

AN OVERVIEW OF THE DOBROGEA GASTRONOMY

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract

Dobrogea is a region of Romania, unique for its cultural, architectural and historical diversity generated by multiculturalism, with many ethnic groups living together in the area: Turks, Tatars, Lipovans, Greeks, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Aromanians.

From a gastronomic point of view, the area offers a wide range of traditional dishes, fish being the main ingredient due to the geographical location of the region. The dishes of Dobrogea reflect the richness of the raw materials available in the area, so that the region can be divided into two macro-areas: that of fish and that of meat, dairy and vegetable dishes.

Keywords: gastronomy, traditions, traditional dishes, gastronomic influences

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INTRODUCTION

Dobrogea is a geographical and historical region in the south-east of Romania, with the Black Sea to the east, the Danube to the south and Bulgaria to the south and west. This region is one of the oldest settlements in Europe and is known for its cultural, historical and natural diversity. (Cociu M., 1993)

Dobrogea has a rich history, having been inhabited by various peoples throughout the ages, including Thracians, Greeks, Romans, Turks, Tatars and Bulgarians. It was an important strategic point for ancient and medieval empires. This cultural heritage is reflected in the varied architecture, spoken languages and local customs. This ethnic diversity has influenced the language, traditions and gastronomy of the region. Greek and Roman ruins, such as Histria and Callatis, bear witness to the region's rich historical heritage. Overall, Dobrogea is a fascinating region with a rich history and culture, a remarkable natural and human diversity and a growing economy, with considerable tourist and economic potential. (Bordanc Floarea, 2008; Cociu M., 1993)

The ethnic diversity of Dobrogea gives the region a different character from neighbouring Muntenia, with the regional cuisine incorporating elements brought by the Turks, Tatars, Greeks, Aromanians, Lipovans and Germans of the region. Dobrogea has historically been crossed by shepherds, and

sheep meat products are common, especially in recipes borrowed from oriental or Aromanian cuisines, such as *saşlâc* (a dish made from lamb cut into pieces, put on skewers and cooked on a grill) or *ghiudem* (a dry and spicy sausage), as well as in local recipes, such as pastrami. Fish, game, mutton, poultry, beef and pork are frequently used in cooking Dobrogenic dishes. The Dobrogea region is known for its abundance of fresh vegetables and fruit, dairy products, cheese and eggs. (Bordanc Floarea, 2008; Roman R. A., 1998; Tatulici M., 2018)

Dobrogean cuisine has its own specific traditions, with dishes such as Dobrogean sarmals, cheese pies or fresh fish prepared in various ways. These culinary traditions are often passed down from one generation to the next within families or local communities. (Bordanc Floarea, 2008; Roman R. A., 1998)

At the same time, painting Easter eggs is another widespread tradition in Dobrogea. People use bright colors and traditional patterns to decorate the eggs, and they become an integral part of the Easter decoration. (Roman R. A., 1998; <https://www.romania-travel-guide.com/attractii/traditii-locale/traditii-si-obiceiuri-din-dobrogea.html>)

Traditions of Dobrogea are those that reflect the diversity and cultural richness of this unique region of Romania. The folk costume of Dobrogea is an expression of the cultural identity and traditions of the place. Dobrogea has a rich and diverse history and this is reflected in the folk costumes worn by the

locals. A common element of folk costume in Dobrogea is the use of bright colours and rich ornaments. Women wear long, colourful dresses decorated with embroidery and lace, while men wear loose shirts and trousers, sometimes accessorised with specific garments such as embroidered jackets or traditional hats. (<https://www.info-delta.ro/traditii-in-dobrogea-28/portul-din-dobrogea--45.html>; <https://acasalaromani.ro/costumul-popular-din-zona-dobrogei>)

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The methodology of the present study combines standard research techniques and methods, such as: documentation, analysis, synthesis and formulation of conclusions. In this sense, a rich bibliography was consulted, respectively different publications, monographs with reference to the traditions and cuisine of Dobrogea.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The diversity of the dishes in the Dobrogea cuisine shows the influences due to the multitude of cultures in this area. Due to its position along the Black Sea and Danube coasts, Dobrogea is famous for its fresh fish and seafood. Fish is prepared in various ways: grilled, fried, boiled or smoked, often accompanied by aromatic sauces and fresh vegetables. Dobrogea is also known for its milk and cheese production. Bellows cheese and telemea cheese are two of the local specialities appreciated for their rich and authentic taste. (<https://gastronomietraditionala.ro/alimentati-a-in-dobrogea>)

