

**DELIGHTS FROM GRANDMA'S NOTEBOOK: AN INTROSPECTIVE LOOK AT
DESSERTS FROM THE '80s AND '90s**

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***Abstract:** The gastronomic tradition is a profound expression of cultural identity, reflecting the values, history, and lifestyle of a community. Through the preservation and transmission of recipes and culinary techniques across generations, food becomes not only nourishment but also a living archive of shared memory. Culinary art, as a manifestation of creativity and mastery, transforms cooking into a multisensory and aesthetic experience, where ingredients, textures, and flavors interact to tell stories of place and time. Cultural and historical influences have significantly shaped the evolution of cuisine, leading to the emergence of distinctive flavor profiles, regional variations, and innovative methods. Trade, migration, and cross-cultural exchange have enriched local culinary landscapes, blending tradition with novelty. In this context, the grandmother's dessert notebook stands as a tangible testimony of familial and regional heritage. Hand-written and lovingly preserved, it encapsulates the essence of homemade desserts—simple, heartfelt, and rooted in time-honored practices. These recipes continue to inspire modern reinterpretations, merging authenticity with contemporary tastes. The act of revisiting such traditions not only honors the past but also bridges generations, ensuring that the cultural and emotional value of food remains vibrant in today's dynamic culinary world..*

Key words: *gastronomy, culinary traditions, recipes, desserts, grandma's notebook*

INTRODUCTION

The Transylvanian region of Arad–Crișana is notable for its complex ethnic and cultural mix, which has generated, over the centuries, a remarkable cuisine. The ethnic diversity – including Romanian, Hungarian, German (Swabian), Serbian and Jewish communities – has led to the construction of a gastronomic matrix in which the influences are significant. [6, 7, 13] In this sense, traditional local desserts – such as “dobos”, bejgli, “gomboti”, “linzer”, but also puff pastry cakes, sponge cake, horn-shaped cookie or Lenten cakes – reflect a cross-border and multiethnic food culture [9, 13].

Recipe notebooks - handwritten manuscripts, they function simultaneously as a household object, an emotional diary or a culinary archive. In times long forgotten for some, in more or less favorable times, the desserts written down in these notebooks reflected both a fidelity to the family culinary tradition and a high degree of adaptability to the available resources [3, 5]. Whatever the challenging hardships, grandmothers always made magic in the kitchen that surprised us every time. Thus, cocoa was replaced with carob, butter with margarine, and whipped cream with whipped egg whites - without the symbolism or function of the dessert being diminished or underestimated [5].

Many writings and testimonies about the dishes that recommend, tell and characterize the specificities and local customs of each region. With largely Austro-Hungarian influences, with the participation of a mix of flavorful ingredients, the gastronomy of Transylvania is considered one of the greatest achievements of culinary art, being closely tied to cultural identity, to the rhythm of life, and to the values passed down from generation to generation. [7, 15]

However, Transylvanian cuisine is not merely a source of nourishment, but also one of emotional balance and psychological identity. Traditional meals foster a sense of

belonging, offering emotional stability and comfort, especially in the context of a fragmented and hectic modern lifestyle. The smell of a dish 'just like grandma used to make' can trigger deep emotional memories and feelings of safety, activating a form of unconscious emotional therapy [10, 11].

The consumption of traditional dishes thus becomes a way of reconnecting with one's roots, with family, and with childhood — an emotional anchor with profound implications for mental health [11, 12].

Frequently referring to the term tradition as “the set of beliefs, customs, practices and values transmitted orally from generation to generation” [14], it can be connected with the concepts of culinary tradition, the emotional value of food and the need to know and protect our roots, which provide a sense of anchoring and verticality.

In developing this perspective, it is important to also mention the concept of transgenerational heritage - heritage carried by parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and ancestors, we often carry stoically out of a deep sense of family loyalty, sometimes without fully understanding its purpose and even despite the burden it can represent. Everything that is inherited becomes a part of the descendants. All this can be likened to the multitude of objects stored in a traditional dowry box, entrusted to the descendants of ancestors - some precious, some modest; some well-known, others forgotten in the dark corners of time. The way we feed ourselves often follows a recipe already placed in that heritage box. Wisdom lies in the ability to discern, with awareness and responsibility, what is worth keeping and cherishing and what can be set aside - without breaking the connection with the roots [4].

