

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE BANAT GASTRONOMY

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**Abstract:** Specific features of people's diets are evident in their gastronomic preferences, with some elements also found in their daily eating habits. Thus, what is commonly referred to as a people's tradition refers more to particular specific dietary features. History has made the Banat region a patchwork of different cultures, given the successive occupations of the Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires. The richness of the natural and cultural heritage is given both by the uniqueness of the fauna and flora and by the ethnography and folklore preserved unaltered in this region. The traditional cuisine of this region is fascinating in its richness and variety, an effect of the influence of the nationalities living in this multi-ethnic area. The gastronomy is very diversified and representative of this Euroregion thanks to the mix of different traditional cuisines specific to the ethnic groups that have lived together for hundreds of years in this region.

**Key words:** gastronomy, Banat, traditional dishes, culinary influences

### INTRODUCTION

Romanian cuisine has been influenced over the centuries by a number of factors, such as: economic conditions, geographical and climatic conditions, the degree of civilization, the stage of development of agriculture and, last but not least, people's habits, tastes and preferences [11].

Over the centuries, Romanian cuisine, in addition to the traditions inherited from the ancestors, has enriched its assortment of dishes with the recipes of other peoples. Romanian cuisine has historically been influenced by neighboring cuisines, especially Hungarian in Transylvania, Turkish, Bulgarian and Greek in Wallachia and Dobrogea, and Russian and Ukrainian in Moldova. After the mid-19th century, Romanian cooks also borrowed elements from Western European cuisines, especially French. Romanian cuisine thus boasts a wide range of meat and dairy products, with specific tastes, flavors and preparation techniques. [7,11].

Romania has been the target of various invading peoples, which has left its visible mark on the way Romanian gastronomy has evolved. The 3rd-12th centuries A.D. brought to the Romanians' diet vegetable borses with meat, typical of the Slavs from the south of the Danube, and the two-toothed fork, of the Venetian merchants and used in the homes of the native masters. [11,12].

Cheese has been part of Romanian cuisine since ancient times, the word itself being theorized to come from the Dacian language. The traditional Dacian cuisine included vegetables (lentils, peas, spinach, garlic) and fruits with high nutritional values (grapes, apples, raspberries), as well as meat from sheep, goats, cows, pigs, rabbits or poultry.[10,12]

Corn and potatoes became staples of Romanian cuisine after their introduction to Europe. Maize, in particular, helped improve the health and nutrition of Romanians in the 16th and 17th centuries. Polenta, cooked with salt and sometimes with the addition of

wehy, butter or cheese, was widely used in the diets of peasant farmers and livestock breeders, replacing bread. [10,12]

Romanian cuisine is nowadays appreciated as one of the richest cuisines, both for the variety of dishes and especially for their refined and pleasant taste. There are differences from one part of the country to another. [7]

Banat is the historical region in western Romania, between the Danube, Tisa, Mures and Carpathian Mountains, today divided between Romania, Serbia (Serbian Banat) and a very small part of Hungary. The Romanian part of the old Banat today covers the territory of five counties: it comprises Timis and Caras-Severin counties in their entirety, includes the territory south of Mures in Arad county, the Orsova area in Mehedinti county and some communes in Hunedoara county. [9,13,14]



**Figure 1. Banat map**

Source: <https://romaniabreakingnews.ro/istoria-uitata-dezmembrarea-banatului-si-republica-banat-din-1918/>

Banat no longer exists as a distinct political entity since 1919, but it continues to be considered a functional historical and cultural region of modern Romania. Its economic, cultural and spiritual center is in Timisoara, joined by Resita, Lugoj, Caransebes or Oravita, all cities that have played a prominent role in the region's history. [1,3,5]

The history of the Banat region is complex and fascinating, as it has been marked by a series of conquests and cultural exchanges over the centuries. In medieval times, Banat was an important territory of the Kingdom of Hungary, before being conquered by the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century. Under Ottoman domination, Banat became an autonomous Ottoman province. This period brought Ottoman cultural and culinary influences to the region and had a significant impact on its gastronomic traditions.[2,14,15]

With the end of the Ottoman domination in the 18th century, Banat was incorporated into the Habsburg Empire. This period marked a new stage in the history of the region, with the strong impact of German influence. German communities migrated to Banat and brought their own culinary traditions, adding a new dimension to the region's gastronomic landscape. [1,5,15]

Banat cuisine is the result of an impressive cultural diversity. The Romanian, Serbian, Hungarian and German peoples brought their own traditions and influences to the region. Each ethnic group has specific dishes, which contribute to the richness and variety of Banat cuisine. For example, the Serbian community in Banat is known for traditional dishes such as "*cevapcici*" and "*pljeskavica*", which are delicious beef and pork meatballs. The German community brought the famous "*schnitzel*", which is a slice of breaded meat, and "*kartoffelsalat*", a delicious potato salad. [4,7,9]

