

From Place to Plate: Three Historical Etudes of Astrakhan. Etude #1

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Abstract

Various distant outskirts of Russia very often followed a specific path in their development, in no way resembling the culture of the Central Russia. One of such areas, where special cultural and natural environments existed, was the southern province located in the Delta of the Volga River – the Astrakhan province. Early in the Middle Ages this territory became a part of highly developed and powerful states – the Khazar Khaganate, the Golden Horde, and the Astrakhan Khanate were situated here. It was during this period that the main alimentary complex of the region was formed, which was a combination of the three main household types: cattle-breeding, fishing, and agriculture. This complex has survived to a large extent until the present day. The annexation of the Astrakhan Khanate by Russia in 1556 did little to change this configuration. The native inhabitants of these regions returned to their usual occupation, while the newly arrived peoples followed the same industries that had been familiar to them in their former homeland: gardening, fishing, or cattle breeding. The multinational character of the region's population led to a flexible system of economic relations and complementarity. As a result, there was an active cultural interchange between all the peoples of the region, which also influenced the alimentary landscape (foodscape).

The history of this foodscape can be divided into three major periods, which differ from each other in the specifics of their character. They are largely dependent on socio-political changes in Russia as a whole, which also stimulated serious cultural and social shifts in the region. This article is devoted mainly to the analysis of the formation of the first period of the alimentary landscape in the region. It lasted from the accession of the Astrakhan khanate to the First World War and the October Revolution of 1917.

Keywords

Astrakhan; Foodscape; Food Practices; Three Stages of Local Foodscape Development; Cattle Breeding; Agriculture; Fishing; Local Specificity



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От места до тарелки: три исторических этюда Астрахани. Этюд № 1

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Аннотация

Развитие различных окраин России очень часто шло своим особым путем, ни чем не напоминающим культуру Центральных районов России. Одной из подобных областей, где существовала особая культурная и природная среда, была южная губерния, расположенная в дельте реки Волги – Астраханская губерния. Уже в средние века эта территория стала частью высокоразвитых и мощных государств – Хазарский Каганат, Золотая Орда, Астраханское ханство. Именно в этот период сложился основной алиментарный комплекс, представлявший собой сочетание трех основных хозяйственных типов: скотоводство, рыболовство, земледелие. Этот комплекс в значительной мере просуществовал и до наших дней. Присоединение Астраханского ханства к России в 1556 г. мало изменило этот расклад. Вернувшиеся коренные жители этих регионов занялись привычным делом, а вновь прибывшие народы осваивали те же отрасли, которые были для них привычны и у них на прежней родине: земледелие, рыболовство, скотоводство. Многонациональный характер населения края привел к тому, что в конечном итоге сложилась гибкая система хозяйственных связей и взаимодополнения. В результате между всеми народами края шел активный культурный взаимообмен, оказавший влияние и на алиментарный ландшафт.

В истории этого ландшафта можно выделить три больших периода, отличающихся друг от друга спецификой своего развития. Во многом они завязаны на социально-политические перемены в России в целом, которые приводили и к серьезным культурным и социальным сдвигам и в крае. Данная статья посвящена в основном анализу складывания первого периода алиментарного ландшафта в крае. Он длился с момента присоединения Астраханского ханства до Первой мировой войны и Октябрьской революции 1917 г..

Ключевые слова

Астрахань; алиментарный ландшафт; пищевые практики; три этапа развития алиментарного ландшафта; скотоводство; земледелие; рыболовство; локальная специфика



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Introduction

The cultural landscape of the Astrakhan region has a long and complex history in which local and national tendencies are very closely intertwined. In some periods this hybrid was dominated by the local, but in other periods the national dominated over the local. The history of Astrakhan is an example of the unique development of the province within the frontier diversity. It reflects, as in a mirror, all the typical features of the evolution of the alimentary (food) system in Russia. However, it is this remoteness, and sometimes cultural marginality, that has contributed to the uniqueness of the situation here, similar to what Igor Kopytoff described in his “African Frontier” with the term ‘ecumene’, which he defined “as a region of persistent cultural interaction and exchange” (1987, p. 10).

Throughout history, three models have emerged in the region that are radically different from each other. Each of them was a peculiar fusion in which regional factors (natural, cultural, etc.) and national (mainly political) factors are closely intertwined. In different periods, regional factors or national factors have prevailed, which has had a different impact on the formation of alimentary models.

In this paper I will trace how the foodscape of the region has changed and how various factors have increased the role of regional specificity or, on the contrary, decreased its importance.

Why Astrakhan Region? The choice of this particular region for analysis is determined primarily by the role it has played in Russian history and by the natural and cultural uniqueness that distinguishes this region from the rest of the country. We will try to show how external factors have repeatedly reformatted the cultural landscape, especially in the sphere of alimentary traditions. This reformatting had a rather critical nature, radically changing the alimentary traditions.

This region is also interesting to analyze from the position of heterotopia, i.e., the presence in the region of a special cultural situation formed by the mixture of sometimes incongruous elements (Foucault, 1986). This cultural polyphony led to the situation where many elements of this system were constantly in dynamics, were rearranged, went beyond “norms” and “customs”. Although such behavior is not unusual, taking into account the very specificity and role of “food” in human life, in this case the uniqueness of Astrakhan was determined not only by the pragmatism of human culture (the desire to expand its food resources), but by the very nature of the multicultural character of the region, that is, the cohabitation of several ethnic groups for a long period of time – several centuries – who willingly or unwillingly created a new cultural phenomenon – Astrakhan foodscape.

