

# THE QUESTION OF PRESERVATION OF NATIONAL TRADITIONS: CULINARY HERITAGE OF LITHUANIAN TATARS

***Galina Miškinienė***

*Research Centre of Written Heritage, Institute of Lithuanian Language,  
Vilnius, Lithuania*

*e-mail: miskinienegalina@gmail.com*

**Abstract:** The history of Lithuanian Tatars settled in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania encompasses more than 620 years. During all these years they were influenced by various political, economic, religious factors. This culturally and ethnically heterogeneous community due to the co-living side by side with Christians has been strongly assimilated and integrated to the local society. Tatars brought unique tradition, where pre-Islamic traditions and Islamic dogmas were tightly bounded. This mentioned synthesis did not stop evolving and changing. Finally, it was supplemented by elements, taken from Belarusians, Poles, Lithuanians and other nations of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, who had become neighbours of Tatars. Combination of several different cultures gave a distinctive shade to the faith, customs, and daily life as well as to the cultural heritage of Lithuanian Tatars. There are little works dedicated to the cultural heritage, especially to the cuisine of Lithuanian Tatars. Sparsely preserved culinary heritage of Lithuanian Tatars and its varieties in the national cuisine of Lithuania is being discussed in this article.

**Keywords:** cuisine, features, heritage, Lithuanian Tatars, traditions

## Introduction

Mostly distant to the West from their Turkic compatriots and living in Eastern Europe, the ethnical group of Lithuanian Tatars<sup>1</sup> celebrated the 620<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the settlement in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 2017. The Tatars arrived from Kipchak steppes and Crimea, bringing particular culture. Influenced by the factors of the West European civilization, this culture changed and acquired new features, but at the same time Lithuanian Tatars managed to preserve partly their identity, and, most importantly – their religion (Islam). The Lithuanian Tatars entering the new Lithuanian-Belarusian-Polish environment gave it some Muslim features. The basis of the newly created tradition was the long experience of Islamic religion and culture. We can learn about this tradition from the written sources, first of all, from the manuscripts, written in Arabic script, but in Arabic, Turkic, Ruthenian, and Polish languages (*kitabs, hamails*)<sup>2</sup>, and we rely on the memory of our ancestors. Features of the cultural heritage of the Lithuanian Tatars should be sought in the original religious architecture, Slavic-speaking Arabic writings, colourful folklore, original traditions and customs, culinary heritage.

In this article, the history of preservation, modification and development of the Tatar cuisine in Lithuania is supposed to be considered.

## To the History of the Issue

The very first mentioning of the Tatars and the culinary heritage of Turks could be found in the literature of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Michalo Lituanus wrote about it in his treatise “On the Customs of Tatars, Lithuanians and Muscovites. Ten Different Fragments of Historical Content” in 1615, so did Piotr Czyżewski in his treatise “Real Alfurkan of Tatars Divided into Forty Parts” in 1617. Although Michalo Lituanus wrote about the customs of the Perekop Tatars, with whom the troops of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania encountered more often, he was well informed that the first ruler of the Crimean, Khanate Haji Khan Giray, was born in Trakai and was enthroned by the Grand Duke Vytautas (Lituanus 1966: 25–26). The basis of the treatise was the observations of the author, who has visited Crimea and has observed character and customs of the Crimean Tatars. There are no doubts to suppose that such customs could largely coincide and were typical to the Tatars of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Going on

a military campaign, Tatars took with them some dried millet grains and grated cheese (Lituanus 1966: 27). According to the observations of the author of the treatise, Tatars abundantly consume milk and the plant cicero (Italian peas), always sober and not wasteful. They eat a lot of meat, but the law prohibits them to drink wine and to eat pork (Lituanus 1966: 30). The observation of the author, describing how the Tatars act at the table, seems very interesting:

*They seek the equality and well as in their clothes, as well as in their lifestyle. They have a breaking and sin of the divine law, which is being punished by hitting with sticks, if anyone, in spite of ancestor's or archaic habits, stands out from the peoples of his nation in clothes, or in a band, or in a hat, or in long hair, as well as who eats his food on his own, not sharing with each attendee, or if the host takes the meal earlier, before it has been put in the middle, cut into pieces and carefully mixed, that each person would get the same size of a piece. During the trip, they not only eat from one plate, but even rush through one another to serve older or weaker human* (Lituanus 1966: 1–32).

