

TRADITIONAL CULINARY CULTURE BAKU

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AZERBAIJAN IS ONE OF THE OLDEST CENTERS OF HUMAN CIVILIZATION. THE CULTURE OF THE AZERBAIJANI PEOPLE GOES MILLENNIA BACK.

Since time immemorial, Azerbaijanis' traditional occupation has been agriculture and animal husbandry, which could not but affect the characteristics and diet of the population. National cuisine can tell many interesting things about the culture and history of a country, and in this sense, Azerbaijani cuisine, with its excellent taste and quality characteristics, as it were, speaks for itself.

As early as the Neolithic period, the population in Azerbaijan cultivated wheat and barley, which served as the basis for their diet along with meat. In the Bronze Age, with the development of cattle-breeding, dairy products came into the diet of our ancestors.

Dishes of Azerbaijani cuisine are mentioned in ancient written sources, the records of travelers and explorers, merchants and diplomats. It's no secret that

the culinary art of Azerbaijan is popular with many nations of the world, especially in the East. Azerbaijan has long been known for local varieties of grapes and fruit, which contributed significantly to the enrichment of national cuisine.

One of the important factors influencing Azerbaijani cuisine is religion. Muslim festivals and various rituals, including fasting, had a strong influence on diet and nutrition.

Home cooking and eating has long served as the primary ethnographic feature of Azerbaijanis in both cities and rural areas. Using old culinary recipes from generation to generation, housewives have expanded the range of dishes and improved their quality.

Like other regions of Azerbaijan, its capital Baku has its own unique features of local cuisine. Developing and becoming richer over the centuries, local cuisine reached the sophistication we observe today. Inhabitants of Baku, which, in the context of the topic of the present article, is associated with its historical kernel – Icharishahar, are inveterate foodies that regard the process of cooking and eating food as a kind of ritual. At the mention of Icharishahar, local baklava and meat dishes spring to mind, although we should not forget about complicated dishes cooking which requires considerable skills, not to mention diverse and abundant ingredients.

Joint meals, which are traditional in the Baku fortress, become an occasion to get together - a form of social life. These days, traditions have become somewhat simpler, **but abundant feasts with laboriously prepared meals are still typical of the culture of Icharishahar.**

Important ingredients of **original Baku cuisine are a lot of spices -**



saffron, thyme, cumin, mint, tarragon, pepper, etc. In some dishes, along with lemon, the juice of unripe grapes - abgora, pomegranate juice, as well as sour sumac are used.

Azerbaijani national cuisine dishes are traditionally prepared in copper vessels, and this tradition continues to live in Baku - Icharishahar.

As the basis for the first courses, Bakuivians primarily use meat and bone broths. Unlike the usual soups, the first courses have thicker consistency as they usually contain a small amount of broth. Another characteristic feature of liquid dishes is the wide use of fat of sheep's tail, which is usually put into the dinner in a finely chopped way, as well as of various spices.

Below is a description of some basic traditional dishes characteristic of Baku – Icharishahar:

Kufta-bozbash. Broth is cooked from the brisket. The flesh of mutton is minced and onions are added. Salt, pepper and separately washed rice are added here, and it all is mixed manually. Palm-sized kofta balls are made from the resulting minced meat, and a plum is placed in each

of them. One day before, peas are soaked and cooked in a separate dish. The ready broth is filtered through a metal sieve and placed on the fire, and when it boils, cooked peas, kofta, potatoes, 2-3 whole onions, salt, pepper, saffron, or yellow ginger are added. It is served in a bowl, sprinkled with herbs or dry mint. Peeled onions and sumac are served separately.

Dushbara (dumplings). Broth is cooked from sheep bones, and minced meat with onion, salt, pepper and cilantro is made from the flesh of meat. Stiff flour dough is kneaded with water and eggs and rolled out to 1 mm. Then the dough is sliced into equal squares of 2x2 cm. The minced meat is placed in the center of each square and wrapped in a special way. The ready dushbara is shaken on a sieve, freed from excess flour, and cooked in filtered broth. 5-7 minutes after the broth starts boiling, the dushbara emerges on the surface - the dinner is ready. Vinegar with garlic is served separately. On top, the dushbara is sprinkled with dried mint or greens, depending on the season.

Dovga with meat. Broth is



cooked from bones, and minced meat with onions, salt and spices is made from the flesh of meat. Small balls – meatballs – are made from the minced meat. One day before, peas are left to soak. Gatig is mixed with 2-3 eggs in a separate dish. They whisk it, add washed round rice, cook it on low heat and stir it with a wooden spoon. When the mixture starts to boil, peas, meatballs and broth are added. At the end, herbs and salt are added and prepared. In summer, the dovga is served cold. The ready dovga should be sour and aromatic from cilantro and dill.