What is also interesting about this region is that from a region that fed the entire country until recently, it has now become a region forced to import various products that until recently had been produced in huge quantities not only for domestic needs, but also for sale almost all over Russia.

This constant process of ups and downs, achievements and losses presents both an ontological problem (as variants of existence) and also an epistemological one. Epistemology is presented in two aspects at once: from the position of the subject's choice of the model of survival and from the scientific point of view, as it presents models of cognitive processes of adaptation to internal and external (most often political factors).

In terms of the first aspect of epistemology, this paper draws on numerous interviews (180 interviews) recorded among Astrakhan residents of different ages (born in the 1930s and 80s). The interviews dealt mainly with questions of cultural memory regarding their eating habits during their childhood. Thus, we had at our disposal the narratives of a wide variety of Astrakhan residents, who talked about their childhood and adolescence. Various travelogues, archival documents, and studies by other researchers were also used.

Geographical and Historical Reference

Astrakhan region is located in Southern Russia in the Delta of the Volga River at the area where it flows into the Caspian Sea. This factor determines the climatic and natural peculiarities of the region. In the southern part of Volgograd Oblast, bordering Astrakhan Oblast, a branch of Volga – the Akhtuba River is flowing parallel to the Volga.

Two rivers form the Volga-Akhtuba Floodplain, which forms a special natural climate on the territory of the region. Clamped from the east and west by semi-deserts and deserts, the Floodplain, which in the South turns into a Delta, is a natural formation, which gives shelter to a variety of fish, birds, animals and insects. A unique flora has also emerged here, including several endemics.

In general, the following large landscape systems can be distinguished within the territory of the region: floodplain, desert (eastern parts of the region), semi-desert and delta. In total, scientists distinguish eight landscape zones in the region, correlated with one of the four landscape systems. These eight landscapes zones may be divided into several sub-zones (Zhilkin, Lunev, & Pyatin, pp. 30-33). In addition, the Baer hills located throughout the region may create not only horizontal, but also vertical natural zones, as the difference in elevation, together with different areas (eastern, northern, southern and western slopes) create different conditions for plant and animal life.

This landscape diversity of the region creates good conditions for animals, fish and birds. The region is rich in commercial species of fish (some of which (sturgeons) are globally recognized), birds and animals. However, some of them are no longer of commercial significance, such as saigas – their hunting is forbidden, and on the territory of the region and the adjacent Republic of Kalmykia there is a reserve, where these animals can safely live and breed. But back in the 1970s, according to the information of old-timers, saiga meat was seasonally sold in grocery stores in the region.

The natural diversity of the region has led to variety of households' economic types that combined different livelihoods: farming (gardening, melon and water-melon growing, orcharding), cattle breeding, fishing, hunting and gathering. Practically all these types have not lost their importance to the present day. Another feature of this model was that the population, even specializing in one type of economy, could actively participate in another. Pastoralists engaged in fishing, hunting and gathering, while fishermen were also actively engaged in gardening. The horticulturists, as a rule, kept livestock, but they did not give up fishing either. Thus, the diet of the local peoples was sufficiently varied and allowed for a nourishing existence.

Already in the 7th century, this territory became part of the powerful Khazar Khaganate, and it is possible that the capital of the Khazars – Itil – was located on this territory – in the area of the modern settlement of Samosdelka (Vasiliev, 2020).

After Prince Svyatoslav of Kiev (920/942 – 972) destroyed the capital of the Khazar Kaganate Itil in 965 (Dunlop, pp. 241-249), a new city – Saksin appeared on the ruins of the mighty city (Fedorov-Davydov; Vasiliev, 2015). But whether it is true or not, in any case we can say with certainty that there was a large settlement that played an important role in the economic life of the region in the Khazar period and after that.

It can be confidently stated that it was in the Khazar period finally formed a multi-economic model of the region, consisting of gardening, cattle breeding and fishing. This model survives to this day.

In the middle of the 13th century, the region becomes the center of a vast empire – the Golden Horde – with its capital Sarai Batu, located on the Akhtuba River near the modern Selitrennoye settlement.

After the fall of the Golden Horde in the 1460s, the Astrakhan Khanate was formed on this territory, with its capital Hajji Tarkhan, which was located on the right side of the Volga, almost on the territory of modern Astrakhan. In 1556 the Astrakhan Khanate was annexed to Russia.

This is actually the beginning of Astrakhan's Russian history. Throughout its existence, Astrakhan's culture, and food culture in particular, has undergone serious changes several times. It is possible to distinguish three main models of the food complex:

1st – From the middle of the 16th century to 1917.

2nd – Soviet (1917 – 1990)

3d – Post-Soviet (1990 to the present).

Of course, each period, in turn, can be divided into several sub-periods, when special changes in the foodscape took place. For example, very serious changes in the first period occurred in the 18th century. The end of the 19th century was also marked by major changes.

In the second period or second model, serious differences were also noticeable, concerning different moments of this system. Sometimes these changes can be traced even within a single decade, as in the 1920s. The period of military communism and the New Economic Policy that succeeded it were radically different. Still, we prefer to consider all these local periods as parts of a larger model.

