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“ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” UNIVERSITY

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DIET AND SOCIETY IN MOLDAVIA AND WALLACHIA

(16TH Century – 18TH Century)

SUMMARY

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The Romanian Historiography of Diet: Genesis, Documentary Sources, Research Directions and Methods

The concept of "eating" does not just reflect a physical necessity which is repeated instinctually on a daily basis, but also a complex type of behaviour which is permanently refreshed through social evolution and that stands to illustrate the culture level of a community.

This branch of historiography has had its foundations laid in 18th century France. For more than one hundred years since then, writers, antiquarians, philologists, master chefs or restaurant owners – and not historians as one might think – have analyzed (but not in a critical manner) and published cookbooks from the Medieval Period, fact which has led to the miring of Food history in the sphere of the anecdotic. The representatives of the Methodist School did not show much interest in the subject as they were more concerned with the deeds of

political, military and diplomatic figures. Only after the founding of the Annales School did the idea of studying food gain in popularity. Until the 70's, food history was not considered a field of science in its own right and was defined as a part of the three fundamental directions promoted by the "Annales" programme: economic history, historical demography and material culture history.

Fernand Braudel later proposed a style of historical analysis which was meant not only to present facts about the past but that could also help in understanding how the people in those times perceived their world. The development of historical anthropology meant that historians were now more preoccupied with the acts of cooking and eating rather than with ingredients and rations. As such, food history has gained an important spot in the field of scientific research and outgrew the boundaries of French historiography. Step by step, the field has caused the interest of specialists from other scientific spheres, interdisciplinary collaboration proving

effective in revealing the eating habits of certain communities.

Regaining this side of Romanian past would further the connection between our historiography and the European one. In our case however one cannot truly speak about a tradition in this historical genre. Not that there were no attempts but the scarce studies in existence are of a short span. The only exceptions are Doctor Ioan Claudian's paper and that of historian Matei Cazacu, the rest of the texts being just shallow attempts that fail to delve deeper into the subject matter. The existing documents have been of interest only from an economic point of view. There are however historians who have proven the validity of a new vision, that was reached through the use of a different kind of historical sources, through a different type of exploration and also through an increased attention towards the marginalized social categories.

The fact that the culinary choices of Romanians did not constitute a field of interest for historians until 1989 is a

reality. However one must not entirely ignore those studies that have helped in the identification of eating habits in Moldavia and Wallachia, have given a statistical number of the people who practiced them and their distribution across the territory of some markets, have given insight into the professional organizations of these people as well as described the tools, equipment and cultivation techniques of some plants or the evolution of the climate in the Romanian regions.

Do the right conditions for an in depth analysis and a qualitative interpretation of historical sources truly exist? Unfortunately the sources are quite scarce and the information that they provide often has a lot of gaps. The vital primary sources are also missing: recipes, cookbooks, daily menus as well as holiday menus and conduct codes. Another impediment takes the form of the lack of supply ledgers, shop inventories and custom-house registers. This state of affairs makes the identification of culinary preferences, their evolution and

that of table manners almost impossible. For the same reason, eating habits specific to a certain region or to a certain social group are very difficult to spot.

Given these conditions, it is still possible to find out how Wallachians and Moldavians who lived between the 16th and 18th centuries were eating, and that is by analyzing the accounts of ambassadors, foreign travellers or chroniclers; however the investigation must not be limited just by these accounts. It is necessary that the information which these accounts provide should undergo critical analysis and be confronted with the information that other historical sources – written, archaeological, visual – provide: account registers from some cities in Transylvania, monographies, outlay lists, custom-house documentation, royal privileges, testaments, dowry lists, property inventories, revenue and outlay registers, laws emitted by the Church or by the Prince, results of archaeological and zooarchaeological digs, church frescoes. The aforementioned written sources should also be used,

however without forgetting their own shortcomings: there are very few such accounts, they are not all that edifying, some may present events that did not actually occur, also the majority refer to those situated higher in the social hierarchy and only rarely refer to the common people. Even in the case of the wealthy most abundant are the documents referring to special occasions whereas those presenting day to day meals are almost impossible to find.

As such, discoveries made by specialists in other fields, namely linguists, folklorists, ethnologists, art historians, archaeologists, archaeozoologists and archaeobotanists become invaluable for the historical study of eating habits. The results obtained through the research of the above mentioned specialists aid historians in consolidating their own findings.

Let us be confident however that the scarce information which is available, when subjected to critical scrutiny and correctly analyzed will help us find truths about the past eating habits of Romanians, about what and how

much, but most importantly about when, why and how did the Moldavians and Wallachians of old eat.

The act of eating – social ritual

To eat alone is just a functional act, whilst sitting at a table with others becomes a social act. In a familiar ambiance, created by a setting which is always the same and by the attitude of those attending towards the served food, the consumption of which can have diverse meanings, the act of eating becomes a social ritual.