The dishes from the Dobrogean cuisine are light, in their preparation a lot of oil, butter and margarine are used. The soups are soured with borscht, cabbage juice but also vinegar, they are made from vegetables and especially from fish. Fresh vegetable snacks in the form of salad in combination with eggs, cheese, cream are used a lot. The basic dishes are accompanied by rice, vegetable and pasta side dishes. (<https://gastronomietraditionala.ro/alimentati-a-in-dobrogea>)

Şaşlâc dobrogean is a traditional dish from the Dobrogea region, which is of Turkish origin. It is prepared mainly from diced mutton, mutton or lamb. The meat is marinated in a rich mixture of spices and flavours, which may include garlic, onions, olive oil, vinegar, lemon

juice, aromatic herbs such as thyme, rosemary, dill and basil, and spices such as pepper, coriander or paprika. The pieces of meat are placed on skewers and cooked on the grill. This dish is often served with various side dishes and salads, such as scallops, fried or baked potatoes, grilled vegetables or rice. (Roman R. A., 1998; <https://povestilemariinegre.ro/saslac>).

Dobrogean **sarmale** are a distinctive variant of the famous traditional Romanian dish. They are known for some peculiarities that differentiate them from other **sarmale** recipes from other regions of the country. A distinctive feature of Dobrogean **sarmale** is the use of vine leaves instead of cabbage, as is more common in other similar Romanian recipes. These leaves are filled with a mixture of rice, meat, onions, spices such as thyme, dill and basil, and sometimes vegetables such as carrots or peppers are added. (Ghidul gastronomic al Romaniei - Bucataria traditionala, 2010).

Roe salad. Preserving roe with oil has been used since the time of the Byzantine Empire. In the Balkan countries the method of preparation has been preserved under the name Tarama. In the old days, only carp roe was prepared in Wallachia and Moldavia, and later pike roe was used as a more tasty alternative (Stroe Monica, Iancu Bogdan, 2012). It was the Greek population that came to the Dobrogea area from Greece that developed the roe salad. The inhabitants of the Delta improved and took over the recipe, resulting in a new recipe that not only retains the original flavor, but improves it. (<https://www.info-delta.ro/retete-culinare-31/reteta/salata-de-icre-de-pest>).

Salad of roe is a preparation based on fish roe (carp, carp, pike), onion, oil, lemon, mineral water and salt. It can be served with olives, greens, lemon, paprika, onions or bread. (<https://pofta-buna.com/salata-de-icre-cu-sau-fara-ceapa-reteta-pescareasca>)

Scordolea. The word "scordolea" comes from garlic and is of Greek origin. **Scordolea** is one of the oldest fish recipes, specific to Dobrogea. This dish is based on mashed potatoes, baked fish, walnuts, garlic, salt, pepper and oil. This dish is often served as a side dish or as a side dish to fish or other main dishes. (<https://www.info-delta.ro/retete-culinare-31/reteta/scordolea-cu-pest-sarat-54.html>)

Storceag is a traditional dish, being a simple and tasty dish. It is a thick and hearty soup, prepared mainly from fish (crucian carp, zander or flatfish). The recipe for storceag is based on a variety of influences, mainly from

Ukrainian cuisine (where the name comes from), but also from Romanian pastoral cuisine, using whey for texture and acidity. The base of the soup in modern Dobrogea cuisine consists of vegetables (potatoes, celery, carrots, parsley, onions), and whey is traditionally used for souring the soup, sometimes being substituted with a mixture of cream and egg. (Roman R. A., 1998; Stroe Monica, Iancu Bogdan, 2012)

Fish Borscht. One of the most common Dobrogean soups is fish borscht. This soup is soured with borscht, but other souring methods are also used, such as lemon juice, vinegar or cabbage leaves. Initially only freshwater fish were used. The soup is based on the meat of fish (red snapper, crucian carp, sterlet, carp, frog fish, sturgeon, stellate sturgeon, catfish, zander, pike), rice, potatoes and onions. It is seasoned with different greens (fennel, parsley, to taste and dill) and seasoned with salt, pepper and hot peppers. It is served plain, warm or cold, usually with polenta. (Jurcovan Silvia, 2012; Roman R. A., 1998)

Saramura (fish brine) is a Romanian dish that contains different types of fish. It is also a process of preserving food for later consumption. Fish brine is prepared from three types of fish: small (ablet), medium (crucian carp) and large (carp, flounder or catfish), fried on a hot griddle (plinta) previously sprinkled with sea salt. Besides the fish, it has tomatoes, paprika, chilli peppers, onions, thyme, dill, parsley and garlic cooked in the oven. The dish can be served with polenta.

