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THE HISTORY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF GANJA CUISINE IN THE LIGHT OF NIZAMI GANJAVI'S WORKS

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Ganja cuisine is one of the principal components of Azerbaijani cuisine. Azerbaijani culinary culture was formed on five fundamental pillars: Palace cuisine; Military cuisine; Spiritual cuisine (the cuisine of dervishes, Sufis, and similar traditions); Commercial cuisine (caravanserais, taverns, restaurants, etc.); The cuisine of ordinary people.

Many sophisticated dishes could only be created and prepared in royal courts. A refined culinary culture was therefore shaped primarily by professional cooks. Ganja is an ancient city with a long history, having served for centuries as a center of statehood and khanate rule. Information about the palace cuisine of Ganja, one of Azerbaijan's ancient centers of science, culture, and statehood, can be found in the works of the great 12th-century Azerbaijani poet and master of words Nizami Ganjavi, as well as Abu Bakr al-Ustad, Mahsati Ganjavi, Qivami Mutarrizi, and others.

For example, in Mahsati Ganjavi's rubai (poems) are dedicated to the son of a baker and the son of a butcher, indicating that these professions were already well established. One of the dishes mentioned in Abu Bakr's Munisnameh appears in the following passage:

Hajjaj Yusuf asked those seated around him: "What do you think is the most delicious food on earth?" One person replied: "If you permit me, I would offer you roasted poultry stuffed with sweet almonds, cloves, and nutmeg, accompanied by white bread fried in butter" [1, p. 304].

This description suggests that a form of lavangi (national dish: poultry filled with mashed walnuts and onion) was already being prepared in Ganja during the 12th century. Another section of Munisnameh mentions dishes that are either still prepared in Ganja today or have since disappeared:

"The girl ordered the table to be set. Tables made from palm wood and ivory were brought in and covered with fine white flatbreads made from the highest-quality flour and various delicacies. Drinks, sherbets, fruits, and sweets were served. Shortly afterward, pomegranate pilaf, cumin pilaf, dovga, Rashidi and Zeynabi pastries filled with almonds and pistachios, roast lamb prepared with lemon juice, chicken chigirtma, quail kebab, dishes made from pounded meat, boranis, pastries prepared with pistachios and almonds, ice creams, chilled rose petals, and many other delicacies were brought to the table."

After the meal, golden basins and rosewater vessels were presented. The guests washed their hands and faces and dried themselves with fine linen towels [1, p. 390].

Many traditional Azerbaijani dishes are also mentioned in the works of Nizami Ganjavi. In *The Book of Alexander (Iskandarnama)*, he refers to pakhlava, gulshakar, paludeh [11, p. 259], and shekerbura [11, p. 269]. In *Seven Beauties*, he mentions saffron pilaf and cumin

pilaf prepared with sugar, pomegranate pilaf [14, p.259], dovga [14, p.369] and other dishes. All of these are connected with the ancient culinary traditions of Ganja.

In 1985, Azerbaijani cuisine was first subjected to comprehensive scientific study by the Azerbaijan National Culinary Association (AMKA), founded in Ganja. This was the first organization in the former Soviet Union, the Turkic world, and the Islamic world to approach national cuisine as an academic field. Ganja cuisine also began to be systematically researched by AMKA. In 1990, the first culinary expedition was launched in Ganja. At that time, Novruzali Sangahchi, a disciple of Sangah Yaqub, worked at the city's Kitchen Factory. Large quantities of Sangah bread were baked on gravel stones in special Sangah ovens. Until the 1950s, near the site of today's Executive Authority building in Ganja, there was both a Sangah bakery and a family-run piti restaurant. Family-style piti was eaten with Sangah bread. Pieces of Sangah bread placed into the piti broth were expected to absorb the flavor of tail fat; if they failed to do so, the baker could be punished.