The third period can also be divided into at least in two sub-periods: the 1990s and the 2000s.

In summary, the Astrakhan region has a long history. And a number of facts allow us to say that certain traditions and food patterns have more than a thousand years of history.

In addition to the historical features of this region, there is an anthropological one, as this territory is located at the crossroads of migration flows: for a very long period of time one population replaced another. The ethnic structures of the local states were rather heterogeneous. Khazar Khaganate was a multinational empire. There were ethnic groups that spoke different languages, practiced different religious systems, and were engaged in different economic activities.

In the Golden Horde period, the situation was quite similar: Turks, Mongols, Uglic peoples, natives of Central Asia and even China, Russians, ethnic groups of the Caucasus and many others.

In the period of Russian Astrakhan the population was also quite heterogeneous: Russians, Tatars, Nogais, Kalmyks, Kazakhs, Armenians, Jews, Germans, Ukrainians, Persians, and many others. Each of these ethnic groups held their own traditions, spoke their own languages, followed their own religions, etc.

There were Orthodox churches (and also Old Believers' churches and houses of worship), Catholic and Lutheran churches, mosques (Sunni and Shiite), synagogues, Buddhist temples, etc. in the city and region.

And this is not surprising, taking into account the role that Astrakhan played in the history of Russia. It was a major economic and trade center, located on the transit route between Asia and Europe.

This diversity left and continues to leave a special imprint on the cultural uniqueness of Astrakhan's inhabitants. A special disposition for communication dominates here, long coexistence with representatives of other peoples provides many unique opportunities to taste the food of the Other. Here it is difficult to adhere only to one's own food traditions, which is typical, for example, in Central Russia, where there has been a mono-ethnic situation for a long time.

A dweller in Astrakhan is constantly transgressing, unafraid to go beyond the bounds of tradition, as their own tradition turns out to be blurred. The habit of celebrating some national holidays by sharing food with representatives of other ethnic groups is quite old. Especially it concerns some special ritual dishes, such as Christmas or Easter food (Kulich) or the food prepared by Tatars on some Muslim holidays.

Treating friends of other ethnicities to “our own” ethnic dishes has become a long-standing tradition. This is especially noticeable between Russians and Tatars. Both groups consider themselves locals, often contrasting themselves with other ethnic groups.

The Kazakhs who migrated to the region in the early 19th century also joined this group.

A Few Words about the Terminology

Despite the fact that the study of cuisine and food has a long history in Russia, we have to admit that the Russian academic literature has not developed a conceptual apparatus that would meet all the requirements for scientific terms.

As a rule, the Russian literature on this topic uses the terms *gastronomic* and *culinary*, descending from the French tradition (Gluschenko, 2012; Sohan, 2013; Gladky & Kornekova, 2015; Popova, 2016). To a large extent, however, these terms reflect a very narrow application of food – its cooking and consumption. And this aspect stems from the etymology of these terms: “gastro” goes back to the term for “stomach”, while “culinary” or “cuisine” focuses on preparation and consumption.

The terms formed with the words “food” and “nutrition” are traditional for some Russian academic literature. Combined with the terms “practices” (“food practices”) (Zarubina, 2014; Mishchenko, 2013) or systems (“food systems”) (Arutyunov, 1981), they form an approach close to the Western (usually Anglophone) one. However, here, too, the main emphasis is placed on food consumption. The famous Russian anthropologist S.A. Arutyunov defines “food system” as

A set of basic foods and types of dishes made from them, the presence of characteristic additional components such as seasonings and spices, methods of food processing and cooking, food restrictions and preferences, rules of behavior related to cooking and eating – all of this together forms a food system characteristic of a particular ethnic group or of a particular region inhabited by a number of culturally close ethnic groups (2001, p. 12).

As we can see again, the concept of “food” is reduced only to such processes as “consumption” –i.e., “gastronomic” and “cooking” Many scholars are aware of this, even those who use these terms. Thus Russian scholars M. Kapkan and L. Likhacheva, who use the term “gastronomic culture”, reasonably state:

There is not a single work explaining the meaning of the term. Therefore, we have to identify its meaning based on the context of its use as well as on its etymology. Another problem is related to the lack of a theoretical understanding of gastronomic culture. It is studied mainly at the empirical level and as a result appears as a set of disparate rules and phenomena. The mechanisms of functioning of gastronomic culture have not been studied. It is obvious that in this sphere there are certain norms, ideas about the prestige and appropriateness of dishes, which are shared by the majority. However, the ways of formation and translation of these norms and perceptions remain unexplored. The interrelation of gastronomic culture and socio-cultural context is almost unexplored (Kapkan & Likhacheva, p. 35)

In attempting to define this concept, Kapkan and Likhacheva state:

Gastronomic culture is a system of rules, regulations, and patterns that determine the way food is cooked, the set of culturally accepted ingredients and their combinations, food consumption practices, and reflection on the above-mentioned phenomena (p. 36).

The Russian researcher D. Mishchenko is even more critical of the state of Food studies in Russia:

There is no generally accepted term for the combination of cultural and social aspects of cooking and eating in the Russian-language literature yet. The most common expression “gastronomic culture” does not meet such requirements for the term as unambiguity and lack of connotations, since it is often used as an evaluative one to indicate the degree of compliance of an individual's behavior with the norms of consumption culture existing in this society... The expressions “culinary culture” and “eating culture”, in addition to the noted disadvantage, have another quality: they narrow the concept to the sphere of cooking or eating (Mishchenko, p. 313).

