

DUCHOŇOVÁ, Diana – LENGYELOVÁ, Tünde. *HRADNÉ KUCHYNE A ŠLACHTICKÉ STRAVOVANIE V RANOM NOVOVEKU. Radosti slávností, strasti každodennosti (CASTLE KITCHENS AND THE EATING HABITS OF ARISTOCRATS IN EARLY MODERN TIMES. The Joy of Festivals, The Sorrows of Everyday Life)*. Editors: Peter Kónya, Viliam Čičaj. Bratislava : Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in the publisher VEDA, 2016. 320 p. ISBN 978-80-224-1538-5

The two authors from the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences have presented the lay and expert public with a real breakthrough. It is the first comprehensive work in Slovak historiography devoted to the theme of food in the aristocratic environment. The authors have researched court culture for a long time and obtained valuable material from long-term archive research and study of expert literature, which is mostly in Hungarian where the Kingdom of Hungary is concerned. They have recast it into excellent scientific monographs, fully able to compete with the books produced by renowned European publishers. The book is a deeply penetrating structuralist sounding into the “everyday” themes of food, dining, etiquette, economic organization and the hierarchy of servants in Early Modern times with regard to the court and aristocratic environment. The authors understood this theme exhaustively and on many levels.

The monograph is divided into four main chapters, each with various sub-chapters. In the first chapter under the title: *The Kitchen*, the authors broadly approach the importance and role of royal and aristocratic courts, which were spreaders of new cultural impulses. Naturally, aristocratic courts could not compete with royal courts, but by the end of the 16th and during the first half of the 17th centuries, aristocratic courts experienced great changes. They became centres for the culture of Hungary on the boundary between Eastern and Western Europe. Precisely food, the ways it was prepared and consumed – everything connected with it, was an integral part of the specific culture of the Kingdom of Hungary. Therefore, the chapter naturally begins with a description of the development of the royal court of Hungary after the Battle of Mohács, with the origin of three new court centres at Vienna, Bratislava and Alba Iulia, and an account of the basic features of an aristocratic residence. It further maps the development of the most important space connected with the preparation of food – the kitchen. In this case it is naturally about the late medieval castle kitchen. This was inevitably connected with a water supply in the form of a well, cistern or system for catching rain water. Castle kitchens were originally wooden and situated close to the banqueting halls. There was also an effort to build them so that fires would not threaten other buildings. In the case of late medieval royal residences, it is notable that there were two specialized kitchens: a larger one for the personnel, and a smaller one for the needs of the monarch. The residential castle of an early modern aristocrat also had two kitchens, the so-called big kitchen for the lord, his family and household, and the little kitchen for the *fracimer* – the women’s part of the court, small children and their wet nurses. The authors also direct attention to the equipment of kitchens with detailed descriptions of the various types of vessel and tool. The reader is surprised by the level of technical maturity of some of the aristocratic kitchens, documented, for example, by a mechanical spit for cooking meat working according to the principle of a clock. It is also notable that the kitchen was very carefully guarded. This is documented in contemporary court regulations. It was motivated by an effort to ensure the quality of production, protect food from poison and especially to prevent theft. Activities closely connected to those of the kitchen, for example, baking of bread, production of vinegar and beer, as well as the cellars or storerooms, are not neglected. Estates and castle gardens were undoubtedly important sources of supplies for aristocratic kitchens. In this period it was already usual to divide them according to the plants cultivated into vegetables, herbs for medicine

and cooking, flowers, fruit and vines. Cultivation of exotic fruit such as citrus and pomegranate, and improvement or grafting of fruit trees became popular among the elites of Hungary in the 16th and 17th centuries. The practice of the so-called courtesy gift, common among aristocrats, is also connected. It often involved unique fruits, either cultivated or collected in forests. The establishment of luxury, decorative gardens as part of aristocratic residences such as those of the Pálffy and Lipai families in Bratislava, is a separate but closely related theme. A nobleman had to secure an appropriate quantity of food for the personnel of his castles and estates. Around 200–350 people could be found at an aristocratic court, and their hierarchy was considered when providing food. The kitchen was supplied both from the serfs' payments and from the output of the estate. Fish ponds, pastures, mills, vineyards, game reserves, gardens, fields, orchards and so on were the most important. Estates and fishponds had increasing roles and importance from the 16th century. Castle and manor house kitchens were supplied with meat from their own butchers and those at nearby estates.