In 2022, this variety of piti was revived and featured on the YouTube channel of Stalik Khankishiev [26]. Family-sized piti was traditionally prepared in vessels serving 8–12 people. One distinctive feature of Ganja's family piti was the addition of a beaten egg. Today, the use of beaten eggs in dishes survives in Georgian cuisine, such as in chakhokhbili. Because potatoes became widely cultivated around Ganja, chestnuts, which had traditionally been used in piti, were later replaced by potatoes—effectively substituting one starchy ingredient for another. The Ganja-style piti prepared in the Bagmanlar district became famous during the Soviet period. At the same time, Ganja cream, Ganja herbs, and the locally produced Chinar chocolate were distributed throughout the USSR alongside products from Baku. The research conducted during these expeditions resulted in a large-scale "Days of Ganja Cuisine" event held in Baku. Beginning in 2010, Ganja cuisine was regularly represented at Novruz celebrations held in Baku's seaside park with the participation of the President of Azerbaijan and other state officials. Considerable attention was paid to Ganja's culinary heritage, and products such as zilviya, Ganja pakhlava, and other specialties were exhibited. AMKA also ensured the participation of Ganja artisans in Jam Festivals, Pilaf Festivals, Bread Festivals, and many other culinary events, where they consistently achieved outstanding results and received major awards. As a result, significant progress was made in documenting, preserving, and promoting Ganja cuisine. Traditional dishes such as zilviya, nazik, and qovud were showcased by AMKA in many countries around the world.

In reality, Ganja cuisine developed throughout the broader region of Ganjabasar and was shaped by products and culinary traditions brought to Ganja from surrounding districts. Borchaly, Goycha, Gazakh, Dashkasan, Shamkir, Samukh, Khanlar (present-day Goygol), and other territories historically formed parts of Ganjabasar. Agricultural products supplied to Ganja included cereals (wheat, barley, rye, etc.), legumes (beans, mung beans, lentils, broad beans, etc.), herbs and vegetables (garden cress, coriander, dill, beetroot, cabbage, potatoes, and others), melons and gourds (watermelons, melons, pumpkins), orchard fruits (apples, pears, quinces, pomegranates), livestock products (buffalo yogurt, churned butter (nehre), goat meat, mutton, beef), freshwater fish from rivers and lakes (such as Khramuli, trout, and shamay fish), poultry products (eggs, goose, turkey, duck, and chicken meat), honey, game meat, and wild plants including thyme, sorrel, asparagus, and forest berries.

Since ancient times, extensive rice cultivation existed around Ganja. The various pilafs mentioned by Nizami Ganjavi and Abu Bakr—including pomegranate pilaf and cumin pilaf—were prepared from local rice varieties [1; 14]. It is worth noting that Nizami Ganjavi himself came from a family of bakers. The Bakers' Quarter still exists today near the old market in Ganja. Qivami Mutarizi, considered either Nizami's brother or cousin, also belonged to a family of bakers and wrote:

"In poetry, none can match me;

In baking bread, none stand as me. " [6, p. 316]

Ganja breads—including yukha, lavash, shatir, and tandoor bread—were renowned throughout the region. Archaeological excavations at Göytepe in the Tovuz district, approximately 80 kilometers from Ganja, demonstrate that legumes, cereals, wheat, barley, and grapes were cultivated in these lands as early as 8,000 years ago. A 9,000-year-old plow discovered near the town of Govlar in Tovuz pushes this history even further back. Animal and bird bones unearthed at Göytepe indicate a highly developed tradition of animal husbandry and poultry farming in antiquity [15; 22]. A storage vessel dating from the end of the second millennium BCE, preserved in the Ganja Museum of History and Local Lore, together with plant seeds found inside it, demonstrates that cultivated garden crops were grown in the Ganjachay Valley three to four thousand years ago [4, p. 7]. These archaeological findings confirm that both plant- and animal-based food resources essential to culinary culture were widely used in Ganja and Ganjabasar and that an advanced culinary tradition flourished there [4; 15; 22].

Ganja cuisine belongs largely to the tradition of the saz and ashiq culture and places particular emphasis on meat dishes and flour-based foods.

The region is famous for dishes such as khangel, bozartma, dovga (doyga), nazik, zilviya, Ganja cream, local herbs, sweets, preserves, and pickled products. In 2022, Ganja cuisine was comprehensively documented together with Stalik Khankishiev and presented on his website and YouTube channel [20–28]. During this project, the preparation of traditional family-style piti was also recorded [20]. Subsequently, shila pilaf made from locally grown red rice was introduced and documented [27].