Historical sources show that there is no space entirely reserved for eating, however one would not eat anywhere. Royal feasts took place in the throne room, the Prince's wife would eat in a room otherwise used for meetings, and boyars would eat in a room that in the rest of the time would have served different purposes. During warm summer days cool terraces or gardens were preferred. Eating times were not random either. The Prince and boyars ate two times a day, lunch being

served at noon and dinner after nightfall. Towards the end of the 18th century, a third meal was supposedly introduced, which was eaten in the morning. The fact that royal feasts and festive dinners organised by boyars could extent for several hours is a certainty.

Amongst the used pieces of furniture one could find the rectangular long table, at the head of which there were the royal armchair – the host's chair respectively in a boyar's house – and those of important guests, whilst on each of the sides benches were placed for the rest of the participants. For a period of time in the 18th century, Oriental influence dictated that the tables should be lower to the ground and that guests be seated on pillows. This practice was later abandoned in the favour of furniture specific to Western Europe. Even in the houses of common traders the table was always covered with a tablecloth, which was made of materials ranging from top quality to the inferior ones. Historical sources of diverse origins – written, visual or archaeological – some of which come from foreign travellers, definitely prove

that Moldavians and Wallachians not only had with what to eat, but also valued and used tableware of high quality, fact which is valid not only just for the 18th century but also for the 16th and 17th centuries. Without a doubt, dishes, glassware and cutlery represented goods of great value due to the precious metals from which they were made. Although these goods could substitute currency if the need existed, their main role was to be utilised at the table. "To eat" was not an insignificant domestic activity which occurred randomly, but one which offered pleasant moments to a family or a community, hence the desire to create the necessary ambiance, fact which implies that this simple and necessary activity of eating was given importance, both in the case of great feasts as well as regular meals.

We can only imagine about how day to day meals took place. However we can form a clearer image about how feasts, especially royal ones, proceeded. The Prince never ate alone, and on holidays or when a guest from afar was present the number of those attending was even

greater. To hold company to the Prince was a privilege, desired by some, however for the court officials to eat with the Prince was at the same time an obligation of their ranks. The refusal of this task could have been considered an offense and would have led to the punishment of the offender. At the table the seat the Prince occupied was distinctly different from the others. Seated at the head of the table, a place which was granted by his royal nature obtained through the will of God – similar to Jesus Christ at the Last Supper – he continued to watch over the others who were feasting, exactly in the same way he ruled his subjects in the rest of the time.

To his right sat the metropolitan bishop, who was always present as he would bless the food. Next to the bishop were high ranking Church officials and state officials, who were seated in the order of their ranks, as well as former officials. Not respecting this hierarchy every time, was considered undiplomatic on the part of the Prince, and he would risk losing the loyalty of his

subjects and even jeopardise the well being of the country. To not respect someone as his rank dictated – in this case to not respect his place at the table – was considered an insult which would immediately draw a reaction from the insulted person, a state of affairs which a wise prince knew how to avoid. The seats at the right of the table were occupied by those who were highly regarded, as was tradition in Christian Europe, however in the event that Turks were attending the feast, given the relations existing between the Principalities and the Ottoman Porte, the Prince would respect their customs and seat the highly honoured guests to his left.

Before everyone was seated, the Prince would wash his hands assisted by the "medelnicer"[1], followed by the boyars who would do the same in the order of their ranks, because only in a state of cleanliness could they eat from the food provided for them by God. After the Prince was seated, moment which was signalled through cannon fire, the boyars would take their places. Security

[1] **Medelnicer** - title given to a boyar who had the role of pouring the water with which the Prince would wash his hands (TN).

officials called "armași", armed with maces, would stand at the end of the table, whilst the "spătar"[2] would stand behind the royal seat, holding the Prince's sword. Seneschals, under the authority of a boyar called "vătaf", would bring food from the kitchens in the sound of bugles, drums and whistles. The metropolitan bishop would bless the food, whilst everyone attending would stand. An icon and a votive light were always to be found where the Prince, his wife, children and court officials ate. The time and space of the meal are no longer common. The presence of the icon and the votive light, the fact that through the power invested in the representative of the Church, the Holy Spirit would descend upon the food and all those present, and also the thanks given to the divinity for the food that was set on the table, point towards a shifting of these two coordinates from the realm of the profane towards the sacred. The eating would begin only after the prayer was complete. The Prince would not taste or drink anything

[2] **Spătar** - title given to a boyar who was holder of the royal sowrd. He also held the second highest rank in the military, after the Prince (TN).

before specially appointed court officials proved that the food or drinks were not poisoned. This fear did not exist without reason, as this was a method sometimes used be boyars the get rid of a prince, or by the prince to eliminate enemy boyars. When the Prince started at last to eat, cannons were fired again and the music began to play. The boyars in charge of the table could barely keep up. The great "stolnic" would tend to the Prince, a task which would later be transferred to the great "medelnicer". The "cupar" was in charge of filling the cups, whilst the great "paharnic" would have had to make sure the Prince received his cup. The second "medelnicer" would help the great "medelnicer" with changing the Prince's tableware. The rest of those attending were looked after by various subordinates of the boyars who were serving the Prince.