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, the authors consulted a rich bibliography, namely scientific papers, various publications, monographs. The methodology of the article combines standard research techniques and methods: documentation, analysis and synthesis and formulation of conclusions.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

Today, the history and diverse cultural influences of the Banat region are reflected in a variety of traditional dishes. These dishes are preserved and handed down from generation to generation, representing a gastronomic treasure and a symbol of Banat's cultural identity. [6,8,11]

The dishes are mostly made with pork and vegetables fried and braised in lard (or oil). The sauces specific to the cuisine of Banat are sweet. They are traditionally called 'paradaisa' sauces (regionalism for tomato) and are sweetened with honey or sugar. The region's predominant spices are pepper, sweet paprika, cumin and thyme. [4,6,7]

A traditional Banat dish is "*Păturata pe crumpi*", a mixture of a potato dish and a rather fussy dough to make (figure 2). The filling for the dough is fresh cow's cheese mixed with salted cheese, eggs and dill to taste. It is rolled into a snail or spiral shape and cooked with the smoked and potatoes, bay leaves and spices. At the origin of this dish is a Swabian recipe - dumplings cooked straight into the food - Strudlknedle. [6,7,16]



**Figure 2. "Păturata pe crumpi"**

Source: <https://www.lauralaurentiu.ro/retete-culinare/cuina-banateana/paturata-pe-crumpi.html>

"*Iofca*" is a traditional noodle dish made with cheese, walnut, milk, poppy or cabbage. [6,17]

There is a dish in Banat called "*Varga Beleş*", which is a homemade noodle pudding with cottage cheese and raisins, wrapped in a pie sheet and baked (in the oven) figure 3). [6,17,18]



**Figure 3. "Varga Beleş"**

Source: <https://www.bucataras.ro/galerie/vargabeles-budinca-cu-paste-branza-stafide-151687-30779>

**"Laște"**. It's a pasta dish, which is paired with a 'porridge' made from ripe pumpkin seed flour, flavoured with a little cinnamon and vanilla essence. This dish can be found pretty much all over the Banat Plain and is mostly made in autumn. [6,19]

Banat's typical **"sarmale"** are larger than the Moldovan ones, well stuffed, they are not served with cream and polenta, and the meat is traditionally chopped with a cleaver.[7,17]

**Dumplings on cabbage ("Bufle")**. They are dumplings rolled out of bread dough (figure 4). Basically, they make some sticks from the bread dough, roll them, give them the shape of the rolls and bake them on the steam from the braised cabbage with **"jumere"** (melted bacon) and sausages. [4, 6]

**Milk soup with "tarhana"** (Peiczl or Ribedl Supn). This dish can be found in the Slovak community and consists of a thick dough ground on a grater (tarhana) and boiled in milk and water in equal quantities. Salt or sugar is added to this soup to taste. [6,17]

**Onions stuffed like in Caransebes** are specific to Banat. Cleaned and boiled onions are stuffed with a composition of walnuts, bread soaked in milk, olives, salt, pepper, onion cores and parsley, and then covered with a tomato sauce with flour and cream. [6, 7, 20].

**Zucchini or kohlrabies custard ("Țușpais")**. Basically, it is a very quick and easy dish, which can be made both with cream and milk and without (figure 5). In the lenten version, grate the vegetable and make a paste of flour with oil, then add water, and finally, garlic and the chopped zucchini or kohlrabies. In the other version, water is replaced with milk and cream is added for creaminess. [6,17]



**Figure 4. Dumplings on cabbage**  
Source: <https://www.lauralaurentiu.ro/retete-culinare/retete-mancare/galuste-pe-varza-kraut-und-knedl.html>



**Figure 5. Zucchini or kohlrabies custard**  
Source: <https://www.lauralaurentiu.ro/retete-culinare/retete-de-garnitura/mancare-de-dovlecei-tuspais-ciuspays-cu-smantana-si-marar.html>

**"Tolvăgene" soup**. It is a soup of pasta stuffed with cheese, with vegetables, soured with sauerkraut juice and flavored with lovage or tarragon. This dish can be found in the Cebza area. [4,6]

**The Banatian vegetable soup** is a soup with beets, potatoes, cauliflower, cabbage and leek, boiled in milk and served with greens. [7,11]

**Poultry noodle soup** is a soup of poultry raised by Banatians in their own backyard, onion, carrots, parsley root, parsnip, celery, greens, salt, pepper and homemade noodles. [7,117]

**"Șmoara"**. It is a thicker pancake. It is made in a much thicker layer, baked on both sides at low heat and for a longer time, after which it is broken and fried again in the pan

(figure 6). It is served in different ways, depending on the area, with fresh cream taken from milk, with jam, with powdered sugar and cinnamon or cocoa. [4,6]



**Figure 6. "Șmoara"**

Source: <https://www.lauralaurentiu.ro/retete-culinare/deserturi-dulciuri-de-casa/smora-coapta-sau-kaiserschmarrn-reteta-din-banat.html>

**"Șoleț"**. It is basically a bean meal containing broth and vegetables. It is prepared especially during the winter, cold periods, until the Easter Lent. During Lent it is made simple, and then with smoked meat or fresh meat directly from the brine. It is served with pickles. [4, 6].