Today, Ganja cuisine continues to be researched, documented, and promoted. One of the most important factors influencing any cuisine is the type of hearth. Each cooking system shapes culinary traditions in its own way. For example, many baked, boiled, and steamed dishes in Slavic cuisine are determined by the characteristics of the traditional Russian stove. The development of Ganja cuisine, however, was closely connected with a wide variety of open and enclosed cooking installations, including: Tandir ovens (pit tandirs, beaten-earth tandirs, glazed tandirs, ring-supported tandirs, built-in tandirs, and woven tandirs); kure, buxari, kulfa ovens, saj, ojaq, mangal and e.t.c

Kebabs prepared in a tandir differ significantly from those cooked over a mangal. Likewise, bread products baked over an open fire, in embers, beneath ash, inside a tandir, in a kulfa oven, or on a saj develop distinct flavors, aromas, and textures.

Traditionally, the people of Ganja used not only gas and electricity but also firewood, charcoal, dried dung, and other fuels for cooking, and many of these methods remain in use today.

Another important influence on local cuisine has been the development of distinctive cookware and kitchen utensils. Since ancient times, vessels made from animal hide, stone, wood, clay, glass, metal, ceramics, and other materials have been widely used.

The thermal conductivity of cooking vessels is of great culinary importance and has a significant effect on the final taste of food. The fifteenth-century Azerbaijani cook, physician, and scholar Mahmud Shirvani wrote in his culinary treatise: *"Food should be cooked in stone pots; if such pots are unavailable, copper vessels may be used instead."* [18, p. 54]

Another indicator of a people's culinary culture is their attitude toward water, including its purification and proper use.

Since ancient times, the people of Ganjabasar distinguished between "white water" and "black water." Water containing high concentrations of salts, ions, and minerals was

considered hard, or “black,” while water low in such substances was regarded as soft, or “white.” Only soft water was used in the preparation of foods and beverages.

Willow trees were traditionally planted along rivers, canals, and irrigation channels. Because willow possesses antimicrobial properties, its roots and branches were believed to improve water quality. For this reason, willow twigs or silver objects were often placed in water containers. To clarify cloudy water, apricot kernels were added to special vessels, causing impurities to settle.

Even today, many residents of Ganja use a traditional “water stone” for purification. This device consists of a hollow sandstone pyramid placed upside down on a wooden stand, with a clean container positioned underneath. Water is poured into the stone, often together with silver objects or willow twigs. As the water slowly filters through the capillary pores of the sandstone, it drips into the lower vessel. During this process, the water is not only purified but also naturally cooled.

One of the factors that has profoundly influenced Azerbaijani national cuisine is the people's religious beliefs and worldview. Zoroastrianism, fire worship, Tengriism, and the philosophy of the Avesta have left their mark not only on the psychology, customs, and traditions of Azerbaijanis but also on their culinary culture. Respect for the hearth (ocaq), considered the cook's primary assistant, originates from these ancient beliefs. Table customs and dishes shaped under the influence of reverence for light and fire have survived to the present day. Christianity has existed in Azerbaijan for many centuries. However, Azerbaijanis have been Muslims for more than a thousand years, and the influence of Islam on the cuisine is undeniable. The avoidance of golden tableware, pork, and alcoholic beverages reflects the strong impact of Islamic traditions. Various religious and national holidays, rituals, and customs have also exerted a significant influence on culinary practices [20].

In Azerbaijan, including Ganja, the meat of both large and small livestock has been consumed since ancient times. Azerbaijanis traditionally do not eat horse meat. The cuisine makes extensive use of both domestic and wild animal meat. References to this can be found in the works of Nizami Ganjavi and his contemporaries [1; 2; 12; 14]. The meat of male animals, especially castrated animals and young livestock, is considered particularly tender and flavorful. Animals raised on mountain and foothill pastures produce highly prized white marbled meat, in which fat is naturally distributed throughout the muscle fibers.