Of all the these parts of the feast, the most surprising and peculiar, as described by foreign travellers, was that of raising the glass. It was customary that at the table, the Prince raise many glasses: for God, for the wellbeing of

the Sultan, and then the different Christian princes, depending on whose subjects were the guests, for the wellbeing of who glasses were also raised. When those present would drink in honour of the prince, the boyars would come in turn and kneel before him, and in this position they would empty their cups, and then kiss his hand after which they returned to their places. This entire ceremony was accompanied by cannon fire and music. Piercing through this spectacle of human flaw, we must perceive the way in which these people, living in a society based on a rigorous hierarchy, were thinking, this being the way through which they understood to show their allegiance to an authority. "To raise the glass" at the royal table was neither a motive to get intoxicated with alcohol without any reason nor a simple gesture of courtesy – as it will later become – but rather a gesture that expressed, first and foremost, humility in the face of God's almightiness, and after that the recognizing of and fidelity towards an earthly authority: that of the prince in case of the boyars, that of the Sultan in case of the prince, who had to strike a fine balance between his

acknowledgement of the suzerain power and his ties to Christian part of Europe. The end of the feast was signalled by the prince by placing his napkin on the table. The great "medelnicer" would help him wash, and after a short prayer he would greet the participants, who then left.

As presented, this ceremony was a social act of high importance, and significant element in the greater process of exercising power. It united and separated at the same time. Because religion still played a powerful role, their lives being divided between sacred and secular, it was only natural that the prince and his subjects share food in a Christian ambiance. In this manner they would remember on a daily basis the deeds of Jesus Christ and his disciples at the Last Supper, suggesting that, as Christians, they would remain together here on earth as well as in heaven. Eating was a moment of bonding also because it brought together people with common ideas, aspirations and interests. The difference was made only by temporary worldly titles,

which brought more privileges to some than others even at the table.

The same Christian beliefs would determine the prince to feed other less fortunate than his boyars. It was both his duty as a Christian and a good ruler, whose authority was granted by divinity, to look after the less fortunate, and in this way becoming more alike the image of Jesus Christ. At the same time, this was a way through which the prince would reassure himself of his subjects' devotion, fact which maintained social cohesion. Last but not least, having the ability to feed others the prince would show his power and gained prestige.

According to the existing documents, during official circumstances – the visit of other princes and their wives, religious holidays, royal weddings – women would not participate at the royal table, and were seated at a special table which respected the same hierarchy and at the head of which sat the wife of the prince. We have reasons to believe, however, that on less solemn occasions, the ladies joined their husbands at the table.

Until the end of the 18th century, as in previous ones, the royal table remained a place where social differences could be very easily spotted, even if the integration of western elements of civilisation led, to some changes. In time, the medieval custom of raisin the glass was transformed into a simple gesture of courtesy, whilst the differentiation between sexes, at the table, disappeared.

The same customs seem to be respected at feasts organized by boyars. We must not overlook however the fact that these were houses of great boyars, who by living close to the prince were used to the customs at court. The lack of documentation prevents us however to discover how many of these rituals were respected by the lower ranking boyars and the commoners.

Both at court as well as in the houses of boyars, multiple types of food were served, but what exactly these were and in what quantities they were served is much more difficult to find out. We can guess the order in which they were presented to the participants. The surviving descriptions from the time create the image of feasts

where abundance was most important. Going on for hours at a time, the royal feasts – and those of great boyars as well – seemed to be just an excuse for excess and wastefulness. It is most certain however that this display of food and drinks was not random. The abundance of food was a sign of welfare, which led to prestige within the community. Such feasts were indicators of the high place in the social hierarchy of those who organized them. In regards to the way in which the food was cooked, presented and its taste, the opinions of foreign travellers are mixed, some finding them satisfying while others did not hesitate to criticize their quality. One of the main causes was that boyars had gipsy cooks and illiterate servants, who were oblivious to culinary finesse and who prepared and brought the food according to their master's preferences. This was not the case for some princes. Some of them employed the services of specially trained cooks, brought from Western Europe, who were skilled in the preparation of a diverse range of recipes and who knew a lot about culinary refinement.