The writer Radu Anton Roman, dedicated to Romanian traditional dishes, emphasizes the liturgical character of festive cakes in the Crișana area, observing that “on the great holidays, not only the table was sweetened, but also the heart” [8]. In the same way, Nistor states that “regional gastronomy is a direct expression of coexistence and common cultural identity, sedimented over time” [6].

On the other hand, according to the Pecica City Monograph, the town has consistently preserved festive and ritualistic culinary traditions, in which sweet dishes have a central place. Culinary practices were transmitted informally, especially through the female line, and recipe books represented not only utilitarian tools, but also symbolic artifacts, illustrating the values of the community: hospitality, modesty, ingenuity. [1]

From an anthropological perspective, the desserts of the analyzed period can be interpreted as forms of expression of collective and family memory. They crystallize not only culinary tastes and techniques, but also social relations, educational models and emotional structures. In this sense, grandmother's recipe becomes a space of cultural resistance, a mechanism for preserving identity through everyday gestures [2].

Moreover, expressions such as “as much as it takes”, “the right fire” or “cooked until it smells all over the house” are indicative of an empirical culinary epistemology, transmitted orally and practically, without standardized tools. These forms of knowledge are today marginalized by the quantitative paradigm, but remain essential for understanding traditional gastronomic phenomena [3].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, the authors consulted a bibliography consisting of various publications, monographs, and an old recipe book. The methodology of the article combines standard research techniques and methods: documentation, analysis and synthesis, and formulation of conclusions.

In the context of cultural globalization and accelerated digitization of everyday practices, handwritten recipe notebooks remain an underexplored but extremely valuable

documentary corpus for understanding regional and family gastronomic heritage. This work aims to analyze, from a cultural-gastronomic perspective, the specific desserts of the 1980-1990 decades, as they were retained and transmitted through family recipes, especially in the Arad-Crisana area. The aim is thus to reconstitute a gustatory universe situated between tradition, adaptation and affective memory. All images are from personal archive. [2].

RESEARCH RESULTS

Grandma Pia's Cookie Notebook (figure 1) a dedicated teacher of her time, is a testament to the devotion to tradition. Each page is a tribute to a culinary heritage that has passed from hand to hand, from heart to heart, from one generation to the next. It is a treasure that preserves not only the recipes, but also the values that guided her grandmother: respect for family customs, for the way in which each cake can become a tangible link between past and present.

The respect for that old but charming notebook is the respect for a sacred heritage, preserved with care and devotion. With every page, the notebook reflects a cult of culinary craftsmanship, of the details that make the difference between a good recipe and a memorable cake.



Figure 1. Grandma Pia's Cookie Notebook

Pia's biscuits. It's a homemade cake with soft dough made with flour, eggs beaten with sugar, vanilla and lemon zest, then kneaded with butter or lard, plus cream for smoothness. Cut out little figurines from the dough, bake and stick them two by two with margarine. Decorate with beaten egg white, sugar, nuts or chocolate icing. Fragrant, fragrant and slightly crunchy, they are ideal for festive platters or everyday sweets (figure 2).



Figure 2. Pia's biscuits

Lemon cake. It is a traditional cake with tender sheets, baked individually, then glued with apricot jam and filled with a fine meringue and butter cream, flavored with lemon. The dough is made from flour, fat, sugar, egg yolks and milk, and the cream combines steamed egg whites with sugar and foamy rubbed butter. It is dusted with sugar or glazed with cocoa and left to cool to soften. (figure 3).



Figure 3. Lemon cake

Broth cake. This simple cake is based on a dough made from whole eggs beaten well with sugar, then mixed with broth, milk, oil, yeast and a pinch of salt. Flour is gradually added until a soft, easily pourable dough is formed. The mixture is baked in a baking pan until airy and nicely browned, resulting in a unique, slightly sweet dessert with a special color thanks to the broth.