About the strict observance of respect for the beloved ones, seniors, neighbours, and guests testifies the following observation of the author:

*None of the Saracens does not dear to eat even a piece, before crushing and mixing it with different food, that everyone gets the equal amount of the food* (Lituanus 1966: 42).

Where grapes grow, Muscovites, Tatars and Turks produce wine, but do not drink it, they just sell it to the Christians and for the money they get, they buy ammunition necessary for conducting warfare (Lituanus 1966: 40). The Perekop Tatars do not overuse seasonings, drink milk and well water (Lituanus 1966: 41). If we carefully follow the observations of Lituanus and compare these with the law, according to which Tatars live, we can see that in everyday life, they (the Tatars) are guided by the prescriptions of Islamic law – the Sharia. Confirmation of this can be found in the texts of manuscripts of Lithuanian Tatars (Miškinienė 2015: 149–160). The most characteristic confirmation is the slaughter of animals of the Lithuanian Tatars, which was carried out in a strictly defined manner. If any deviation from religious precepts during slaughter occurred, believers did not eat such meat.

Piotr Czyżewski in his pasquinade calls the Lithuanian Tatars “cucumber Tatars” and “onion landowners”, as a direct indication of their occupation – growing cucumbers and onions (Czyżewski 2013: 58). Directly taken from the Lithuanian Tatars the word *soğan* (Lithuanian – *svogūnas* (onion)) is found among the small borrowings in the Lithuanian language. Local inhabitants buy cabbages and turnips from Tatars (*ibid.*: 64). Further author states, that “Tatar is not a prince, just eater of goats. Simple peasant was not able to pronounce *koźiniec* (an eater of goats) and that is why he called a Tatar person a prince” (*ibid.*: 64). The fixation of the epithet ‘the eater of goats’ shows that Tatars used a large amount of goat meat.

Some pieces of evidence about the cuisine of Lithuanian Tatars could be found in the manuscripts written in Arabic script, but it didn’t include systematically selected recipes, and furthermore, those recipes were not included into a separate book and were not published as cookbook collections. Culinary skills were passed on from generation to generation.

The interwar period includes the beginning of intensive researches in the field of material culture of Lithuanian Tatars. The works of an orientalist by education, Imam Ali Woronowicz, and orientalist Jameel Aleksandrowicz, were dedicated to the elements of the preserved culture of Lithuanian Tatars. Stefan Tugan-Baranowski, Stanisław Kryczyński and other researchers of the Tatar studies wrote about it as well. Moreover, the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of the S. Kryczyński’s study “Lithuanian Tatars. An Attempt at a Historical-Ethnographic Study”, which was published in 1938 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> number of annual magazine “Tatars Chronicle” (*Rocznik Tatarski*) (143–150) was dedicated to the material culture of Tatars.

Preserved legends eloquently testify about the material culture of Lithuanian Tatars. In the article of A. Woronowicz “Language of Polish Muslims”, which was published in the journal “Tatars Life”, a traditional Tatar pie with stuffing *belush* (*belichi, belishi*) and Tatar pancakes *dzhaima* were mentioned (Woronowicz 1934: 9–10). *Dzhaima* belongs to festive dishes and is being prepared for certain ceremonies. Those pancakes have a form of flapjack and remind Uzbek bread. *Dzhaima* is made of wheat, with the addition of water and salt; it is fried in oil and is given to all participants of a funeral dinner. As S. Kryczyński has noted in his study, “name of this flapjack is rarely found in Turkic dialects and if it is being found, only in Kipchak dialects. This is evidence, that *dzhaima* is one of the oldest cultural heritages of Lithuanian Tatars” (Kryczyński 1938: 148–149). A. Woronowicz in his subsequent article “Lithuanian Tatars’ Language Remains”,

which was published in the annual journal “Tatars Chronicle”, investigates the preserved Arabic-Turkic language elements in use by the Lithuanian Tatars and expands the list of traditional dishes.