Sulu-khingal. Broth is made from the mutton breast and shoulder. Peas are soaked separately, cooked in a separate bowl and then put in the broth. Stiff dough is kneaded with eggs and water and rolled out to a thickness of 1 mm. The dough is cut into 2x2 cm squares, gently shaken on a sieve, freed from excess flour and put into the boiling broth. When it boils, they put onion roasted in butter, chopped cilantro and dill and prepare it. Before serving, it is sprinkled with dried mint. Vinegar is served too.

Shorba. They take mutton - 2-3 slices per serving, pour cold water and cook it for about an hour. One day before, peas are left to soak in cold water and boiled, and then the

peas are added to the boiling broth with washed rice, plums, onion roasted in butter, cooked meat and salt. It is served sprinkled with dill and cilantro. The shorba can also be cooked with meatballs. In the same way, a chicken shorba is cooked - sprinkled with dried mint after cooking.



Sulu khingal

Khamrashi. Broth is cooked from lamb bones, and minced meat with onion is made from the flesh of meat. The minced meat is cut into small balls of 5-6 pieces per serving. Beans soaked in advance and cooked separately are placed in the filtered broth, and then noodles prepared in the following way are added: stiff dough is kneaded with water and eggs and rolled out to a thickness of 1 mm. It is sprinkled with flour, cut into 5 cm

wide strips and arishta (noodles) is chopped with a sharp knife. Before dropping the arishta in the broth, it should be shaken. Meatballs, beans and chopped greens are placed in the broth, and it is sprinkled with mint when served. Vinegar is served separately.

Khash (jelly). The head, feet and tripe are processed, washed well and soaked for at least an hour. Then they are chopped into pieces, put in a pot, and cold water is poured on them - 2 liters of water per 1 kg. They cook it for a long time, occasionally removing the foam with a skimmer. After the cooking, the meat is removed and separated from the large bones. Then the meat is cut into small pieces and put in the broth to finish cooking. The resulting broth is filtered and served separately from the meat with vinegar and garlic added for flavor.

Azerbaijani second courses are made mostly from mutton, in the form of pieces or finely chopped pieces (Gushbashi), as well as in the form of minced meat. Some second courses are cooked from beef, chicken, duck, goose and turkey in the form of independent dishes and seasonings to pilafs.

While preparing most second courses, mutton fat is used - fat tail, melted butter or dairy butter. Fresh herbs, as well as various spices are served separately: **sumac, pepper, narsharab, vinegar, lemon**, and in summer – fresh cucumbers and tomatoes. Farinaceous second courses - guru khingal, shula khingal and gurza – are very popular in Baku and Absheron.

Guru khingal. Stiff dough is kneaded with salt, water and eggs. It is rolled out to a thickness of 1mm, cut into diamonds, boiled in salted water and then drained in a colander. The mutton is cut into 2-3 pieces



Tomato dolma

cut into diamonds, then boiled in water and drained. When serving, they put khingal on the plate and on top, minced meat sprinkled with grated cheese and cinnamon. Gatig with mashed garlic is served separately.

Gurza. They make minced meat from mutton, add salt and pepper and fry it. Stiff dough is kneaded, rolled out to 1 mm and cut into circles of 5 cm. The ready minced meat is placed in the circles and wrapped so that the seam is on top - one end remains open. Gurza is boiled in salted water; when it surfaces, it is taken away from the stove and drained. When it is ready, gatig, mint and cinnamon are served.

Dolma. There are many varieties of dolma: from grape leaves, white cabbage leaves, eggplants, toma-





Kebab

toes, bell peppers, cucumbers, onions, apples and quince. Dolma is made from minced mutton. In summer, they often prepare the vegetable ragout anjab-sandal from lamb and veal. They prepare vegetables - onions, potato slices, elongated eggplants and tomato slices, which are placed on one another. They salt and pepper them and then put them on a weak fire to cook them in their own juice.

Kebab (shish kebab). This dish comes from the shepherd's rather than the agricultural way of life. Today kebab is perceived as a picnic and almost a festive meal (prepared by men) which has a merely informal nature, because it is eaten by hand. Shish kebab is a kind of culinary escapism associated with escape into nature.

Mandelstam's poem «I'm dreaming of humpbacked Tiflis» is based on this motif: «The man is old, The sheep is young, And under the moon, under the heat With pink steam kebab smoke will fly in their air...».

Alexandre Dumas writes about kebab in the "The Three Musketeers":

«Any selfish person would keep this recipe secret – but I will provide

you, dear reader, with the recipe of kebab: follow it and you will be thanking me for this gift forever.» And he goes on to say: «Put small pieces of mutton on an iron or wooden spit and turn them over the coals.» For making kebab, the more gentle meat of a young sheep is preferred. Among the varieties of Azerbaijani kebabs, we can note amateur kebab, Kars kebab, basdirma kebab, kidney kebab, tava kebab, gazan kabab, juja kebab, turkey kebab, etc.