“Lady's whim” cake. This cake is based on a soft dough made from flour, butter and margarine (or lard combined with margarine), powdered sugar, egg yolk and lemon juice. The dough is then rolled out on a rectangular baking tray, generously smeared with apricot jam and topped with a light cream made from egg whites whipped with sugar and lemon zest, then mixed with ground walnuts and yolks. Bake over moderate heat until the meringue is light golden and firm, resulting in a balanced dessert with contrasting textures and rich flavors.

White “cremes”. It is a traditional cake with tender sheets, made from a dough kneaded from flour, lard, eggs, sugar and milk or cream, for extra tenderness. The custard is prepared from boiled milk with flour, to which, after cooling, foamy butter rubbed with sugar and vanilla sugar is added. The sheets are filled one at a time, and the cake is left in the cold until the next day, when it becomes tender and can be cut into equal portions. (figure 4).



Figure 4. White “cremes”

Wonderful cake. The cake is prepared from a dough made from flour rubbed with lard, whole eggs, to which honey melted with sugar is added, for a sweet and aromatic taste. The kneaded dough is divided into 5 equal parts, each part being stretched into thin sheets and baked on the back of the pan. The cream is a fine combination of sour cream, ground nuts, vanilla sugar and lemon zest, which is enriched with sour cherry jam. (figure 5)

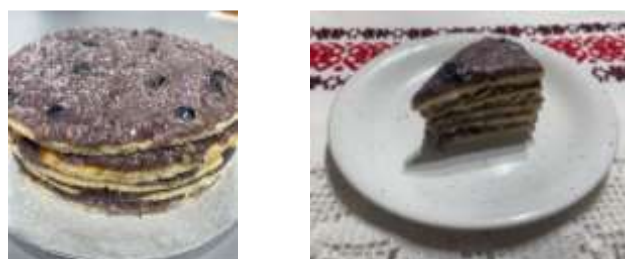


Figure 5. Wonderful cake

Maria cake. For this cake, egg yolks are mixed with fat, powdered sugar and milk, and then flour and baking powder are added. The resulting dough is divided into two parts, and cocoa is added to one of them. Both sheets are baked together, on the back of the tray, until golden. After the sheets have cooled, they are covered with a mixture of ground nuts, jam and sugar. On top of this layer, a steamed egg white is added with sugar, and finally, a milk chocolate glaze is added, which is boiled over low heat. After the glaze cools, it is spread evenly on the beaten egg white, creating a glossy layer. (figure 6)



Figure 6. Maria cake

“Televizor” (TV) cake. This cake with alternating layers combines tender dough with an aerated sponge cake top and a rich cream with walnuts and rum flavor. The dough is prepared from flour, lard, sugar, whole egg, cocoa, ammonia dissolved in milk, kneaded until it becomes homogeneous. It is divided into two equal parts, and the sheets are baked separately, on the back of the tray. In the same tray, a sponge cake top made of 4–5 eggs is also baked, which will complete the texture of the cake.

The cream is prepared from boiled milk with semolina and vanilla, cooled and mixed with foamy butter rubbed with powdered sugar. Finally, ground walnuts and a small glass of rum are incorporated, which adds a special fragrance. The assembly is done by smearing the sheets with apricot marmalade, followed by layers of cream, and finally the sponge cake top is added and everything is powdered with sugar. After a few hours, the cake becomes tender and can be cut into uniform portions.

CONCLUSIONS

The studied notebook is not just a simple notebook, it is considered a true altar of tastes, a place where traditions are not only noted, but also live, to be passed on. Each recipe carries with it not only the ingredients, but also the stories, laughter and memories of a family that are found in each dessert.

Thus, "that notebook" of grandma's is more than just a culinary guide - it is a true link in a priceless tradition, in which each cake is a symbol of the bond between generations, an act of love and respect for the past.

These references from the grandmother's notebook constitute a legacy that goes beyond the simple notion of cooking, being an invitation to understand and respect the connections between people, time, and tradition.

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