I agree with such remarks, because most people define “gastronomic culture” rather narrowly, through the prism of consumption. Although I should say right now that I have no objection to the use of these terms in narrow spheres of consumption. In our case these terms are completely inappropriate, because we deal here with a holistic system consisting of many factors: *production, acquisition of food, issues of logistics, reprocessing and consumption*, i.e. the whole set of production and consumption practices. We deal with a system that lines up on the axis: nature-human, state-human, society-human, human-human. In this case, the term “food landscape” would be more appropriate (by analogy with “cultural landscape”)¹. In Western (English-language) literature there is a peculiar analogue as “foodscape”, but, unfortunately, there are no analogs for it in Russian-language literature².

In my analysis, I will use in parallel the terms “alimentary culture” and “alimentary landscape”, which in general correspond to the terms “foodways” and “foodscapes”.

I believe that the use of the latter terms (alimentary landscape, foodscape) reflects to the greatest extent the main message of this article – the relationship between humans and the natural environment. However, at the same time, I take into account that in this system of relations there is no mention of the political aspect, which is very often the main mediator influencing both the individual and the natural environment. It is this factor that has very often been decisive, and has determined the patterns of the foodways of the region.

¹ Such a combination is not very euphonious for the Russian language (Rus. *pishchevoy landshaft*).

² In our previous researches we used the term “alimentary landscape” (Якушенков & Палаткин, 2020) as a synonym for the “foodscape”.

The First Case: from the City-Fortress to the City of Abundance

In 1558, Russian Astrakhan was founded on the left bank of the Volga River. To be precise, it was not even a town, but a fortress, designed to control the situation in the region. The fortress had a small garrison of Streltsy units and Cossacks. Near the fortress a Tatar settlement arose under the protection by Russian fortress.

The formation of Russian Astrakhan marked the beginning of a new model of alimentary culture. Given the fact that in the beginning Astrakhan was only a fortress with a small Russian garrison¹, the alimentary system was formed by the Russian traditions and traditions of local peoples – Tatars² and Nogai. Astrakhan Tatars, as a rule, lived sedentary, and Nogai were nomads, moving closer to the city in the winter. In the past, the lands of the Nogai nomads were located near the capital of the Astrakhan Khanate – Hajji Tarkhan (Zaitsev, p. 149).

Although a large part of the local population (the Tatars) left the area before the time the Russian troops approached, we do not know how many fled away, how many remained, and how many later returned. At the same time, the Nogai, on the contrary, moved closer to the city. In any case, there was an active cultural exchange between the Streltsy and the local population. It concerned primarily the alimentary culture.

From the local produce the fortress defenders could rely only on fishing, but even here they had limited opportunities due to the fear of possible attacks from hostile groups roaming nearby³. However, there were few of them, and even on the contrary, the Astrakhan Tatars largely relied on the help of the Astrakhan authorities from their oppression by the Nogai. The Nogai heads regarded the Astrakhan Tatars as their vassals, trying to attribute them to their ulus⁴.

Although the Tatars were forbidden to settle on the territory of the fortress, they were given a place to settle next to it. This area is still recognized as “the Tatar territory”. ‘Tatar Bazaar’, or food market, is still located near the fortress. It is likely that another food market, ‘Bolshiye Issady’⁵, was set on the site next to the headquarters of the penultimate ruler of Astrakhan, Yamgurchey (Yangurchey).

It is known that Yamgurchey lived not in the capital of the Astrakhan Khanate, but nearby. For a long time this place was called Yamgurchey hill. To this day, the bridge near the market is still called the Ingurchey Bridge. I dare assume that both the Tatars and Nogais came here with their goods in the period before the annexation of the Astrakhan Khanate to Russia.

¹ As Anthony Jenkinson informed, the Island where the fortress was built is “most destitute and barren of wood and pasture, and the ground will bear no corn” (Jenkinson, p. 57).

² The term “the Astrakhan Tatars” is very arbitrary for this period. In the 16th-17th centuries, the term was used by various authors in reference to completely different ethnic groups.

³ The Crimean Tatars made several attempts to conquer Astrakhan in the first years of her existence, but they were useless in spite the fact that the walls of the fortress were from earth and timber.

⁴ A clan or a neighborhood group under a given leader.

⁵ Bolshiye Issady – from Russian ‘bolshiye’ – *great* and ‘issady’ – *a pier, the place of landing*. This place is situated far from the main channel of the Volga River, So we may suppose that the choice of place for the market was due to its proximity to the residence of the previous ruler of Astrakhan.