Kebab is prepared not only from meat but also from vegetables or adding vegetables - eggplants, potatoes, peppers and tomatoes.

Many varieties of pilaf decorate Baku cuisine.

Pilaf is boiled rice cooked in a special way and seasoned with butter. Often, pilafs are prepared with meat, fish, vegetables, egg and flour garnishes, fruits, berries, etc. In most cases, pilafs are prepared from boiled rice, while undrained rice (demya) is rarely used.

To prepare drained pilafs and crumbly rice garnishes, you need to take local kinds of rice - «Sadri», «Ambarbi» and «Akulchik». Although they are not rich, pilafs and gar-

nishes are of high quality and good consistency. For cooking undrained pilafs (dashma) and various fillings, it is best to use such kinds of rice as «akula» and «chilali», which have good properties.

To obtain high quality pilaf, it is necessary to adhere to the following rice processing technology. After processing, rice is left to soak in cold water for up to 12 hours and is placed in a gauze bag with salt. Then the rice is washed with warm water and put in boiling salted water. 6 liters of water, 50 g of salt and 1 cup of gatig are used per 1 kg of rice. The rice is cooked on high heat until it is half ready and drained through a colander. The drained rice should be washed with warm water, although it reduces the quality of pilaf. Dairy or melted butter is placed in a saucepan with a tight bottom. Then gazmag is placed on the bottom - thin flat bread of unleavened dough with eggs - and is covered with boiled rice. For better and even stewing (dam) of the pilaf, the cauldron or pot are covered with a special lid. The pilaf is stewed on low heat until there is steam inside. After that, the pilaf is poured with butter, and a saffron tincture (1 g of saffron per 100 g of water) is poured over some parts of it.

Among the many varieties of pilaf, we should note turshu govurma, ali-musamba, sabzi govurma, parcha doshama, doyma doshama, fisijan pilaf, mutanjam, lobyachilov, giyma pilaf, plas kebab, marji pilaf, kuku pilaf, juja pilaf, toyug pilaf, gizil balig pilaf, sudlu pilaf, shirin plaf, ila shandaz pilaf, yarma pilaf, gir-gir pilaf, kishmishli pilaf, etc.

Finally, a few words about sweet desserts. **Baku baklava** is a very labor intensive product. Several people roll out thin dough, others place the dough on baking sheets,



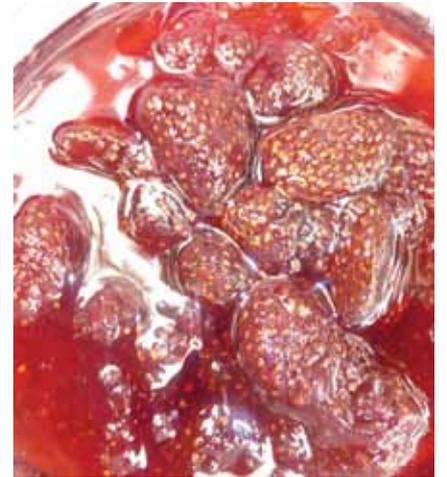
and some more people sprinkle the dough with chopped nuts, or hazelnuts, almonds and pistachios with powdered sugar. On the whole, they make 13-15 layers and cut the layered dough into diamonds and put it in the oven. Toward the end of baking, the baklava is soaked with melted butter and saffron sherbet.

Tarag. Water is poured in a saucepan and maize flour, sugar, butter and salt are put on the fire and stirred continuously until a thick mass forms. After that, the tarag is cooled and sprinkled with cinnamon when served.

Sujuk. Water is poured into a saucepan and maize flour, sugar, butter, a saffron tincture and salt are put in it and placed on fire. When cooking, it is stirred continuously until a thick mass forms. Shelled nuts are minced, and half of the nuts are mixed with the sunjug, and the other half is sprinkled from above before serving.

Firni. Rice is sorted out, washed and soaked in water for 2-3 hours, drained and put in the oven. The dried rice is crushed or milled in a coffee grinder, and milk is poured on the resulting mass and sugar and salt are added and cooked until it is ready. The resulting jelly is poured into deep plates or bowls. It is served cold, and cinnamon is sprinkled from above in the form of a lattice.

Sherbet. Water is boiled and cooled, sweetened, basil and mint



seeds are put in, and it is left to brew for 2-3 hours. The sherbet is served with such dishes as toyug pilaf, giy-ma pilaf and parcha doshama pilaf.

Among the hot drinks, the most common drink in Baku and in all of Azerbaijan is tea.

In conclusion, we offer several proverbs about food.

«Prepare tasty food and eat it not to fill yourself up.»

«Food is eaten slowly, selflessly and with inspiration.»

«Choose a friend by the taste of the dishes he likes.» ❀

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