In the writings of the 18th century, accounts made by western travellers regarding the table manners of Moldavians and Wallachians – some of them very critical – become more frequent. However, even up to that time, starting with the end of the 16th century, there were travellers who had given insight of the simple manners of people from that time. It is true that critical accents became more frequent in the 18th century, but we must also take into account the fact that whilst they were describing the Romanian Principalities they were at the same time trying to prove the superiority of western civilization. Because of this reason we consider that travellers were not entirely objective and did not fully understand the situation of Moldavia and Wallachia. So instead of considering Wallachians and Moldavians totally without table manners, we should rather consider that their behaviour was sometimes contradicting western etiquette. As western travellers who found themselves on Romania soil correctly observed, starting with the 18th century, the Orient has strongly influenced the manners of the higher classes of Moldavian and

Wallachian society. This did not mean however that new conduct rules which appeared in the West could not reach the Romanian territories. Maybe surprisingly, it is the merit of some of the Phanariot princes that norms of western conduct were picked up by the local boyars. There is then proof that young Moldavians and Wallachians, who studied in western universities, were schooled in proper conduct and manners. All these factors make us believe that in reality, during the whole interval between the 16th century and the 18th century, a mixture of local habits and western standards which was overlapped, towards the end of the 17th century, by the ever increasing oriental influence, is what best defines the way in which the privileged were eating in Moldavia and Wallachia. Individuals would practice some of these customs according to their own origins, social standing and personality. We judge that as far as human behaviour goes, social manifestations vary from one individual to another, some being keener than others to constantly refine their manners and improve their standing.

For the commoners things seem to have been much simpler. We don't know how many of the interdictions, which were identified by ethnographers as being known in contemporary rural areas, were familiar to the peasants of that time, an if they were, in what form were they transmitted. What we can observe is that even commoners did no eat anything, anywhere and just for the purpose of staying alive. The significance of eating was deeper than that, even to them, fact which has transformed eating in the rural zones as well.

Eating – An Act of Culture

Eating becomes an act of culture when humans produce and cook their own food, as well as when they make choices, instead of just taking whatever nature provides, and attribute food diverse meanings.

Notes made from the beginning of the 16th and up to the end of the 18th century by travellers visiting Moldavia and Wallachia prove that the diversity of the relief and

the and the fertility of the soil have impressed most of them. It was equally obvious to them that nature had blessed these lands but that the locals were incapable of exploiting these riches to their fullest extent. They thought that the inhabitants of Moldavia and Wallachia were content with taking whatever nature procured for them rather than learning how to properly exploit its reserves. However some of these observers, who came from faraway, have noticed that however plentiful nature might have been, production rates could have not been so high without the constant work on the part of the locals.

In April and May grains were being sowed: wheat, millet, rye, and corn, which, after they were gathered, had to be taken to the mill to be transformed into flour. Documents often comment about mills placed on watercourses, although some wind mills might have been used while flour needed in the household could be made with the use of a manual grinder. The hills were covered with never-ending vineyards, which were equipped with

tubs, pails and manual presses, which proves the fact that, before becoming wine kept in barrels, grapes would undergo a series of transformations, the result of intense human activity. Orchards and vegetable gardens played in important rule in the economy of the household as even the royal court had some in its perimeter. Among the fruit trees which were grown in the orchards of Moldavia and Wallachia there were apple trees, pears, peaches, walnut trees, plum trees, quince trees, cherry trees and sour cherry trees. The vegetables that were cultivated were peas – from as early as the 16th century - onion and garlic, cabbage, parsley, celery, beet and cucumbers – according to accounts from the 17th century – beans, pumpkins and even eggplants – as described by 18th century documents. Boyars would procure their vegetable seeds from Transylvania, which was the same place from where they would hire their gardeners. The abundance and diversity of flowers, found in almost any landscape, attracted bees which gathered pollen and transformed it into honey. If looked after properly, bees would thrive. Among the auxiliary buildings of the

household there were cattle stables and a courtyard for birds, where chickens, geese, ducks and turkeys were grown. Almost everyone owned cattle, sheep, pigs or goats and some even had buffaloes. Most of these animals were destined for export, but expenses lists prove that - at least during weddings and funerals - cattle, sheep and birds, including turkeys, were sacrificed with the purpose of being eaten. Foreign travellers did not overlook the abundance of fish from the Danube and surrounding rivers either. However people would not fish just in rivers, but in lakes and ponds as well, their tools ranging from fishing poles and fykes to large nets used on the Danube. Game was varied and plentiful. However hunting was an activity mostly reserved for the prince and the rich, as a form of showing courage and battle prowess in times of peace and why not a form of recreation, rather than a way of procuring food. Salt was extracted from the mountains and was a highly prized for its properties.