(<https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saramura>)

Plachia is a dish based on fish meat (carp, caras, red mullet, perch, novac), onion, carrot, celery, garlic, bell pepper, dry white wine, broth, bay leaves, thyme, black pepper, vinegar (or lemon juice), parsley and oil. The fish is placed on a bed of baked vegetables. It is served with polenta. (Roman R. A., 2010; <https://www.e-retete.ro/retete/plachie-de-pest>)

Dobrogean pie. The Dobrogean pie recipe was spread, reinterpreted and known by people outside the region. The sheets for Dobrogean pie should be as thin as possible, almost transparent. This pie is based on a dough in which sweet or salty cheese is integrated, mixed with egg, green onion, dill and baked in different shapes. (Roman R. A., 2010; <https://www.libertatea.ro/lifestyle/retete-de-placinta-dobrogeana>)

Kobete pie is a dish specific to the turkish-tatar community in Dobrogea, being

made especially during the month of Ramadan. This pie is based on a simple dough in which yogurt has also been integrated, and the filling is based on meat (chicken or beef), rice and sautéed onions. Serve with ayran or yogurt. (Stroe Monica, Iancu Bogdan, 2012; <https://pofta-buna.com/placinta-kobete-reteta-turco-tatareasca-dobrogeana>)

Suberec is part of the local specificity of Dobrogea, as part of Romanian cuisine. The pie is popular in Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine as a snack, but its origin is from the cuisine of the Crimean Tatars. *Suberec* is a kind of pie in the shape of a semicircle, filled with spiced minced meat and onions. The outside of the pie has a texture similar to a *scovergi* or a *langos*, being cooked in corn or sunflower oil. (<https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suberec>)

Geantâk is a pie specific to the turkish-tatar community of Dobrogea. The pie is based on a leavened dough filled with a mixture of minced meat (beef, lamb or poultry), fat yoghurt, sautéed onions and mint. It is seasoned with salt and pepper, and eggs and poppies are used as garnishes. Serve hot or cold with ayran or yoghurt. (Roman R. A., 2010; <https://pofta-buna.com/geantak-placinta-cu-carne-turco-tatareasca>)

Ghisman is a pie in which cow's cheese and sour cream are the main ingredients. Eggs, sour dairy products (yoghurt, kefir), melted butter and lemon juice are also used. Serve cold with powdered sugar, blueberries and strawberries. (Roman R. A., 2010; <https://cartederetete.ro/ghisman>)

Dobrogean baklava is a tasty reinterpretation, adapted to the gastronomy specific to the Dobrogea area, of the traditional dessert of oriental origin. The aspect that makes this dish stand out is the use of puff pastry and a sugar syrup enriched with vanilla, cinnamon, rose water. The filling is made of nuts, butter and sugar. (<https://www.skytrip.ro/baclava-din-regiunea-dobrogea-re-167.html>)

Muhalebi with wheat or rice flour, semolina or starch is a popular dessert in the Middle East and in Romania, being a thickened milk pudding. (<https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhalebi>) *Muhalebi* is prepared in a simple way with milk and rose water, wheat flour or corn starch for thickening and served with powdered sugar and pistachios. The dessert was popular in the 19th and 20th centuries. Currently, in Dobrogea, a variant is prepared with grape must instead of milk and sugar and

served with walnut core. (Roman R. A., 2010; <https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhalebiu>)

Acacia flower donuts. This dish is cooked in the months of May-June, when it is the flowering period of the acacia. Acacia donuts are made from a leavened dough in which acacia inflorescences are integrated, the donuts being flavored thanks to the flowers. After frying, the donuts are served warm sprinkled with powdered sugar. (Ghidul gastronomic al Romaniei - Bucataria traditionala, 2010; <https://www.lauralaurentiu.ro/retete-culinare/deserturi-dulciuri-de-casa/gogosi-din-flori-de-salcam>)

CONCLUSIONS

Dobrogea is known for its distinct culinary specialties, the geographical location of the area determining that the basic ingredients in traditional dishes are fish, cheese, vegetables, lamb, pork, honey, spices and aromatic herbs.

Due to the multicultural influence in the area, changes have also occurred in the field of gastronomy. The population of the area has learned and adapted many savoury dishes (șaşlăc, scordolea, storceag, Kobete pie, suberec, geantâk), as well as sweet dishes (baclava, muhalebiu).

From the Danube Delta and the Black Sea coast come savoury specialties such as roe salad, fish borscht, plachia, fish brine, Dobrogean sarmala, Dobrogean pie. Among the area's sweet specialties are acacia flower doughnuts, chisman, baclava.

In conclusion, the cuisine of Dobrogea is complex, with a wide range of dishes and unique recipe techniques. The region is special because of the harmony created between the communities present in the area and the culinary traditions.

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