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THE HISTORY OF THE TRADITIONAL DISHES OF THE JIZZAKH OASIS AND THEIR DISTINCTIVE ETHNOLOCAL FEATURES

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Abstract: *The article studies the historical stages in the formation of the traditional dishes of the Jizzakh oasis and the economic-cultural, ethnic and political factors that influenced them. The ethnolocal features of the oasis cuisine are analyzed in the examples of mountain and foothill, plain and steppe zones, and the multilayered structure of local dishes is shown. The results may serve as a basis for ethnographic study of the oasis cuisine and for safeguarding it as cultural heritage.*

Keywords: *Jizzakh oasis, history of food, ethnolocal features, ethnography, economic-cultural type, pastoralism, agriculture, cultural heritage.*

Ethnolocal features are local differences that arise within the general culture of an ethnic group living in a particular area and are determined by the nature, history and social environment of that place. Several recent studies of the shrines and sacred places of the Jizzakh oasis have set the same approach, revealing ethnolocal features, as their main aim [9]. Applying it to the history of food allows a deeper understanding of the cultural heritage of the oasis. Historically the Jizzakh oasis lay on the northern and eastern borders of Transoxiana, a transitional area between the Zarafshan oasis, the Fergana valley and the Mirzachul steppe [7]. This border position led, on the one hand, to settled farming and, on the other, to nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralism influencing each other. The aim of this article is to separate the historical layers of the oasis dishes and to identify their ethnolocal traits.

The presence of human activity in the oasis in ancient times is shown by images of riders and animals on the rocks of Suzmoyilota, Ravotsoy, Nakhraj and Sigomsoy [4; 8]. These images speak of the hunting, herding and horse-related economy of the early population. Views that the Massagetae and other ancient tribes regarded the sun as a deity and sacrificed horses in its honour [4] suggest that everyday traditions connected with horse meat and livestock products in the oasis have very old roots. In the foothills and irrigated lands farming developed: wheat, barley and millet were grown, and bread, groats and flour dishes were made from them. Because the oasis lay among the cities of the Great Silk Road, trade caravans stopped here, and this created conditions for exchange with the food traditions of other regions. Studies of the oasis in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries note fortresses and defensive works and social and economic links between settled and nomadic populations [6], and it is reasonable to suppose that dishes also developed through mutual influence. From the Middle Ages the influence of Islam also shaped the food system to a degree: the rules of halal and haram, fasting, Eid and sacrifice partly determined the composition of the menu, while dishes tied to ancient seasonal festivals such as Navruz preserved traces of pre-Islamic rituals. Khudoyi meals connected with shrines and the custom of distributing bread and sweets during pilgrimage show the blending of religious and folk beliefs [5; 9].

Oasis dishes are also closely tied to the ethnic composition. A study of the formation of the Uzbek population of the oasis through ethnotoponymic data points to the presence of the so-called ninety-two tribal groups of Uzbeks, including Kipchak and other clans [3]. Historical sources mention that the people of the Kipchak quarter kept sheep and cattle and moved seasonally between the Zarafshan oasis and the Mirzachul steppe [7]. It is therefore plausible that part of the pastoral dishes of

the oasis, such as qurt, yoghurt, kymyz and qazi, took shape in that layer. In the mountain and foothill parts of the oasis, Tajik-speaking and mixed populations lived beside Uzbeks for a long time, which is visible in the similarity of certain dishes, for example qatlama, shirchoy and buttered bread. B. Kh. Karmysheva noted differences in the economic and everyday features of ethnic groups in the southern and central regions of Uzbekistan [1]; the dishes of the Jizzakh oasis also have a mixed and transitional character in line with this general pattern.

After the oasis became part of the Russian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century (Jizzakh was taken in 1866), the administrative order, trade routes and population structure began to change. The Jizzakh uyezd was formed, and Russians and other nationalities appeared alongside the village population [6]. In this period new products such as potatoes, tomatoes, sugar and tea gradually entered the village diet. In the Soviet period, especially during the development of the Mirzachul steppe and the cotton monoculture, the economy of the oasis changed greatly. Many people arrived in the steppe areas from different regions, including other republics, and the food culture of the oasis became more multiethnic and mixed. On the one hand, public catering strengthened the standardization of dishes; on the other, home cooking traditions survived in villages. In the years of independence the return to national values also affected food, and interest in cooking traditional dishes for festivals and ceremonies has grown.

Ethnolocal features in the oasis dishes can be seen in three main directions. The first is the difference between natural-geographic zones. In mountain and foothill villages dishes based on dairy products, mutton and wild plants and kinds of bread such as kazan patir are important; in plain villages the products of farming, wheat, vegetables and melons, and rice dishes predominate; in the steppe and semi-desert areas dishes connected with livestock (sheep, goats, camels), qurt, yoghurt and other dairy products lead. The second is local names and methods of preparation. The example of Zaamin kazan patir shows that even under the common name patir a distinctive dish can arise through local milk and butter, separately kneaded dough and cauldron baking; it was registered as a geographical indication in 2025 [2; 10]. Such examples show that other districts of the oasis also offer a chance to identify and document local dishes. The third direction is the link between dishes and ritual and pilgrimage traditions. The formation of the shrines and sacred places of the oasis around historical figures, natural wonders and the sanctification of animals [9] has also influenced the content of the meals served during pilgrimage, such as khudoyi, bread, sweets and sacrificial meat. Here food performs not only a nutritional but also a religious and moral function.