We have an image of what was produced in Moldavia and Wallachia, however locals also included products from faraway places in their diets, products which they were able to procure through market traders, whose goods came from the most important commercial centres on the continent. Spices were mostly brought from Danzig, whilst fruits and all sorts of exotic products came from Istanbul. The first mentions of such goods, destined for selling in the two Romanian countries which we analyze, date back to the middle of the 17th century and emphasize the fact that they were still rare and expensive, which made them affordable only to the richest of boyars.

Bread could almost always be bough in markets, even top quality one. We must make the observation that some princes did not forget that one of their main duties as a Christian ruler towards their subjects was to make bread available to all. In Moldavia and Wallachia, similar to Western Europe, bread was different from other food products and held an important role in the diet

of the locals. Bread was the result of complex series of operations which only humans were capable of doing. The link created between the idea that through learning the techniques necessary to transform the grains of wheat into bread, and thus to procure food rather than just taking it from nature representing human evolution from animal stage to creators of civilization, has transformed bread into the symbol of this evolution. Ethnologists have showed that this idea was also embedded in the popular Romanian way of thinking. It is because of this that we believe, that during the 16th and 18th centuries, bread was considered a "total food", being associated with existence itself, which resulted in all the importance it was given.

We would be more interested however in the selection of other food products, besides bread, that the Moldavians and Wallachians ate. The writings of foreign travellers, especially those from the 18th century, leave the impression that Moldavian and Wallachian cuisine was

considered simplest, the travellers considering that the locals were not very skilled at cooking.

The necessary components for the preparation of the royal foods were gathered with permission from the prince himself, part of the aliments coming from taxes, others being bought. Gifts, received by the prince or by members of his family, often enriched and diversified the royal meal. It is not difficult to observe that the prince and his family were destined the most diverse, freshest and in some cases hard to procure products, fact which was owed to their social standing and which showed that for the members of that family only such products were suitable. On the other side, the same privileged social standing gave the prince and his family the means to procure such products. Unfortunately, historical sources do not reveal what the prince and his close ones ate on regular occasions or during holidays nor what the preferences of other royal family members were. The royal table must have been plentiful on holidays, especially when distinguished guests from

other parts of the world were attending. However, how did the prince and his relatives eat on regular days, especially in times of hardship? The scarce information that we hold makes it almost impossible to find out more about the look and taste of royal food in Moldavia and Wallachia. Be it so, we do not have reasons to doubt that the prince and his family did not eat enough not only on feasts, but also on regular days. They were supplied with necessary amount of food of the best quality. On the other hand, these foods did not reach the high quality of laboriously and professionally cooked food. However tasty, they remained simple, no more refined than those found on a commoner's table, with the difference that the latter, out of lack of knowledge or financial possibility, did not enhance it by making some additions. To satisfy their more refined culinary tastes, princes hired cooks from Western Europe, who most certainly brought with them recipes and ingredients which were found in that part of the world. These cases are however only a matter of personal taste rather than an intention of developing a special cuisine at the court, through which

the elite could be distinguished from the commoners. As such, the princes of Moldavia and Wallachia have either preferred to indulge themselves with foreign products, or have continued to eat unrefined food, like so many others beneath their social standing, without being interested in making their court famous through the preparation of original Romanian food, that would distinguish itself through flavour and unique way of preparation, fact which we believe to have been an important impediment in the development of a traditional cuisine. If princes tried to impress, they would do so only through the abundance of food and drinks, and only for the sake of proving their power. Royal feasts never became culinary spectacles. However we must to be realists. In a region were times of peace were short, and reigns were uncertain, who could find the time to look after the appearance and taste of food and come up with whoever knows what recipes? Who would take up this task, when even at the royal court the food was cooked by illiterate gipsy slaves? To be a cook in the Romanian Principalities meant to be able to prepare,

over and over again, the few types of food enjoyed by the masters, this very repetition representing the only way of acquiring the skill, without the possibility of transforming the process into art, which would require the existence of a creative spirit.

We can get a better understanding of how food was cooked and eaten in the Principalities if we analyze those documents which hold information about the diet of boyars. The account register from the city of Cluj, which holds information about the period between 1556 and 1665, is a valuable example of such a document, because it gives insight which covers a large time frame. We tend to believe that in Transylvania, Moldavian and Wallachian boyars who came as emissaries, ate the same things they would back home. Some of them brought their own travelling kitchens, maybe even their personal cooks, just so they would not have to give up their diet. We believe that the daily diet of high ranking boyars enjoyed a fairly balanced diet, which comprised both products of animal origin as well as various vegetables.