Adam Olearius – a secretary to the ambassador of Duke of Holstein-Gottorp Frederick III, who visited Astrakhan in the 30s of the 17th century – left a very detailed account of local occupations and food traditions of the Tatars and Nogai. He paid attention to every detail of the economic life of the region. He was especially impressed by the abundance of the local land:

From Astrachan to the Caspian Sea, are twelve leagues, and thereabouts, the river does so abound with fish, that we bought twelve large Carps for two pence, and two hundred young Sturgeons, which are very delicate there, for half a Crown. It produces also Lobsters, or Seacrevices, which multiply in a manner to infinity, by reason the Muscovites and Tartars eat not of them. The Isles which are in the river afford habitations for all manner of Fowl, especially an infinite number of wild Geese and Ducks, which the Tartars take with Falcons and Hawks, and are very expert in the ordering of those Birds for that kind of sport. They are also excellently well skill'd in the hunting of the wild Bore; but in regard their Religion permits them not to eat of it, they sell them for a small matter to the Muscovites (Olearius, p. 127)

Olearius was surprised by the variety and quality of local fruits and vegetables:

As to the Fruits of those parts, it is certain, that, both in goodness and beauty, they yield not to those of Persia, especially Apples, Quinces, Nuts, Peaches, and Melons, but above all that kind of Melon, or rather Citruls, which the Muscovites call Arpus, the Turks and Tartars, Karpus, because they are extremely cooling, and the Persians, Hinduanes, because they had the first seeds of them from the Indies. This Fruit is excellently good, and very pleasant to the taste, as also to the eye, having the rind of a lively-green colour, the meat of a pale Carnation, and the seed black. The Tartars, who brought them to the City in Carts, sold them two or three a penny (p. 127).

However, speaking of the local ethnic groups, Olearius does not always make a distinction between the Nogai and the Tatars, naming both peoples the Tatars. But to some extent, their diet was largely similar, with some differences in the predominance of meat and vegetable/fruit dishes.

Both ethnic groups were engaged in fishing and hunting, and given the epidemics of Nogai's cattle that began as early as the late 16th century, they placed the main emphasis on fishing. The Tatars were also active in fishing, especially sturgeons (*Acipenseridae*):

Their ordinary food is fish dry'd in the Sun, which serves them instead of bread. They have also certain Cakes made of Meal, Rice, and Miller, fry'd in Oyl or Honey. They eat Camels and Horse-flesh, and drink water and milk. Mares milk they much esteem; with this they treated our Ambassadors, when we gave them a Visit, taking it out of a nasty Leather-bag, to present it to us (p. 129).

True, this fragment does not specify what kind of fish the "Tatars" were fishing and drying, but it is easy to guess that this refers to sturgeon, since to this day in Russia salted and dried sturgeon is called by the Turkic word 'balyk' – fish.

A. Jenkinson painted a vivid picture of what Astrakhan looked like during his stay there in 1558:

the ayre is there most infected, by reason (as I suppose) of much fishe, and specially sturgeon, by which only the inhabitantes live, having great scarcitie of flesh and bread.

They hang up their fish in theyr streetes and houses to dry for theyr provision, which causeth such abundance of flyes to increase there, as the like was never seene in any land, to their great plague. And at my being at the sayd Astracan, there was a great famine and plague among the people, and especially among the Tartares called Nagayans, who the same time came thither in great numbers to render themselves to the Russes their enemies, and to seeke succour at their hands (Jenkinson, p. 57).

In the Middle Ages, in order to obtain the maximum number of sturgeons, the local population made significant efforts, constructing special structures – *Uchugi* – out of huge logs driven into the river bed, which were used to block the stream. On top of these logs a platform was erected, on which several people could move freely. In some places, pockets were made of the same logs, into which fish would enter and from which they would pull them out with a pike poles.

This barbaric fishing method caused enormous damage to fish stocks, as it prevented the natural passage of fish to spawn. Already in the 16th-17th centuries, almost all traditional sturgeon fishing grounds were transferred to Orthodox monasteries. However, some *uchugi* remained in the possession of the Nogai nobility.

Russian academician Nikolai Ozeretskovsky, who visited Astrakhan in 1782-83, informs us,

Uchugi belonged formerly to patriarchs, bishops and Tatars, but in 1704, by decree of Emperor Peter the Great, they were placed in the state department and remained in it until 1762, when on July 31 by Her Imperial Majesty's Most Gracious Majesty's Decree, both the *uchugi* and all the fishing grounds therein were granted to the Russian merchants of Astrakhan (Ozeretskovsky, pp. 108-109).

Such a fishery was very profitable, although it caused enormous damage to the sturgeon population in the region. On November 3, 1771, over 500 beluga sturgens (*Huso huso*), weighing from 600 to 1200 kg, were caught in just a few hours in one of the *uchugi*. Merchants and fishery owners were fabulously rich. The meat of sturgeon was salted, poured with *tuzluk*¹, fish oil, etc.

This barbaric way of fishing existed in the Volga delta until 1859. The word '*uchug*' itself, which entered the Russian language, is of Turkic origin (Dahl, p. 874). There are still villages on the map of the region whose names conceal the word '*uchug*', as, for example, the village *Ivanchug* goes back to the Tatar *Yaman uchug*, as well as other villages near which such *uchugs* were located also point to the fact that they most likely originated from the period before Astrakhan was joined to Russia.

Another barbarian method of sturgeon fishing, which is often recorded by archaeologists in the cultural layers of the Saksin, is the '*peremyet*' or '*pereborka*' – a long cord stretched across the entire riverbed. Smaller cords, arranged vertically, with hooks at the ends, are tied to the cord horizontally. These small cords are spaced a foot apart. When swimming through this trap, the fish will unwittingly get

¹ *Tuzluk* is the name of a solution of table salt in the Turkic languages. It was used for salting fish.

hooked on one of them. In an attempt to escape, the fish gets tangled in these hooked cords even more¹.