The meat and tail fat of the Qarabagh sheep breed are especially valued. The tails of these sheep may weigh between 5 and 10 kilograms, and small wheels are sometimes placed beneath them to support the weight. Fresh meat is preferred to frozen meat. In addition to meat itself, tail fat and internal organs are widely used in cooking. To preserve meat for long periods, it is cut into small pieces and fried together with tail fat. The mixture is then stored in leather bags or special clay containers and covered with melted tail fat. This preservation method is known as qovurma. Another traditional method is the preparation of qakhac (dried meat). Minced meat has also been used in Azerbaijani cuisine since ancient times and serves as the basis for dishes such as dolma and kofta.

Poultry and game birds have occupied an important place in Ganja cuisine since ancient times [1]. Hunting wild birds traditionally began after the first snowfall, when the birds' beaks and feet turned red from the cold. Domestic poultry consumed as food includes geese, ducks, turkeys, and chickens. Birds were often specially fattened to improve the tenderness and richness of their meat. Poultry fat is generally regarded as superior to animal fat. Both poultry and livestock meat may be cooked whole, in large pieces, or finely cut, either alone or in combination with other ingredients.

Butter produced in traditional churns (nehre butter) and sheep tail fat are widely used in Ganja cuisine, whereas vegetable oils play a relatively minor role.

Certain dishes and sweets are traditionally cooked overnight for six to ten hours and served at dawn, after the first morning prayer. Such foods include khash, halimashi, and samani halva.

The Kura River, along with other rivers, Lake Goygol, Lake Maralgol, Lake Goycha, and numerous other bodies of water, enriched the cuisine of Ganja with fish dishes. Fried, steamed, and poached fish dishes are common on local tables. Fish may be prepared whole, in large portions, or in smaller pieces. Nevertheless, fish is generally not considered a staple food in Ganjabasar cuisine and is usually served as a supplementary dish.

Chicken eggs are widely used in the daily diet. Quail eggs are also valued in dietary cuisine. Dishes such as gayganag (omelet), çalxama, nümürü, boiled eggs, kükü, and çığırtma continue to be popular today.

The dairy cuisine of Azerbaijan, including that of Ganja, is exceptionally rich and diverse. Dairy products collectively known in Ganja as *agarti* include milk, colostrum, bulama, yogurt, cheese, duğ (a fermented dairy drink), cream—especially the famous Ganja cream made from buffalo milk—*shor* (curd cheese), *ayran*, and many others. These products also form the basis of numerous traditional dishes, including *dovga*, *dogramac*, *ayran ashı*, *atlama*, milk porridge, and various other foods that have enriched local cuisine for centuries. Azerbaijanis, including the people of Ganja, treat bread with exceptional respect and reverence. *Yukha*, *fətir*, *lavash*, *shatir*, *xamrali*, *tandır bread*, and many other varieties differing in shape, thickness, and baking method are essential elements of the national table. If bread is present on the table, Azerbaijanis traditionally begin the meal by eating bread first as a sign of respect, believing that nothing can surpass bread in importance. Bread is revered almost as sacredly as the Qur'an, and people may even swear oaths upon it [20].

Flour-based dishes and baked goods occupy a special place in Azerbaijani cuisine. It should be noted that the combination of meat and dough is characteristic of all Turkic peoples. The historian Faruk Sumer cites the consumption of *tutmac* several times in his book *The Oghuzs* as evidence of the Turkic origins of the Seljuks [17, pp. 364–365]. Nizami also mentions *tutmach* in *Seven Beauties* [14, p. 51]. Flour-based dishes such as *khangal* (“leaf *khangal*”), *spoon khangal* (“hot” or “soupy *khangal*”), *khashil* (“flour *khashil*,” “cracked-wheat *khashil*,” and “bread *khashil*”), and *horra* (“thin *horra*” and “milk *horra*”) are mainly prepared during the winter months. Leaf *khangal* is served with various fillings depending on the locality: minced meat in Ganja and Tovuz, potatoes in Tovuz and Gadabay, fried poultry in Gazakh and Aghstafa, or finely chopped tomatoes fried in butter in Shamkir [20; 25].