The second chapter with the title: *The Kitchen Staff* takes the reader into the world of complex social structures typical of the court environment. The starting point is the late medieval organization of the kitchen staff at the royal court of Hungary. Functions and their roles are successively presented: court-master, cup-bearer, steward, stableman, manager, cooks and so on. This account continues into the post-Mohács period with regard to the Habsburg court. The personnel of castles and the organization of aristocratic courts were originally derived from the royal court of Hungary, but changes also came here in Early Modern times, especially in the two important functions of senechal and castelan. The key-bearer, court captain, chamberlain, stableman and the court-master, whose duties included supervising the apprentices, stewards, kitchen staff and kitchen master, can also be mentioned. The kitchen at an aristocratic court had its own apparatus, its own staff responsible for preparing food. The kitchen master from the ranks of the retinue stood at the head of the kitchen. He was responsible for the quality, preparation and serving of the food. He decided the menu, and directed the work of the chief, specialized and assistant cooks and kitchen servants. He also supervised the servants responsible for serving meals: stewards, servers of drinks, carriers of dishes, carvers and so on.

The third chapter with the title *Dining* gives an extraordinarily interesting view of its cultural and social importance. It was one of the criteria of social differentiation and for the aristocrat or monarch, it served as a manifestation of court glamour and wealth. Dining fulfilled various functions in the aristocratic environment. They included social communication: creating, extending and strengthening social contacts; representation: the form of dining, composition of the diners, eating habits, number and content of courses, serving. Dining also pointed to the property, life style and cultural maturity of an aristocrat, increased his social prestige and confirmed his status. This applied especially to wedding and funeral feasts. It was a direct mirror of the hierarchy and discipline of the court society and relations at the court. Dining customs in early modern Hungary also changed in various ways. In contrast to the Middle Ages, monarchs increasingly distanced themselves from their courtiers when dining. From the end of the 17th century, aristocrats at their own courts dined ever more frequently only with their immediate families. The authors describe a multitude of details connected with dining on the basis of the archive materials they have studied. Arrangement of tables with the help of carpets, serving, use of table furniture such as candelabra and saltcellars, the use of cutlery with the introduction of forks at 17th century banquets, and vessels for drinks. Since we lack domestic literature on behaviour and guides to the cultivation of good manners and self-control (N. Elias) from Hungary, the surviving court regulations represent a valuable source of information on table etiquette at aristocratic courts. We learn from them about the exact rules and instructions for dining, the order of seating at individual tables, namely those for the lord, the familiares, women and servants, the number of courses. From the mid 17th century,

the first course was soup and was followed by boiled and roast food, pâté, fruit and dessert. The number of meals offered during the day increased with the new phenomenon of breakfast appearing around 1700. Finally, it is necessary to mention the new drinks that appeared on the table in this period with coffee from the end of the 16th century, chocolate from the first half of the 17th century and tea from the beginning of the 18th century.

The following, fourth chapter: *On plate and in cup*, documents the close connection between culture and food. It presents the changes in the field of food in Hungary connected with Ottoman expansion, and with the spread of humanism and the Renaissance. These developments meant new foods, crops and technologies for preparing food and drink. These changes appeared most rapidly in the urban middle class and aristocratic environments, in connection with the trading journeys of businessmen from the towns, the study visits of noblemen and the presence of foreign armies in the country. To illustrate the eating habits of the period and evaluations of “national cuisines”, the authors have used their usual methods of contemporary texts placed in “us – them” opposition. They present authentic views on cuisine in Hungary through the eyes of outsiders: Poles, Germans and Turks. The views of people from Hungary on foreign food and ways of dining are also presented. The authors point to hospitality and the importance of bread and meat – mostly beef, but also from wild animals, sheep, lambs, fish and crayfish, with freshness not always the primary criterion of quality – and wine or beer in the catering arrangements at aristocratic courts. The reader learns about vegetable supplements, the introduction of potatoes, spread of pasta, use of puree, flavouring, spices, dairy products such as butter or tvaroh and bryndza cheeses, and the consumption of luxury goods such as citrus, olives, capers, artichokes and parmesan at aristocratic courts.

The conclusion of the work is extraordinarily interesting and valuable. It gives examples of various surviving menus from the aristocratic environment for individual days or longer periods, including ordinary, fasting and festive times. An unusual and revealing feature of the conclusion is a collection of authentic Early Modern recipes for food, including dishes with and without meat as well as desserts and drinks, which readers can produce for themselves.

It is also necessary to praise the rich pictorial supplement, which makes the work attractive for the ordinary reader.

Michal Bada