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Interactive culinary map of the Bulgarian language territory¹

The recent years have seen, both nationally and internationally, a persistently growing interest in cookery – there is hardly a television channel without its own culinary show; specialized TV channels have emerged dedicated exclusively to cooking; various TV formats feature professional and amateur cooks competing for lucrative prizes; many feature films and TV series are being made centred around cooking etc. The sphere of publishing has followed suit, as numerous thematic culinary books have been released, as well as magazines, recipe books, books about wine, chocolate etc. and there are even special blank notebooks available aimed to help collect and keep the favourite recipes from *grandma’s kitchen or mamma’s kitchen*. Responding to keen public interest in cookery and also seizing the opportunity to present comprehensively a diverse and archaic layer of folk lexis related to the daily and festive diet of Bulgarians, the Department of Bulgarian Dialectology and Linguistic Geography at the BAS Institute for Bulgarian Language came up with the idea to compile a Bulgarian Dialectal Culinary Dictionary (BDCD). In the conclusion of a previously published article [3, p. 19-25] which summarizes briefly the key methodological principles that would be used to compile it, I laid out the idea that the presentation of dialectal culinary lexis can be done in a special format too – by means of an electronic map. Fortunately, this idea was supported by the the Bulgarian National Science Fund at the Ministry of Education and Science, and the project won in 2018 will be implemented by a small team from the Department led by Professor Ana Kocheva, PhD.

The concept behind this interdisciplinary research project (bringing together linguistics, linguistic geography and cultural studies) suggests collection and presentation of the culinary lexis and practices across the entire Bulgarian language territory (both inside and outside the Bulgarian state borders). Outside the dialectal continuum, the study will for the first time include the traditional cookery of the Bulgarian settlers in Banat, Ukraine and Southern Moldova. The goal of field research is to visit any larger region, study a few towns and villages in it on the spot and collect video and audio material which would in an authentic form present preserved folk traditions in cookery as one of the most relevant and archaic components reflecting to a great extent the Bulgarian folk culture and world outlook.

The project represents an original study in applied linguistic geography in terms of its concept, methodology and implementation, since it will employ up-to-date information technology tools. The

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Interactive culinary map of the Bulgarian language territory is the first of its kind, and with its features and implementation it will be a fully innovative product of applied study.

For a few months now, work on the map has been underway. First of all, the outline map was made with its base presenting images of various cultures, raw materials, products which are dominant and characteristic for a certain region – e.g. wheat, corn, potatoes, various fruits and vegetables, animals etc. In creating the cartographic grid the team aimed to achieve relative evenness and representativeness of the points.

In the summer of this year, the field expedition took place in the region of Troyan. What was distinct about it, and this will certainly be the case with future expeditions, was that it was preceded by a fair amount of logistic work. Contacting the local cultural leaders, like for example the director of the Museum of Folk Crafts and Applied Art in Troyan, was critically important for its success. Our informants from different villages were briefed in advance about the goals we had set, and they also went through certain preparatory work in the selection of dishes, ingredients etc.

The very first impression as we met with the locals was that in spite of the political and economic changes in the country they still display the distinct features of the Bulgarian national character – cordial hospitality, openness and readiness to share their knowledge and experience and to hand them down to posterity. They demonstrated their cookery skills with enthusiasm, told us about the oldest culinary practices they knew about, recalled some typical features of their ancestors' cookery and compared olden traditions to present-day culinary trends.

We once again received convincing proof that contrary to certain futuristic predictions of Bulgarian and foreign scholars, the dialects, even in the advanced 21st century, have kept intact their vigour and functionality as a basic means of communication in the local communities [for more details, see for instance 2]. It is well known that the dialect of Troyan does not possess many features different from the standard language, because it was one of the dialects which formed its basis. Nevertheless, even today Troyan people practice reduction of the open vowels towards close ones; use exclusively the definite article *-ът* for all masculine nouns; deviate from the standard spoken language in accentuation of some forms – *кметове*; keep specifics such as the generalized accusative form in feminine nouns – *чурбѣта*; as well as old lexemes – *крѣфтинѣ* 'red meat' etc.

In contrast to widespread views that the diet of the Balkan Range people mostly features meat and potatoes, the people from the region of Troyan predominantly consume a variety of plant foods – a choice of vegetables from their own garden – onions, beans, potatoes and the like. In the past they made bread however not from pure 'wheat' flour but from corn – *просеник*, which to this day they believe is healthier. Hominy was also present on the dining table, in a few varieties. However all this would invariably go with fat from melted salo. Regardless of whether they cook soup from *барѣбѣй* 'potatoes' or bean soup, make fried eggs or nettle gruel, *лучник*, *щирник* 'a baked dish with two rolled out sheets of pastry, with a filling of dock, rice and green spices between them', *копрѣвник*, *кѣпърник* and other baked dishes with pastry and filling, the Troyan people would always add fat from melted salo with *крѣфтинѣ*. What is more, this kind of fat is used also to make desserts, so if we have to rank the No. 1 food in this region it is beyond any doubt the salo. In the past, salo and onions would give energy to this population in its life of hardships, and today dominates its diet as well.

The region of Troyan is unique as the only place where *wedding boiled wheat* is made – which is in fact ceremonial food. As its name suggests it was served only at weddings, christenings and parties given before

young men leave for military service, i.e. during celebrations. Its method requires a long time and is not quite easy – it takes at least two days for the wheat to boil well enough and “blossom”. We managed to find its oldest version when it would be made with water and flour fried in melted salo fat and without sweetening. It was served as a great appetizer to rakiya brandy. Later in time, milk was added to the browned flour, and salo was replaced with butter and sunflower oil, or was combined with them. Now *wedding boiled wheat* is sweetened with sugar and is sometimes served sprinkled with crushed walnuts, dried blueberries or raisins. It goes perfectly well just seasoned with salt. It is a very delicious dessert which is not made in other points of the Bulgarian ethnic territory and therefore, the local people are rightfully proud of it. What comes as a proof of this is that a few villages are contesting its original “patent”, and it is always prepared and served at regional folk festivals.

Wedding boiled wheat as a denotation and its respective cooking term is not registered in the section *Diet* of the three-volume academic *Ethnography of Bulgaria* [1], i.e. it has not been established as a lexeme during the dialectological expeditions, because it is not found in the Archives of the Dictionary of the Bulgarian Dialects at the Institute for Bulgarian Language. Only brief notes about it have been found in certain local historical studies which are part of the archives of the Museum of Folk Crafts and Applied Art in Troyan. Thus we hope that our audio and video recordings will preserve for both scholarly work and for the general public the authentic method of cooking this culinary treat unique for the region of Troyan.

The results in the first expedition for the *Culinary map of the Bulgarian language territory* have suggested that the implementation of the project is fully justified and timely, given that the study of folk legacy in the sphere of food and diet in time and space, is more than an exploration of the evolution of traditional culture but also a guarantee that this legacy will be preserved and handed down to posterity. Our ultimate goal is not just to keep and conserve this heritage but also to help it become a “living piece from the past” aimed to remind present-day Bulgarians of their ancestors’ cookery practice and to provide them with the recipe for a healthy and delicious local food.

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