Besides local products, ingredients brought from distant parts of the world were used. Bread and wine were never missing from the table. The register offers clear evidence that the wealthy of that period were used to eating two times per day, the main meals being lunch and dinner, which, we have reason to believe, were not different from each other, either through the types of food served, nor through the amount of food eaten. From what we can tell, the food was cooked by boiling or by frying. Some mention help us understand what the boyars ate: food cooked in a simple manner, which could hardly differentiate between a boyar and a simple peasant. It is noteworthy that although the types of food available to emissaries and their companions were generally the same, the quality of these products greatly varied fact which was visible in the case of the bread and wine. As such, however slight, we can distinguish an image of a Romanian society in which every individual had his place, being obvious that food and drinks represented an important element which signalled social standing to

Moldavians and Wallachians, similar to other European regions.

Although scarce, proof that this was a characteristic of the entire period between the 16th and 18th centuries exists. This is a way of knowing that boyars differentiated themselves from the commoners through their possibility of acquiring a more varied range of local food products of higher quality. Also, because of their social standing, boyars were entitled to receive better products which were not destined for common people. Boyars ate a lot, but simple food, which did not mean however that their meals were not tasteful, as long as good quality ingredients were used for their cooking. Some foreign travellers praised the food they tried, whilst other did not hide their criticism, showing their disgust. Of course, some elements which were to be found in the house of a boyar could affect the quality of the food. Those working in the kitchen were gipsy slaves so there was no culinary refinement involved. Then the kitchen was to be found in a different building, rather

than in the house itself. We must not overlook the fact that boyars had another possibility to differentiate the food they were eating from that of commoners. As we mentioned before, it is proven that towards the half of the 17th century exotic goods were brought to Moldavia and Wallachia. Although they were still expensive because of their rarity, some boyars did afford to buy them. We can also observe that boyars took up some eating habits that came from Constantinople in the 18th century. This makes us believe, that at least for some of our boyars, satisfying hunger was not the only thing to be expected of food. The fact that some desired more flavoured meals – even if during the whole period their food remains simple – and wanted to hire skilled professionals to cook their food in more hygienic conditions, proves that at least some families diet was given a higher importance. This indicates that some boyars became aware of the fact that a privileged social standing required a certain refinement of the act of eating, their preference for well cooked and appropriately served meals distinguishing them even

more from the masses of commoners. This might have been the reason why in the 18th century, certain measures were taken in the Principalities to prevent cooking as a profession from being practiced however and by whoever. We think that such measures were intended to give greater control over those who practiced this profession and, at the same time, to make these people more responsible for the quality of their work. This points us to believe that being a cook no longer meant being just a servant in the house of a boyar or at court, but rather being able to practice this trade freely and receiving payment for the provided services.

Was the diet of Moldavian and Wallachian peasants as scarce as foreign travellers describe it? There is enough evidence which leads us to believe that peasants would often have less on their table when an uninvited guest would happen to be visiting them, and that in the rest of the time they would eat somewhat better than the historical sources show. Some documents even tell of some who did not miss the opportunity to enrich their

diet and not necessarily through honest work. However scarce, these sources confirm that theft was a way of acquiring the necessary amount of food – be it even occasionally and by chance – these events by no means representing something out of the ordinary. As such, even the less fortunate could eat special food, only that in their case this was purely change and not something that occurred regularly. It was only natural that peasants also had cravings of their own. We would be inclined to believe that only hunger made them resort to stealing. This is why they would not miss any opportunity to eat exotic products that were otherwise too expensive for them. However they were destined to a life of misery, so their dietary choices were greatly restricted, which leads us to qualify their diet as one of subsistence because food – no matter from where it came – had to assure their survival before anything else and only very rarely was a delight.

In the absence of recipes and cook books, although few would have expected it, it is the work of a linguist which

helps us in knowing what types of food were served in Moldavia and Wallachia. Lazăr Șăineanu, studying the ways in which the Orient has influenced the Romanian culture and language, has identified a large number of terms of Turkish origins within the language spoken by common people, discovery which made him believe that the close ties between the Romanian Principalities and the Ottoman Empire led to lexical borrowings, process which occurred starting with the 15th century and up to the 18th century, being more intense during the Phanariot period. What is of interest to us is the fact that some of the terms are names of objects used at the table or in the kitchen, but especially types of food and drinks which proves that, in time, Wallachians and Moldavians became more and more accustomed to Turkish products without feeling the need to change their names, eventually becoming so used to them that they started to consider them their own.

The *Monograph of Wallachia* written by doctor Constantin Caracaș remains the document with the most

significant observations about diet at the beginning of the 19th century, when the author lived. The special importance of this monograph is not only due to the fact that, through a thorough presentation of the natural products which could be found in the region and of the way in which these products were prepared, it familiarizes us with the way in which Wallachian boyars and peasants ate, but also for other reasons as well. It reveals that doctor Caracaș presumably knew about the Western medieval theory according to which there existed a connection between animals and plants destined for eating – organized in a hierarchal order between earth and sky – and social hierarchy. Criticizing the customs of the time, the author presents what he believes should be a correct diet: that of the child. The monograph also shows the close connection that exists between diet and physical health. As he presents different food products, Doctor Constantin Caracaș informs his readers of the effects which these have on digestion, the emphasis being on the possible negative side effects.