As the weather becomes warmer, the amount of meat and flour-based dishes on the table decreases, while plant-based foods become more common. Dishes such as *kete*, *tutmach*, *suyuq*, *dovga* [6; 20; 25], *eceb-sendel*, and numerous salads are prepared from parsley, spinach, beet leaves, mint, eggplants, tomatoes, and other vegetables and herbs.

In Ganjabasar, *kətə* is commonly prepared with herbs, minced meat, or pumpkin. In some cases, crumbled *motal* cheese or *shor* is added to herb-filled *kete*. It is traditionally served with butter, while in Hajikend it may also be accompanied by cream.

Dishes made from grains and legumes also hold an important place in the local diet. These include porridge, pilaf, roasted grains (*qovurğa*), *hədik*, bean *çığırtma*, boiled chickpeas, fresh corn, and popped corn known as “corn rooster.”

Ganja cuisine includes numerous varieties of pilaf, such as *Sheshtarangi pilaf*, *pomegranate pilaf*, *cumin pilaf* [1; 14; 19], *saffron pilaf*, *dill-and-legume pilaf*, *herb pilaf* (*sabzi pilaf*), *pilaf with roasted noodles and beans*, *milk pilaf*, and *shila pilaf*.

Confectionery, pastries, and halva occupy a special place in the culinary traditions of Ganjabasar. In the twelfth century, Nizami Ganjavi wrote about the abundance and diversity of halva:

*“There are halvās, names unknown to sight,
yet pistachio and almond overwhelm the delight”* [8, p. 156].

This richness was closely connected with the ancient production of sugar in Azerbaijan. Sugar was obtained from sugar cane, which Nizami referred to as *ney şəkər* (“reed sugar”) [14, p. 43]. The sixteenth-century Azerbaijani physician Mir Muhammad Husayni Momin also mentions sugar cane under the name *neysheker* in the first volume of *Tohfeyi-Hekim Momin* [16, p. 64]. By order of Catherine the Great, Potemkin imported sugar cane from Azerbaijan to Russia. Sugar produced from cane was known as *takhta gand* (loaf sugar). Another type of sugar was obtained from sugar beet. Nizami Ganjavi referred to both types of sugar as early as the twelfth century [14, p. 43]. Although Azerbaijanis often consumed sugar in an unrefined form, sugar refining had already been practiced in Azerbaijan since the tenth century. In addition, crystallized fruit sugar known as *nabat* was produced. References to *nabat* appear frequently in the works of Nizami Ganjavi [13, p. 84; 14, pp. 86, 213]. The widespread availability of honey and concentrated fruit syrups-*bahmaz* and *doshab*, produced by boiling fruit juices to a thick consistency-also contributed greatly to the diversity of the dessert table.

Traditional sweets and confectionery products include *pakhlava* [19, p. 244; 1, p. 390; 11, p. 259], *shekerbura* [11, p. 269; 23], Turkish delight (*rahat-lokum*), *sucuq*, *guymag*, *gatlama*, *yukha halva*, and many others. The abundance of honey, sugar, molasses, and fruit enabled the preparation of remarkable fruit preserves, sweet pastes, compotes, jams, rose-petal preserves (*gulgand*), and candied fruits made from cornelian cherries, quinces, sour cherries, figs, walnuts, and rose petals.

One of the forgotten sweet dishes that has nevertheless survived in Ganja cuisine is *Rahtarbeyish* [4]. In the historical sources examined by the authors, however, this dessert appears under the name *Rahtarbehisht*. The earliest reference was found in Abu Bushaq's fifteenth-century work *Kanzul-Ishtaha* [2]. The pronunciation *Rahtarbeyish* is believed to be a local dialectal variation of the original name.

