

Little known facts of national cuisine

Italy is known for its spaghetti and pizza, Spain for its gazpacho and hams and France for its frog legs while everyone associates Switzerland with its unique cheese and America with fast food. Meanwhile, Belarus is strongly associated with its draniki (potato pancakes). However, are these truly local culinary delights?

By Dmitry Umpirovich

The director of Minsk's Kamyantsa Restaurant is an expert in Belarusian cuisine. Sergey Chegrinets shares his views:

Draniki are associated with Belarus, as those from post-Soviet states know, but Holland and Germany have their own versions, which they see as their national dish. The explanation is simple: potatoes migrated across Europe from the west — from Portugal and Britain. It would be naive to think that we were the first to cook such pancakes although we began earlier than the Russians east of us.

If Belarusian cuisine is not based on potatoes, what else is there?

Natural ingredients are at the heart of every recipe. Chatting with foreigners has convinced me that these are more important than rare or expensive delicacies. When Moscovites taste our potatoes, they enjoy the natural taste (not genetically-modified). Our mochanka is unique among our neighbours, comprising two parts: meat broth, cream and smoked meats are simmered to create a rich casserole, with draniki placed on top. Both are eaten together, creating a tasty combination. Mochanka is found countrywide, following various recipes and using different ingredients: some use blood sausage while others make pancakes from whey.



Belarus' largest dranik (potato pancake) is 1.62m in diameter

Of course, restaurants need to serve dishes which customers find palatable regardless of where they hail from: Mogilev or Grodno. You should feel as if you're tasting something from your childhood. All those dining out have their own critical opinion of the food.

Sadly, we lost ownership of this beverage to Ukraine. It's legally produced there and is found in almost every shop. Our southern neighbour promotes its alcohol so widely that we cannot compete. I wouldn't choose samogon over other national beverages — such as medovukha

(with honey), khrenovukha (with horse radish) and liqueurs made with juniper or cranberries. These drinks are natural and are more unique to us.

How many Belarusian dishes are found abroad?

Lots! It seems we were looking elsewhere when they were stolen. Lithuania has taken our zeppelins, Poland has our bigos and Ukraine offers borshch. Only mochanka has remained among our well-known authentic dishes.

Do western states have their own view of Belarusian cuisine?

Sadly, too little time has passed for this to have gathered force. Few realise that every Chinese person who set up a restaurant in the USA received a \$50,000 grant from the government of their country. Now, a quarter of the public catering market belongs to China.

What can we do to promote our national cuisine?

We need to en-

courage such restaurants to open by offering financial incentives. Why can't we offer small tax concessions? Such places would buy ingredients locally, ensuring work for our farmers and for local companies, while saving on importing food from abroad.

Auction accompanied by Strauss

By Olga Maximova

Nesvizh fundraising ball for Novogrudok Castle

Nesvizh is to host its first charitable ball on November 10th, allowing guests to enjoy the atmosphere of past times in the noble Radziwills' former family home. It's the perfect venue for a luxurious ball, illuminated by bright torchlight. Guests will be welcomed by knights on horseback, a red carpet and champagne, while an auction will raise funds to help restore 6th century Novogrudok Castle.

The spacious halls of Nesvizh Palace — Golden, Theatrical, Hetman, Hunting and others — will host diverse dance, musical, theatrical and costume performances. The night will offer guests ball games, thematic salons and various programmes and dishes — to suit even the most demanding tastes. Music by the king of waltz — Johann Strauss — will accompany the party.

Among those attending will be many prominent figures of culture and arts from Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and other European states: Belarusian National Academic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre soloist Oksana Volkova; Russian State Academic Bolshoi Theatre soloist Alexander Zakharov; actor and singer Dmitry Kharatyan; famous ballerina Anastasia Volochkova; and popular Russian band Quarto. Marat Basharov will host the ball, which will also feature performances by Belarusian instrumental and dance teams — such as Khoroshki. The Symphony Orchestra of the Belarusian State Academic Musical Theatre (conducted by maestro Arkady Berin) will play waltzes in the Large Ballroom and, at midnight, there will be a fireworks display. Guests will then enjoy listening to Germany's Sculer Cover Band Berlin.

Irish model, actress and Miss World 2003 Rosanna Davison (daughter of the famous singer Chris de Burgh) is also planning to attend.

Pages of rarities reveal many facts

By Viktor Andrejev

This year, Polotsk celebrated its 1150th anniversary. Its Museum of Belarusian Book Printing was founded in 1986, on the bank of the Dvina River, inside the former Epiphany Monastery.

The rare editions held within its walls bear witness to religious and political disputes through the ages. It first opened to visitors in 1990, allowing them to view exhibitions in the old cells. Yelena Shumovich, who heads the museum, tells us, "While we were deciding where to create an exhibition, Prof. Adam Maldis noted his preference for Polotsk, convincing specialists that folios and manuscripts should be located here, in the city of the first printer, Frantsisk Skorina."

Moscow and Leningrad muse-

ums and archives helped fill the halls with exhibits, as Ms. Shumovich explains. She adds, "Nikolay Nikolaev worked hard to help: he now heads the Rare Book Department at the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg, where many Belarusian 16th-20th century editions reside. He helped select the most interesting editions and found artists to make copies. We also received a donation of an original edition of *The Soul's Supper*, by monk Simeon Polotsky, from Moscow's Lenin State Library (now the Russian State Library)."

Moscow Slavist and Belarusian scholar Yuri Labyntsev, whose expertise is in Eastern European editions, works at the museum-library of Simeon Polotsky; his suggestion has been used at the Museum of Belarusian Book Printing, recreating the atmosphere in which the Belarusian enlightener lived over 300



In halls of Museum of Belarusian Book Printing

years ago.

One of the museum's most precious collections relates to Russian Old Believers: a set of unique 17th century editions, donated many years ago by a Novopolotsk resident whose father was a famous figure among Old Believers in Belarus.

Meanwhile, Father Piotr, of the Polotsk Old Believer Church, recently donated *The Psalter*, released even before Patriarch Nikon's reform.

Unfortunately, Polotsk lacks a single original folio by Frantsisk Skorina; the oldest edition on display is the *Educational Testament*,

published in 1595 and released in Vilnya (Vilnius) by the Mamonichi printing house. It spans two ages in Belarusian culture: Orthodox faith and the traditions of Ancient Rus, against Catholicism and the influence of Western Europe.

Before signing the Brest Church Unia, in 1596, between the Orthodox and Catholic churches, the Mamonichi printing house used to work for Orthodox monasteries, schools and churches, releasing theological and liturgical editions, as well as promotional works, textbooks and collections of legislative acts. Particularly, it printed the Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania of 1588; Belarus received its first copy of the rarity recently, when it was acquired for the Museum of Mogilev History from a Moscow collector. From the 17th century, it printed books exclusively for Greco-Catholics.