Analyzing the diet of Wallachians from a medical perspective, Constantin Caracaș reaches the conclusion that there was a significant difference between the way in which boyars and peasants ate. He found the diet of the latter as being "sober, careless and irregular", unlike that of boyars which he describes as "plentiful, varied, lavish and nourishing". From what we can tell, the differences did not end here, the privileged affording a larger quantity and more varied food products which they could procure on a regular basis. We can also observe an evolution of culinary tastes in the case of the boyars, their menus already including meat dishes complemented by different sauces cooked after French, German and Turkish recipes, which means food obtained through a more elaborate technique and better tasting than just boiled or fried meat. On the other hand, commoners ate whatever they could find, and not necessarily because the wealthy stopped them from gaining access to products of higher quality, but rather because their lack of education translated in a lack of refinement made them oblivious to the existence of such

products. The diet of children – one that was suitable to their healthy growth – should have been different from that of adults, however the text shows a totally different reality of the time. Because of the lack of knowledge in that age, there was no concern to provide children with the appropriate quantities of suitable food products, which were necessary for their growth in completely healthy conditions.

It is necessary to note that an important role in the reconstruction of Moldavian and Wallachian diet and the types of food used by different social classes, between the 16th and 18th centuries, was played by archaeology - especially zooarchaeology, this being the reason why such sources should be consulted with regularity.

Between the 16th and 18th centuries, the religious factor also played an important role in shaping the diet of Moldavians and Wallachians.

Paying special attention to the soul rather than the body, Christianity, at its beginnings, was very permissive in

regards to what could be consumed as food. With time however, following the Judaic example, the Church introduced certain specifications through which the consumption of meat, dairy products and eggs was prohibited during certain periods of the year, the practice of fasting being definitively homogenized within the Orthodox Church between the 8th and 9th centuries.

Books written between the 16th and 17th centuries in the ecclesiastical medium of Moldavia and Wallachia, inspired by the Holy Scriptures, give us an insight into the rigours of fasting and the motivation behind this act. The writings of foreign travellers paint however the image of rather laic Moldavians and Wallachians, who were not too pious. The same travellers testify that Wallachians and Moldavians respected fasting periods and considered that failing to do so was worse than killing or stealing. The identification by folklorists of a series of beliefs in connection with this situation helps us understand that for the simple people fasting did not have moral value, but rather was a purifying action with

immediate repercussions on daily life. All of this goes to prove that in traditional environments tradition was more powerful than Church authority, and this is why saying that the inhabitants of Moldavia and Wallachia were lacking faith would be far from the truth. Commoners did not stray from the Christian belief, but rather became more strict in respecting some of the customs, because they though this meant total proof of their faith in God. For the same reason, The Church was not the one making sure that the practice of fasting was respected, but rather the community who kept a close eye on the individual regardless of who this person was. Boyars, unlike commoners, recognized the moral value of fasting which was presented in ecclesiastical teachings. The fact that some perceived punishment for disobeying fasting as something distant and improbable, would explain why mostly boyars were those break this rule. We can observe that, disregarding the normal fact that in daily practice some deviations occurred, on a grand scale between the 16th and 18th centuries a dietary pattern influenced by the Church had taken form in Moldavia

and Wallachia. This diet was characterised by an alternation of periods when almost anything could be eaten and periods when products of animal origin were forbidden. In popular belief some dietary restrictions based on Christian dogma which referred to the tainted meat of some animals survived until the 20th century.

Wine was not forbidden to Christians, however intoxication with alcohol was condemned by the Church. Moldavians and Wallachians did not drink only wine and they did not pay much attention to how much they were drinking either. Foreigners were surprised by the large number of full taverns. Men were not the only ones to enjoy the pleasure of drinking, but unlike them, women – especially commoners – who had this shameful habit would keep it a secret and not show themselves drunk for everyone to see. We must ask ourselves however if drinking in taverns alongside others, pretending to forget about hardships, was just proof of great vices or could it be something else as well. Could we not consider the tavern a suitable place for socializing, and that the

alcohol being served there as having an important social role? A lot of cups were being raised at royal feasts as well, and chroniclers have not been too lenient in their writings with princes who showed this habit. In a time when the Church played an important role in the lives of people and belief in God was strong, it was only natural that such behaviour be considered as going against the Christian teachings. Inebriation was a danger which threatened the soul and rendered its salvation in the afterlife questionable. It was a sin which estranged Man from his salvation and from God.