**"Ștangle" with walnut.** It is a dough composed of ground walnut, egg yolk, powdered sugar and cinnamon which is optional. Make a dough, knead it well and refrigerate, then roll out a sheet about 4-5 mm thick, spread it with meringue and bake in the oven until it dries. [4]

**Slovak doughnuts.** These are similar to traditional doughnuts, but with a slightly thicker dough. They are steamed and then rolled in honey and walnut or honey and poppy or directly coated with jam. [4]

**"Suveacă" with poppy or walnut.** It is a roll made from leavened dough, filled with walnut or poppy. It is rolled out into a thin sheet and topped with a poppy filling flavored with vanilla or lemon peel. If made with walnuts, add cinnamon. Shape by rolling and bake. [6, 7]

**Crempita** (Cremeschnitten) is a dessert with Swabian origins, consisting of puff pastry dough and boiled cream made of eggs, sugar, flour, butter, milk and vanilla (figure 7). [6, 21]



**Figure 7. Crempita**

Source: <https://www.lauralaurentiu.ro/reteta/cremsnit-cremes-crempita>

**Pancakes from Banat.** Banat pancakes are also known as "*Ana Lugojana pancakes*" (figure 8). The rolled pancakes are filled with cottage cheese, cream and raisins, put in a tray, topped with vanilla sauce and placed in the oven. In the meantime, prepare a

meringue from egg albumen, which will be poured over the pancakes when they are almost ready and left to brown. [7, 11, 22]

**"Croafne"** in Banat are doughnuts, which are large and fluffy and are traditional at Christmas time. In Maramureş and Ardeal the same doughnuts, but prepared differently, are called **"pancove"**. In Banat they are made from a dough containing egg yolks, lemon zest, sifted flour and melted butter. This dough is left to rise in an oiled pot until it has doubled in volume, and then spread out on a table to shape the gogos. They are fried in oil and served with toasted sugar or jam. [6, 17]



**Figure 8. Pancakes from Banat**

Source: <https://www.lauralaurentiu.ro/retete-culinare/deserturi-dulciuri-de-casa/clatite-banatene-sau-ca-lana-lugojana.html>

**"Turtele fripce"** (fried pies) are made from hemp seeds, crushed in a wooden pot by an elderly woman. The women of Banat are famous for the homemade cakes they used to prepare both during the week and for holidays, including **"colăcei"**, **"turtele fripce"**, **"păturata"** and **"suveacă"**. During Lent, as a dessert in Banat is bread with marmalade, bread soaked in water with sugar (**"țucor"**), dried fruit compote (**"poame"**) with bread or **"chisăliță"** (a plum jam boiled with a little sugar, with a thin consistency). [6,7]

**Dumplings ("gomboti") with plums**, a dessert borrowed from the Hungarian neighbors and reinvented, is among the most beloved desserts of the people of Banat and has as ingredients potatoes, flour, eggs, oil, salt, for filling plums, sugar and cinnamon, and is covered on top with breadcrumbs. [7,11,23]

**"Sarmale" in horseradish leaves**. This dish is a variant of the typical Banat mountain dish, where cabbage leaves are replaced by horseradish leaves. **Soup of "bureți"** is a soup made from forest mushrooms, often gathered from mountain areas, onions, carrots, parsley, sour cream, eggs, salt, pepper. [8,17]

The following desserts are also specific to the mountain Banat: **boiled "papanashi"**, made from a dough of flour and cottage cheese and served with cream and jam, respectively, **"colărezi"** i.e. traditional homemade pasta, served with cottage cheese and cream. [14,17]

**Chicken "papricaș" with dumplings**. It is a traditional Hungarian dish, adopted in the Lowland Banat, consisting of chicken cooked with paprika, onions, peppers, and sour cream, served with dumplings (nokedli). [11,17]

**"Gulaș"**. It is a hearty and spicy dish, originally from Hungary but very popular in Banat, made with beef, potatoes and vegetables. [11]

## CONCLUSIONS

The history and various cultural influences of the Banat region are reflected in a variety of traditional dishes. These dishes are preserved and handed down from generation to generation, representing a gastronomic treasure and a symbol of Banat's cultural identity. It is important to promote and preserve these culinary traditions, as they represent

a valuable part of the region's cultural heritage and contribute to its cultural diversity and richness.

Food and culinary traditions are an essential part of a region's cultural heritage. They are a way of conveying the history and identity of a community. In the context of globalization and social change, the preservation and promotion of Banat's culinary traditions are becoming increasingly important.

In conclusion, the culinary specificity of Banat is characterized by diversity, consistency and the use of fresh ingredients, reflecting the rich cultural and historical heritage of the region. Each meal is a celebration of the local traditions and multicultural influences that have shaped this unique cuisine

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