However, only a few lexemes from the 600 listed could be correlated with the names of original eastern dishes. It is *ashur*<sup>3</sup>, *halva*, already mentioned *beliush* and *dzhaima*. Drinks *sherap* (arab. *sharab* – wine) and *sherbet* (arab. *barbat* – drink) were mentioned. Other four mentioned drinks – *mene*, *rechik*, *tasnim* and *tinatl al-habal*<sup>4</sup> – have mystical-religious character. The linguistic situation changed after 100 years. In 1999, an MA student of Vilnius University, Natela Nasibova, conducted research in Forty Tatars Village. She found that despite the fact that material culture occupies the fifth place out of the total number of nine among the components of national identity (10% of respondents mentioned its importance), the amount of extant orientalism numbers from this field is the richest one (Nasibova 2005: 198). The names of eastern dishes are well known for all respondents, while a lot of the other vocabulary, recorded in A. Woronowicz' and S. Kryczyński's works, have become little or not used at all (Nasibova 2007: 517–518).

## Traditional and Festive Cuisine of Lithuanian Tatars

The traditional cuisine of Lithuanian Tatars consists of two parts – festive (Friday and ritual) and ordinary cuisines. Specifically – *dzhaima*, *ashure*, *halva*, milk porridge from rice with raisins, “*lokshen*” (Belarusian term) – soup with homemade noodles and dumplings of minced meat, “*shtukament*” – stewed beef with beans, could be assigned to the traditional festive cuisine, which is served during one or another festival or ritual. The traditional cuisine of Lithuanian Tatars is an inalienable part of their religion – Islam. It is no coincidence that *gal'ma* (flour, fried in oil) and *dzhaima* are *Sadaqah*<sup>5</sup> and is being given during religious rites. A traditional drink of the Lithuanian Tatars, *syta*, is fermented from water with honey (without hop and alcohol). *Syta* is served for guests during various holidays and during the execution of family rites such as name giving, nikiaha (engagement) or during funeral.

The Lithuanian Tatars as other Turkic nations like such dishes as pilaf, kebab (shish kebabs), chorba / shurpa (various soups) with vegetables and meat, a special place is occupied by *peremechi* and *chebureks* in everyday life. Meat is an inalienable ingredient in the recipes of all kinds of soups. Traditional

drinks – such as *kumys* (mare milk), *katyk* (strongly diluted sheep milk) and yogurt were familiar for the Lithuanian Tatars, but were not used for food.

One hundred leaves pie (*shimtalapis*) should be mentioned among the sweet dishes. It is a layered cake made from a very long rolled dough, in which thin and brittle layers are abundantly greased with butter and sprinkled with sugar and cinnamon. The pie filling consists of raisins with poppy seeds. All this is wrapped into a roll (snail) and baked in a stove or oven. One hundred leaves pie is a kind of traditional layered pie – *perekachevnik*. In Belarusian language *perekachevnik* corresponds to “layered pie”, in Russian language it corresponds to the verb ‘to roll’ (roll out). The dough is made in the same way as indicated above, and the filling can be very varied: from chopped goose with a lot of onions to cheese with greens, cheese with raisins, and curd with raisins or dried plums.