That is how a similar type of fishing is described in the Astrakhan almanac “Astrakhan Flora” in 1827:

Pereborka is named a fishing method by a line, stretched across the channel, equipped with 60 hooks, to one end of which the approaching fisherman starts to look through his line, and after seeing the fish, which got caught in the line, he releases it from this deadly tool and puts his prey into the boat, controlled by another fisherman, sitting on the stern. Leaving about five miles from Samosdelka, we saw five boats, which on the orders of the landlord suddenly scattered in the wide space of the channel, each to its line. While we were driving around in our boats over the pereborka, a hundred sturgeons and up to 30 sevrukas and several dozen sterlets were caught in front of our sights. (Rosenmeyer, pp. 26-27).

In addition to tasty meat, sturgeon fish also provided an abundance of such delicacies as caviar², which Astrakhan citizens prepared in a variety of ways: *zernistaya* (grained), *payusnaya* (soldered or pressed), and *yastachnaya* (*yastychnaya*). Grain caviar is considered of the highest quality. With this method of cooking, the producers tried not to damage the eggs, and to preserve the taste of the caviar (*ikra*) as much as possible. Fresh caviar was washed in water and lightly salted. But this method of preparation was not very common, as it did not guarantee the preservation of the product for a long period. The *payusnaya* caviar was the more favorite and widespread dish of the Astrakhan people, because after soaking in brine (*tuzluk*), it was pressed and could be stored for a long time. It was not smeared, but sliced thinly on bread. So the best caviar (*ikra*) is *payusnaya*, because it is kept for a long time.

It is noteworthy that the brine used to salt caviar or fish is called “*tuzluk*,” which indicates the Turkic roots of the word. Another term that came into the Russian language from Turkic languages is *yastychnaya* or *yastachnaya* caviar. ‘*Yastak*’ (*yastyk*) – is a Tatar word for the fish ovaries. *Yastachnaya* caviar is prepared with the thin membrane of ovaries. It has a lot of grease that gets yellow colour

¹ There is no need to explain that this method of fishing, although practiced to this day by poachers, is considered illegal. However, it is quite productive, because the fish cannot freely pass through seemingly open water. This type of fishing is also dangerous due to the fact that often people, especially children, can get hurt by such hooks especially children, swimming near places where such fishing gear is located. But the hapless fisherman can become a victim of their own device, if there is no one to come to their aid. The author knows a case that happened in one of the villages of the Astrakhan region in the 1970s. when a fisherman, who went out alone to fish, caught a huge beluga sturgeon, but could not pull it out. Considering that the fish could weigh about a ton, and even more, he could not hold it, and more and more hooks were sinking into his body. Handling such a fish in open water is very difficult, and no one could come to his aid. The hapless fisherman was found dead a week later, and the fish he had caught was also dead. The life of an illegal fisherman is very difficult and dangerous, but the profit they make is very high given the market demand for their products in the region and in the world. Fish poaches can become rich very quickly, so they see no alternative to their activity. This kind of fishing in the United States was called “Chinese line”, and at the end of the 19th century it was widely recognized as illegal. Jack London described it in detail in his stories (*Tales of the Fish Patrol*).

² Sturgeon gives also a lot of other very tasty and useful things: its chord was dried and cut in small pieces (*vyaziga*) which were later used for cooking pies. The fish glue was also got from this fish.

under the influence of salt and sun. This caviar has a peculiar taste, but it is considered that it is very useful for human health.

Despite the fact that sturgeon and other sturgeons were also found in the upper part of the Volga River, it is understandable that the Russians adopted the ways of processing the products of this fish from the Astrakhan Tatars.

All this demonstrates that there was a transfer of knowledge from local peoples to the new inhabitants of the region, which ultimately predetermined further ways of fishing, and the process of formation of a new foodscape, which in many ways repeated the previous one.

However, it was not only sturgeons, called “red fish”¹ in the region, which formed the basis of the region's fish abundance. Other important fish of commercial importance in the region were *sudak* – pikeperch (*Sander lucioperca*) and *sazan* – carp (*Cyprinus sagrio*). Since the beginning of the 19th century these fish began to play an important role in the foodscape of the region.

Although pikeperch was much tastier, it was carp that was considered a symbol of the region. A guest was often served a boiled head of carp for dinner. It was believed that if a guest had eaten a head of carp, he would surely return to Astrakhan. The carp were easy prey when they went to spawn. The caught fish was preserved by cutting it into large pieces and salting them in barrels.

Carp roe was especially valued because it did not require long processing. The most difficult thing is to peel it from the ovarian membrane, and then it is salted. It is still made according to this recipe to this day. The carp roe is ready to eat in a few hours. It is eaten with sunflower oil and onions. It is possible that black caviar was also eaten with onions, at least as indicated by the already mentioned A. Olearius, who visited Astrakhan in 1636:

The spawn of Fish, especially that of Sturgeon they order thus. They take off the skin, very neatly, and then salt them. Having been in salt some eight or ten days, and by that means reduced as it were to a paste, they cut it into small slices, putting Onions and Pepper to them and they are eaten with Oil and Vinegar like a Salad. It eats much better, if, instead of Vinegar, you put the juice of Citron. Yet to love this kind of Salad, a man must be accustomed to it, though they think it excites appetite and fortifies Nature. The Muscovites call it Ikry, and the Italians Cavaia. There is much of it eaten in Italy in the Lent time, instead of Butter. The best is made upon the Wolgda and near Astrakhan, whence it is transported in Tunns of 7. or 800. weight, by the way of England and Holland, into Italy (Olearius, p. 65).