In the fifteenth century, a dessert called *Yah der Bihisht* is mentioned in Atimah's *Kanz al-Ishtaha*. The authors suggest that the name was later altered to *Rahtarbehisht* and that the dish was essentially a type of milk pudding (*firni*). In the eighteenth century, Ahmed Cavid, in his Turkish translation *Tərcüme-i Kenzü'l-İştihā*, (Translation of the Treasure of Appetite) explained the preparation of this dessert:

“They call it Yah der Bihisht Karhalvası. To prepare it, thirty dirhams of rice flour are lightly roasted and placed in a pot. Seventy-five dirhams of sugar are dissolved in a small amount of water, then mixed with six hundred miskals of water and cooked over low heat until it reaches the consistency of a jelly. It is easy to digest and highly nutritious.” [2, p. 66]

Although this dessert is rarely encountered today, it has not disappeared completely and is still served at certain gatherings and celebrations in Ganja. By restoring and studying such dishes, it becomes possible to preserve and continue the culinary heritage of Azerbaijani table culture.

Preserved vegetables (*tutmalar*), pickled products prepared with vinegar (*turshular*), and salted vegetables (*shorabalar*) are also widely used in Ganja and the surrounding regions.

Therapeutic and dietary cuisine occupies a special place in Ganja. Dishes such as *umach*, *spoon khangal*, and *chicken broth* are traditionally used for treating colds, fever, influenza, and similar illnesses. *Khash* and *bash-ayaq* (head-and-trotter soup) are consumed during recovery from bone and muscle injuries and are also believed to increase physical

strength. Guymag is commonly prepared for women after childbirth and traditionally served to a bride on the morning after her wedding night. Bulama and horra are used to alleviate sore throats and inflammation of the mouth and throat. These and many other dishes have long been employed in folk medicine.

A separate category of cuisine consists of ritual, ceremonial, and festive foods. Dishes made from sprouted wheat (samani) are prepared exclusively for the Novruz holiday. Govut is associated with the Khidir Nabi celebration, while hedik and govurga are prepared when a child starts teething or, symbolically, when exceptionally old people “change” their teeth. Chillə watermelon is traditionally served during Little Chille, a women's festival observed from February 1 to February 21 according to the modern calendar.

A wide variety of beverages also forms an integral part of Ganja cuisine. Distillates produced from mulberries, cornelian cherries, and other plants, known as araq, were used primarily for medicinal purposes. The word araq literally means “white drink” (ağ meaning “white” and “ar” meaning “drink”; similarly, the element “ir” in the word kefir also denotes a drink). The term may additionally imply something purified or refined. Through distillation, people also produced non-alcoholic medicinal distillates from mint, fumitory, mixed herbs (chal araq), and rosewater. The production of alcohol by distillation is believed to have first appeared in Azerbaijan during the seventh and eighth centuries [7].

The discovery of grape seeds more than 8,000 years old at the Goytepe archaeological site in Tovuz demonstrates the ancient history of viticulture and winemaking in the region. As in other Turkic culinary traditions, Ganja cuisine includes numerous beverages prepared from milk and dairy products, such as ayran, atlama, and bulama.

Fruit juices, plant extracts, sugar, and various ingredients are used to prepare a broad range of sherbets. Beverages such as ovshala, gendab, medlar juice, sahlab (orchis root or salep), basil sherbet, lemon sherbet, rose sherbet, and saffron sherbet are widespread in Ganja. These drinks not only embellish the table but are also valued for their medicinal properties.

Tea occupies a special place in Azerbaijani cuisine. Coffee and cocoa are consumed far less frequently than tea. In the mornings, tables are traditionally served with warm boiled milk and dairy-based beverages. Among the drinks valued for quenching thirst and benefiting the body are those prepared from bahmaz (doshab), a concentrated syrup obtained by boiling the juices of mulberries, watermelons, sugar cane, sugar beets, grapes, wild dates, and other fruits until they reach a honey-like consistency.

To facilitate the digestion of rich and fatty foods, a beverage known as iskanjabi is often served. It is prepared from a mixture of honey and vinegar, although sugar may sometimes replace honey. In some sources, this drink is referred to as sirkəbal (“vinegar honey”). Ibn Sina (Avicenna) also mentions this beverage in his writings [21, pp. 287, 301].

One of the ingredients most frequently used in Ganja cuisine and recommended by Ibn Sina is rosewater (güləb) [21, p. 181].

Nevertheless, the finest drink is still considered to be the icy cold water of mountain springs.