Living in a foreign environment, the Tatars adapted to the local, European cuisine and transformed it into their own style. So called “European” dishes were peppered a lot by the Tatars, adding seasonings from various herbs as well as fat. The Tatars ate meat and meat products more often than all other inhabitants. One of the Tatar contributions to Lithuanian cuisine is meat preparation. The authentic Lithuanian sausage *skilandis* must be made of chopped meat not minced meat. This way of meat preparation was brought by the Tatars and has been preserved since then. Relying on sources, S. Kryczyński wrote about the grades of meat popular among the Tatars: “Most of all they like lamb and goose, previously willingly ate meat of goats, so their neighbours nicknamed them eater of goats” (Kryczyński 1938: 142). The method of drying meat, well known to kipchaks from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and to nogais from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, was brought to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania by the Tatars. Unlike their compatriots from Kazan and Crimea, the Lithuanian Tatars do not consume horse meat (Buinovska & Moćkun 2012: 10).

Cabbage rolls are characteristic dishes of the Lithuanian Tatars. Their original shape, however, was slightly different from the ones we are used to nowadays. These were *dolma*; they were made of grape leaves and mutton. *Dolma* became cabbage rolls in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: grape leaves were replaced by cabbage leaves, and beef was used instead of mutton (Girniuvienė 2016: 14).

Dumplings were also brought to Lithuania from the East. Their predecessor was the Tatar *kundum*. To make dumplings, just like kundums, meat must be chopped not minced. Today you will only find the Tatar *kundum* in a Tatar family. What you see in the supermarket in the form of a precooked food is

far from the true Tatar *kundum*. Besides, some researchers of the culinary heritage suggest that the predecessor of the Lithuanian *cepelinas* (potato-meat dumplings) was also the *kundum*.

In the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the long exile, when Crimean Tatars started to come back to their homeland, to the Crimea, thanks to the renewed contacts between compatriots, the cuisine of Lithuanian Tatars was replenished with new (forgotten) Tatar recipes. There is no doubt that the cuisine of Lithuanian Tatars was influenced by the examples of Kazan Tatars' cuisine, who had arrived to Lithuania to implement large construction projects in the '80s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the examples of Visaginas and Klaipėda). So, such culinary products as *beshparmak* (patties of triangular shape with meat), watermelon pie (pumpkin pie with minced meat) and others returned to the table of Lithuanian Tatars.

In 2011, on the initiative of three Lithuanian Tatars from Lithuania, Roza Makulavičiūtė-Aleksandrovič, Liusė Milkamanavičiūtė Gaidukevičienė and Fatima Šabanovič Buinovska, a small brochure "One Hundred Leaves Pie and not Only It... The Secrets of Lithuanian Tatars Culinary Heritage" was published. This included the descriptions of the most popular dishes of Lithuanian Tatars. Recipes passed from lips to lips, from moms, grandmas and ancestors, appeared in this album. Roza Makulavičiūtė-Aleksandrovič learned the secrets of recipes from her mother Jelena Chaleckaitė Makulavičienė (born in 1925 in Adamonyš village, the district of Alytus), the latter – from her mother Emilija Vilčinskaitė Chaleckienė (born in 1906 in Raižiai village, the district of Alytus); Liusė Milkamanavičiūtė Gaidukevičienė learned how to cook Tatar dishes from her mother Elžbieta Asanavičiūtė Milkamanavičienė (born in 1930 in Žiežmariai town, the district of Kaišiadorys), from her grandmother Jelena Raižauskaitė Asanavičienė (born in 1911 in Raižiai village, the district of Alytus) and from her great-grandmother Ieva Gembickaitė Raižauskienė (born in 1891 in Merkinė town, the district of Varėna). Fatima Šabanovič Buinovska took the secrets of dishes from her mother Aminė Radkevič Šabanovič (born in 1936 in Ivje town, Belorussia) and from her grandmother Fatima Šabanovič Radkevič (born in 1916 in Ivje town, Belorussia). The recipes presented in the album were witnesses of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the living memory sought ancient times, and covered the territory of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

In 2012, this brochure was supplemented with new recipes and was published under the new title "The Culinary Recipes of the Tatars Cuisine". In the same

year Fatima Buinovska and Slavomir Mockun prepared and published a brochure about the Tatar cuisine in Polish language: “Tatar cuisine. The History.”