The oasis cuisine is also tied to the economic calendar. In spring fresh herbs, greens and dairy products decorate the table, and the lambing and milking season increases dairy products. In summer vegetables, melons and fruit are available and drying of fruit begins, and the harvest period calls for a wide range of bread and flour dishes. In autumn the festival and wedding season starts, meat and fat are stored, and qazi, qurt and dried fruit are laid in for winter. In winter thick, hot dishes made from stored grain and groats, such as atala, umoch, shurpa and mastava, predominate. This seasonal calendar shows that oasis dishes were rational not only nutritionally but economically, since each season made sensible use of its own products and of methods of preservation such as drying and salting. The names of dishes are also a source of history. Many Uzbek dish names go back to Arabic, Persian-Tajik and Turkic languages, reflecting different linguistic layers, and the same dish being called differently in different villages points to ethnic and linguistic influences. Just as the study of place names makes it possible to draw conclusions about the settlement of tribes [3], the study of dish names helps to draw a map of cultural contacts. The utensils matter too: cauldron, tandoor, hearth, bowl and platter determined the methods of cooking, and village preparation was often communal, in bread baking, plov making or qurt making, which passed experience to the younger generation and tied the food culture to crafts such as pottery, metalwork and woodwork.

Several problems stand in the way of studying the oasis dishes. First, the sources are not systematized, and information on food is scattered across general ethnographic works and information materials. Second, oral information from the older generation in the villages has not been fully recorded, which puts many names, recipes and methods at risk of disappearing. Third, urbanization and public catering are erasing regional features. For future research the following directions can be proposed: ethnographic fieldwork in each district of the oasis recording local names of dishes; interviews with older people to write down the oral tradition of recipes; comparative analysis of dishes by ethnic group (Kipchak, Kazakh, Tajik and others); and the creation of an atlas of oasis dishes. Such work would combine archive and published sources, fieldwork and comparison with neighbouring regions such as Samarkand, Syrdarya, Tashkent and Nurota, and would benefit from cooperation with linguists, archaeologists and botanists.

Because of these difficulties a combination of methods is advisable. Archival and published sources, including travellers' notes, administrative reports and ethnographic descriptions, can supply scattered information on the history of food. Fieldwork in villages, using observation, questionnaires and interviews, can document the modern menu and the methods of preparation, and comparison with neighbouring regions can show which features are genuinely local. Such an approach makes it possible to assess both the historical roots and the present state of the oasis cuisine. Cooperation with linguists, archaeologists, botanists and livestock specialists is also useful, since the analysis of ancient plant remains and animal bones could clarify the history of the menu, while a glossary of dish names with ethnographic commentary would be a valuable tool for later research and for cultural heritage work.

The movements of people in the twentieth century left further traces. Across Uzbekistan, resettled and deported peoples, among them Koreans, Crimean Tatars and Russians, brought their own foods, and some of them, such as Korean-style carrot salad, borscht and pelmeni, became ordinary items on Uzbek tables. Migration into the newly irrigated steppe areas of the Jizzakh oasis in the Soviet period is likely to have worked in a similar way, although the details of each dish in each settlement still need to be recorded. The Silk Road, for its part, is commonly associated with the spread of rice, spices and sweets along the caravan routes, and while the specific contribution to Jizzakh cooking is hard to trace in the sources, the location of the oasis on those routes makes such exchange plausible. These layers show that the oasis cuisine is best understood not as a fixed inheritance but as a constantly renewed mixture of local, regional and imported elements.

A further task is to bring the results of such study back to the communities that keep these traditions. Village museums, school projects on local foods and recorded interviews with older cooks can make the research visible, give older people a sense that their knowledge is valued, and encourage young people to continue the craft. Publishing recipes together with their stories, names and the occasions for which they are made would turn scattered memories into a shared cultural resource, and would give both researchers and tourism planners a reliable basis for further work.

Some caution is needed in interpreting such evidence. Many statements about the origin of a dish rest on later descriptions, and similar dishes under different names appear in neighbouring regions, so claims of uniqueness should be tested by comparison. At the same time the absence of written records does not mean the absence of tradition, and oral testimony remains the main source for many village foods.

In conclusion, the traditional dishes of the Jizzakh oasis form a multilayered system that took shape through ancient pastoral and farming traditions, Silk Road contacts, the influence of Islam, links between Uzbek clans and neighbouring peoples, and the changes of the imperial and Soviet periods. Their ethnolocal features are defined by natural-geographic zones, ethnic composition, local names and ritual and pilgrimage traditions. They are an inseparable part of the cultural heritage of the oasis, and

collecting, documenting and preserving them systematically is an important scientific and practical task.

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