Light everyday foods and snacks occupy a special place in Ganja cuisine. The term gelyanaltı (literally “something eaten with a water pipe”) refers to light refreshments served between meals. These include yaxma—open-faced sandwiches made by spreading various ingredients on bread—and durmek, wraps prepared by enclosing fillings in lavash or yukha bread. Sometimes tandir bread or xamralı bread is split open and filled, creating a pocket sandwich known as a cibli dürmək. Such wraps may be served either hot or cold.

Among the appetizers served at the beginning of a meal, salads (meze) occupy a distinctive place. However, mixed salads are relatively uncommon in Azerbaijani cuisine.

Vegetables and herbs are generally presented whole and consumed together with the main course rather than separately as appetizers. For example, kebabs are traditionally accompanied by fresh herbs and vegetables. This practice is connected with the exceptional quality and flavor of local produce. Tomatoes, cucumbers, cornelian cherries, sour cherries, and many other fruits and vegetables possess sufficiently rich natural flavors and therefore require neither mixing nor additional seasoning.

The same principle applies to meat. High-quality meat is often described as *chichek kimi et* (“meat like a flower”), meaning that it is so fresh and flavorful that nothing more than salt and pepper is needed. This appreciation extends to fruits, vegetables, and melons as well. The seventeenth-century traveler Adam Olearius observed that melons in Azerbaijan were so naturally sweet that there was no need to sprinkle them with sugar [23].

At the end of a meal, *cherez*—a selection of fresh fruits, dried fruits, nuts, and sweets—is traditionally served.

One of the indicators of the richness and sophistication of a cuisine is the variety of fruit pulp and sauces it employs. The famous seventeenth-century Ottoman traveler Evliya Chelebi wrote that twelve types of sauces and seasonings were known in Azerbaijan [24]. The most common condiments are yogurt with garlic and vinegar with garlic. Sauces are typically prepared by reducing fruit or vegetable juices to the consistency of honey or sour cream. Fruit leathers (*pastil*, *lavashana*, dried fruit sheets, and sour fruit preserves) and fruit purées are also used in the preparation of sauces and are served with a variety of dishes. Fish is commonly accompanied by *narsharab*—a thick sauce made from pomegranate juice—or by sauces prepared on the basis of *narsharab*. Other widely used sauces include those made from cornelian cherries, quinces, blackthorn berries, plums, and cherry plums.

Alongside meals, black pepper, sumach, sea salt, and rock salt (mined salt) are commonly placed on the table.

The composition of Ganja meals and menus varies according to the season, weather conditions, age of the diners, lifestyle, and local customs.

According to traditional Azerbaijani table etiquette, food is eaten by hand. Thin breads such as *yukha*, *shatir*, and *lavash* are folded and used like spoons to scoop up the liquid portions of dishes. The solid components are wrapped in these breads and then eaten.

The Azerbaijani word *gonagperverlik* (“hospitality”) carries a broader meaning than similar terms in many other languages. For example, the German word *Gastschaft* implies friendship with a guest, while the Russian word *гостеприимство* means receiving a guest. The Azerbaijani concept encompasses welcoming, befriending, honoring, caring for, entertaining, presenting gifts to, and elevating the status of the guest. It should be noted that one of the most significant contemporary ethnographic studies devoted specifically to Ganja cuisine is the collection of materials entitled “Ganja Cuisine”, compiled by Matanat Ikram gizi Aliyeva, a researcher at the Ganja Branch of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences.

Conclusion

Ganja cuisine represents one of the oldest and richest regional culinary traditions of Azerbaijan. Formed through centuries of interaction between palace, military, spiritual, commercial, and folk culinary practices, it preserves traces of ancient agricultural traditions, livestock breeding, bread-making, dairy production, confectionery arts, ritual foods, medicinal dishes, and sophisticated table customs. Historical literary sources, archaeological discoveries, ethnographic records, and modern culinary research collectively demonstrate that Ganja has long been one of the principal centers of Azerbaijani gastronomic culture. The preservation, study, and promotion of this culinary heritage contribute not only to

safeguarding national identity but also to introducing the rich traditions of Azerbaijani cuisine to the wider world [1; 2; 4; 6; 7; 8; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20–28].