In addition to carp roe, the people of Astrakhan also salted pike (*Esox lucius*) roe. But it required a very long and thorough treatment because of the presence of many helminthes in this fish. So the fresh roe was washed in boiling water for a very long time, killing all the worms. This procedure did not harm the caviar, and even made it tastier. The pike roe was also eaten with oil and onion.

¹ ‘Red Fish’ (Rus. *krasnaya ryba*) is named so due to a specific meaning of the word “krasnaya” in Russian Language. Besides the first meaning of the color ‘red’, it also has a meaning of *beauty*, cf. *krasnaya ploshchad* – “red square” – “beautiful square”; *krasna devitsa* – “beautiful girl”. The flesh of the sturgeon is of yellow color.

Generally speaking, however, Astrakhan inhabitants had and still have a dual attitude toward pike and catfish. Catfish was considered an unclean fish, and many preferred not to eat it because, in the opinion of some respondents, it eats drowned people. This exclusion of catfish from the diet, as it seems to us, could be connected with a religious tradition going back to the Old Testament. According to the Book of Leviticus, Christians were forbidden to eat fish without scales:

Anything living in the water that does not have fins and scales is to be regarded as unclean by you (Leviticus, 11 : 12).

At the same time, it is unlikely that everything can be reduced to just a religious prohibition. Osteological analysis of fish remains from the Samosdel'scoye settlement¹, carried out by professors from Astrakhan State University, showed that the proportion of sturgeon remains is 43.6%, of carp bones is 26.7%, and the proportion of catfish is 5.5%. (Lozovskaya & Matveev, 2011, p. 59; 2014, p. 25). The issue of avoidance of pike by Astrakhan citizens is more complicated. Many Muslims do not eat pike, detesting figure of a cross on the head of this fish. It is possible that the avoidance of this fish by some Orthodox believers has more to do with the fact that this fish is often infected with helminthes than with cultural or religious reasons². At the same time, pike cutlets are one of the favorite dishes of modern Astrakhan residents.

The question of the place of food taboos in the diet of the Astrakhan people is very interesting. After all, from the point of view of religious prescriptions, sturgeon fish, due to the absence of scales, should also have been classified as unclean (*Haram*) and subjected to a prohibition on consumption by the Muslim. At the same time, we see that sturgeon flesh was consumed both in the Khazar period, during the period of the Golden Horde, when Islam was adopted, and in the later period. This most likely speaks in favor of the hypothesis that the Astrakhan foodscape was formed during the Khazar period. And in subsequent periods it was only slightly modified, supplemented by new products and new methods of cooking.

The fact that Iran, neighboring Astrakhan Region, has a strict ban on sturgeon and fish consumption also testifies to the correctness of this hypothesis. This prohibition was one of the reasons why Astrakhan fishermen so easily obtained the right to fish sturgeon in Iranian waters in the 19th century:

The Persians will not eat sturgeon, but rent the grounds of the Sallian to the Russians, who in the spawning time, have taken with a hook and line, fifteen thousand large sturgeons in one day. (Smith, 1833, p. 120)

Sallian (Salyan) waters were transferred to Russia in 1813 under the Gulistan Treaty, and by the end of the 19th-beginning of the 20th centuries. Astrakhan fish-

¹ Samosdelka – a modern village near Astrakhan – about 40 km to the South-West from Astrakhan. The middle layers of the archeological site near the village may be dated to the 11-12th centuries. The town existed in the period of the Golden Horde.

² We may also suppose that the Russians didn't eat it in the previous period due to the influence of the Tatar foodways on the common Astrakhan foodscape. This avoidance was noticed among old people. The modern people (Muslim and Christian) don't follow this tradition.

ermen felt quite free in the Southern Caspian, having fish-processing enterprises in Gilan.

The abundance of fish resources was well combined with the presence in the region of large supplies of salt, extracted, as a rule, in salt lakes: Baskunchak, Elton, etc... This made it possible to store fish. As mentioned above, large fish were cut into large pieces and salted in barrels. In time of need this fish was soaked in water, boiled and eaten with vegetables or potatoes.

Sometimes soaked and lightly boiled fish was finely chopped and mixed with cabbage to make a fish pie (Rus. *pirog*). Mostly sturgeon, pike-perch, or carp were used for this pie. The same principle was used for the meat pie:

Among other things they make a fort of Pies, which they call Piroguen about the bigness and fashion of a two penny Loaf. They fill the crust with Fish or minced meat, with Chibols and a little Pepper, and fry them in a Pan with Butter, and in Lent with Oil. 'Tis no ill dish, and may be called the Bisque of those parts (Olearius, p. 65).

The 17th-18th centuries were a peculiar turning point in the history of the Astrakhan foodscape. New food plants were constantly appearing in Astrakhan, enriching the already varied diet of Astrakhan residents.

In 1608 a monk from Astrakhan, the abbot of the local monastery, Father Nikolai tried to plant in the monastery a grapevine that merchants brought him from Persia. After a few years, his garden was already profitable, and the grapes sent to Moscow caused excitement. After another couple of years, the monastery was already able to produce good wine. Thus, Astrakhan became the first city in Russia where viticulture began to flourish.