What were the causes then which maintained this reality, other than the fact that for mostly everyone the selling of alcohol was an important source of income? Was it because priests, who were supposed to guide people, were not setting a good example? Or was it maybe the popular belief that wine held properties which would restore health and vigour to the body?

The information offered in documents of the time certifies that inebriation was considered a vice and a cause for other condemnable deeds, and that individuals suffering from this weakness were not seen as worthy and respectable by their peers. Those found guilty of such behaviour were to receive a spiritual punishment as well a very worldly one. Therefore the excessive consumption of alcohol was a reality of Romanian society between the 16th and 18th centuries. Although documents show that there were many who drank too much, it was also true that intoxication with alcohol was not considered a normal and praiseworthy behaviour but on the contrary, it was viewed as being disgraceful and degrading. The individual who suffered from this vice would incur the disdain of his peers as one who, on one hand, broke the rules of the community and threatened social order, and on the other hand, disobeyed Christian morale, endangering his soul only to please his body.

Even though historical sources do not allow us to delve too deep into minds of Moldavians and Wallachians of

those times, it is well established that their religious convictions and nothing else determined them to eat lamb, "pască"[3], Easter eggs and "cozonac"[4] during Easter and pork meat products during Christmas. According to ethnological studies, for generations, the sacrificing of the lamb symbolizes the remembering of the death of Jesus Christ. Also, the pie called "pască", prepared with wheat flour, eggs and milk – ingredients which are tied themselves to the idea of death and resurrection – symbolizes, to the same extent, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the triumph of life over death. Sacrificing pigs had both a religious aspect as well as a very pragmatic one. In the popular calendar the sacrificing of the pig coincides with a period of renewal, Christianity also transforming this event into a symbol of honouring the souls of the dead.

[3] **Pască** – a type of pie which is only baked and consumed during Easter and symbolizes the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
[4] **Cozonac** – a type of cake which is baked and consumed during Easter.

Burial practices in Moldavia and Wallachia shed even more light on the significance given by the locals to some food products. The unknown which death brought with it naturally frightened people. Some tried to prepare for what was to come on the other side, and they would do so in the way in which the Church had thought them to, by asking their offspring to look after their soul after they passed away, mentioning them at certain time intervals as was customary. Meals offered as charity in the name of the dead represented an important moment. Ethnologists have determined that people in those times believed that by giving food for charity they would "feed" the dead. Until they would fully integrate in the world beyond, the dead had an uncertain status. Because of this there was the possibility of them becoming hostile and even endanger the lives of those they had just left. To prevent this, people had to appease the dead by offering food as charity which would have eased their journey to the other realm. Christianity added a new moral significance to this symbolic gesture, by convincing people that they too would be received into

the afterlife. These are all ideas which we have identified in the mentality of the people living in the period that makes the object of this study. For them the bread and wine they received as charity no longer represented nourishment just for the body but also for the soul, uniting them with Jesus. Funeral wheat porridge made from boiled wheat and sweetened with honey, represented the body of the departed one, and also symbolized the Christians' belief in resurrection and immortality. Because of this we believe that, during the 16th and 18th centuries, the bread and wine given during funerals reminded of the Last Supper and displayed the solid connection between the living and those who had passed away, all being part of the Church of Christ.

Chronicles often times mention ether prolonged drought or never ending rain, floods, hailstorms or unbearable low temperatures, swarms of locusts or various diseases which killed plants and animals, all of these affecting Moldavia and Wallachia between the 16th and 18th centuries. To these were added robberies and destruction

during times of war as well as the obligation to supply foreign armies with food, which made the lives of the locals even harder. In situations like these the existence of stockpiled goods could have spared people the unbearable suffering caused by famine. Both written sources as well as archaeological ones prove that Moldavians and Wallachians were not without such kind of worries. Without a doubt people in those times lived in constant fear of hunger. It could not have been any other way, when texts are very convincing when speaking about the shock felt by those who experienced such an ordeal. It is obvious that in such conditions nothing was missed more than bread, people even trying to cook bread out of weeds and plants found on fields or in forests. To eat them raw would have meant that they had lost their human characteristics and had reverted back to the condition of an animal. The role of the saviour in such situations would belong to the prince who, as a representative of God, had to feed his subjects and in most of the times this was exactly what happened.

May we consider that eating was an act of culture for the Moldavians and Wallachians who lived between the 16th and 18th centuries? Although their simple food would make us believe that it was not, evidence offered by historical sources shows that we would be wrong to consider so.

Conclusions

To find out why and how people, who lived in Wallachia or in Moldavia sometime between the 16th and 18th centuries ate, has meant nothing more than getting to know these people and the way in which they acted – on special occasions but also in regular days – in relation to their environment, their peers and the divinity, and last but not least to understand the motivations behind this behaviour.

Table of Contents