For more than five years, the traditional Tatar cuisine has been popularised and represented by the Tatar community of Nemėžis, one of the largest Tatar communities in Lithuania. They represent the culinary heritage of Lithuanian Tatars at various fairs and festivals with the dishes, prepared according to the preserved recipe. Tatar community of Nemėžis became a participant of such projects as “Together We Are Lithuania”, exhibitions “Litexpo”, “Adventure”, “Year of Regional Communities”, fairs “Fair of Nations”, “Fair of Kaziukas”, etc. This is the only community that has a certificate to produce 10 dishes of national cuisine.

## Conclusion

For more than 620 years, the Lithuanian Tatars preserved the characteristics of their culture and passed it on to new generations. All this time, the elements of Tatar culture were and still are an essential part of culture of the state, which has become a homeland for them. The functioning of culture in a multicultural environment enriches not only the culture of the diaspora, but also becomes a source for other, neighbouring cultures. There is a hope that the modern and succeeding generations will preserve the traditions and rites of their ancestors. Everyone is well aware of the hospitality of the Tatars and may never forget the old saying: “The Tatar kundum is just right for the Bernardine’s belly”.

The Tatar table etiquette has had its peculiarities. So, the head of the family always sat in the place of honour at the table, next to him the mother, then the children according to their age. If there were old people or guests in the family, the place of honour were provided for them. The first person who started the meal with the word “Bismillah” (‘In the name of Allah!’), was the head of the family, after him – all the participants of the meal. After the end of the meal no one stood up from the table until the elder one had read a short prayer which contained ayat from Quran and well wishes.

The relict national dishes of Lithuanian Tatars and the traditions of their use bring us back to the life of the Turkic nomads and the more ancient periods of history; serve as a clear example of the material and spiritual connection of the epochs and a kind of bridge from the past to the present. The cuisine of Lithuanian Tatars is a good material for comparative studies and comparison

of the cuisine of Belarusian, Lithuanian and Polish Tatars with the cuisine of their historic homeland.

## Notes

1 Tatars, who arrived to the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 14<sup>th</sup> century, are being called differently in many contemporary historical works: Belarusian Tatars, Lithuanian Tatars, Polish Tatars or even Belarusian-Lithuanian-Polish Tatars. In historical sources of 15<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries those definitions like Tatars of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Tatars of Radziwill, Tatars-Cossacks, and etc., used to be used next to the ethnonym Tatars. Definition “Lithuanian” traces Tatars in 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the necessity of establishment a distinction between Tatars living on the lands annexed to the Russian Empire, and Kazan, Crimean and Siberian Tatars occurred.

2 Kitabs (Arabic: ‘book’) – one of the genre varieties of manuscripts of Lithuanian Tatars, they are voluminous collections containing texts of various content: the basics of Islamic faith, stories about the life and activities of the Prophet Muhammad, descriptions of rites and rituals, and the main religious and family responsibilities of Muslims. Often, there you can find biblical legends and moralizing stories in kitabs. Chamails (prayer books) consists of Arabic and Turkish written prayer texts and their explanations in the Belarusian and Polish languages. There you can find not only prayers, but also knowledge of Muslim chronology, tips on how to treat diseases with prayers, dream interpretations, prophecy of happy and unhappy days.

3 Ashura (‘asura’) – the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month Muharram, Shiite holiday; compote from nine sorts of fruits.

4 Mene (Arabic: ‘man’) – “lousy” water; rechik (‘rahyyq’) – the name of the heavenly drink; gasnim (Arabic: ‘tasmim’) – the name of heavenly drink; wine mixed with water; gintal al-habal (Arabic: ‘tin ‘al-gibal’) – heavenly drink.

5 Sadaqah – voluntary charity, alms.

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