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Айнура АМИРАСЛАНОВА

ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ИСТОРИИ И ЭТНОГРАФИЧЕСКИХ ОСОБЕННОСТЕЙ ГЯНДЖИНСКОЙ КУХНИ НА ОСНОВЕ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЙ НИЗАМИ ГЯНДЖЕВИ РЕЗЮМЕ

Ключевые слова: Низами Гянджеви, Гянджинская кухня, азербайджанская кухня, кулинарное наследие, культура питания, этнография, Гянджабасар, традиционные блюда

В статье на основе произведений Низами Гянджеви, средневековых письменных источников, археологических и этнографических материалов исследованы исторические и этнографические особенности Гянджинской кухни. В результате исследования установлено, что гянджинская кухня является одной из древнейших и наиболее богатых региональных школ азербайджанской кулинарной культуры, а в её формировании важную роль сыграли дворцовая культура, городская жизнь, сельскохозяйственные традиции, религиозно-нравственные ценности и природно-географические факторы. Упоминание в произведениях Низами Гянджеви таких блюд и сладостей, как наровый плов, плов с зирой, довга, пахлава, шекербура, палуде и другие, подтверждает существование высокой кулинарной культуры в Гяндже XII века. В статье системно проанализированы продовольственные ресурсы Гянджабасарского региона, традиции хлебопечения, приготовления плова и кондитерских изделий,

молочные продукты, обрядовые блюда, напитки и культура застолья. Одновременно дана оценка современным исследованиям, работам по восстановлению и популяризации гянджинской кухни. Исследование показывает, что произведения Низами Гянджеви обладают большим научным значением не только как литературное наследие, но и как важный историко-этнографический источник для изучения средневековой культуры питания Азербайджана.

Aynurə ƏMİRASLANOVA

**NİZAMİ GƏNCƏVİNİN ƏSƏRLƏRİ ƏSASINDA GƏNCƏ MƏTBƏXİNİN
TARİXİ VƏ ETNOQRAFİK XÜSUSİYYƏTLƏRİNİN TƏDQIQI
XÜLASƏ**

Açar sözlər: Nizami Gəncəvi, Gəncə mətbəxi, Azərbaycan mətbəxi, kulinariya irsi, qida mədəniyyəti, etnoqrafiya, Gəncəbasar, ənənəvi yeməklər

Məqalədə Nizami Gəncəvinin əsərləri, orta əsr yazılı mənbələri, arxeoloji və etnoqrafik materiallar əsasında Gəncə mətbəxinin tarixi və etnoqrafik xüsusiyyətləri araşdırılmışdır. Tədqiqat nəticəsində müəyyən edilmişdir ki, Gəncə mətbəxi Azərbaycan kulinariya mədəniyyətinin ən qədim və zəngin regional məktəblərindən biri olub, onun formalaşmasında saray mədəniyyəti, şəhər həyatı, kənd təsərrüfatı ənənələri, dini-mənəvi dəyərlər və təbii-coğrafi amillər mühüm rol oynamışdır. Nizami Gəncəvinin əsərlərində narplov, zirə plov, dovğa, paxlava, şəkərbura, paludə və digər yemək və şirniyyatların adlarının çəkilməsi XII əsr Gəncəsində yüksək kulinariya mədəniyyətinin mövcudluğunu təsdiq edir. Məqalədə Gəncəbasar bölgəsinin ərzaq ehtiyatları, çörəkçilik, plovçuluq, şirniyyatçılıq, süd məhsulları, mərasim yeməkləri, içkilər və süfrə ənənələri sistemli şəkildə təhlil edilmişdir. Eyni zamanda Gəncə mətbəxinin müasir dövrdə öyrənilməsi, bərpası və təbliği istiqamətində görülən işlər qiymətləndirilmişdir. Araşdırma göstərir ki, Nizami Gəncəvinin əsərləri yalnız ədəbi deyil, həm də Azərbaycanın orta əsr qida mədəniyyətinin öyrənilməsi üçün mühüm tarixi-etnoqrafik mənbə kimi böyük elmi əhəmiyyətə malikdir.

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