We owe our successes in viticulture and winemaking in the region to the fact that Father Nikolai (Nikolaus), was a German, from Austria¹. As a young man he was captured by the Turks, who sold him to Russia. He no doubt remembered the vineyards in his homeland, and apparently had an idea of the care of the vines. In 1636, when he met with Olearius, he was 105 years old, but in good physical condition.

It was viticulture, along with local melon farming, which had already gained fame, that created a specific fame for the region, which was now perceived as a special granary. This was very clearly reflected in the development of the region in the 18th century. The reformist Tsar Peter the Great paid special attention to the economic prosperity of Astrakhan. For him, this region was of particular value, not only as a strategic outpost for advancing Russia further to the south, but also as a land with amazing opportunities provided by Nature. This is evidenced by the fact that on October 26, 1720², Peter the Great issued a personal decree

¹ This example shows the hybrid character of the Astrakhan foodscape. As in any frontier regions it was a system brought to life due to efforts of many ethnic groups. Among others who brought their efforts for the development of viticulture in the Region were French, German, Hungarian (Serbian), etc.

² It was the third town, after Moscow (1706) and St. Petersburg (1714), where the Apothecary Garden was organized.

to the Astrakhan governor A. Volynsky: “On the establishment in Astrakhan of an Apothecary vegetable garden, vineyards and a horse factory of Persian breeds”:

1. To establish the Apothecary Garden in Astrakhan, also to make a greenhouse and keep trees and herbs brought from Persia (which cannot winter in the town), and to prepare herbs which are needed for the Apothecary, to take from St. Petersburg to Astrakhan an Apothecary and a gardener;
2. The grapes from the vineyards in Astrakhan should be used to make hot wine, but instead of that, they have vineyards in Grebeny; and for this reason, you send there those masters who are in Astrakhan for testing, and that they search convenient places there, and they should test the grapes for wine;
3. To grow plants for sheep breeding in Astrakhan, for which to take some of those sheep shepherds from Schlesia; also to send for sheep in the mountains and other places;
4. Buy buffalos in Persia, 15 pairs;
5. Try out fish for sale abroad; thus, salt fresh sturgeon, cut into sections and put in small barrels; cook another in brine and pour vinegar, also try to pour with fish oil and cork in the same barrels. These experiments should be done both from sturgeon and sevryug. Try to salt the herring that are in the Caspian Sea (PSZRI, 1830, p. 251).

Of course, not all points of this decree were directly related to food, but in any case they almost all influenced the alimentary landscape by introducing new food-stuffs into the region, and by setting the population on the readiness to use these new products. After all, it was not only provincial officials who were engaged in gardens by order of the emperor. Other townspeople and even peasants began to actively engage in gardening as well.

This was largely due to the direct and purposeful policy of the state and local authorities, who viewed the city as a very important resource base:

This semi-Asiatic and important commercial town, which, next to St. Petersburg and Mosco, ranks among the first cities of the Russian Empire (Pallas, 1812, p. 210).

In the second half of the 18 century, the development of viticulture and wine-making reached its peak. It was connected primarily with the activities of Austro-Hungarian lieutenant I. Parobich, who arrived in Astrakhan in 1734 specifically to engage in viticulture and horticulture. In 1752 he was appointed the director of the Astrakhan Garden Office, after which this direction began to develop even more actively.

The work of this remarkable person deserves special attention because he combined an inquisitive mind with commercial acumen. He was a man of special persistence and diligence. Thanks to his efforts, Astrakhan began to grow many subtropical plants, which seemed to have no place in the harsh and rather dry climate of the region.

With summer temperatures above + 40 C and winter temperatures as low as - 30 C, it is difficult to preserve certain plants not only during harsh winters, but also during dry, hot summer days under the scorching sun. At the same time,

in Astrakhan, oranges, lemons, tangerines, figs, and even pineapples are beginning to be grown. Every year the Garden Office begins to send to St. Petersburg for the tsar's table more than 70 pineapples. Astrakhan gardeners also tried to grow sesame, saffron, peanuts, olives, and many other plants.

The development of viticulture and horticulture in the region was the result not only of the activities of Ivan Parobich and other foreigners invited to work in Astrakhan, but also quite insightful leadership of the governor of the region Beketov (1763-1780), who had done much in favor of developing this area.

Not far from Astrakhan, he improved a huge territory, drained the swamps, and poured an artificial island, creating a well-appointed place for his estate. On this territory he engaged in viticulture and horticulture.

In his estate in the village of Cherepakha (Beketovka) he created a unique garden and vineyards where more than 30 varieties of grapes were grown. As P. Pallas reported, his wine cellars contained 14,000 buckets of wine for sale:

The oldest, which is preserved for the use of the pro-praetor's family, is said to be the produce of the year 1772, from the Hungarian vine, and resembles a good French wine. It is, however, easily perceptible that this wine is indebted for its preservation to a proportionate addition of brandy. Next to this, the wine made in 1774, of grapes without stones, called Kyshmish, deserves the preference (Pallas, 1812, p. 238).

But it was not only good grapes and wonderful wine that made Beketov's estate famous. Here the inquisitive governor tried to introduce many new plants. There were even attempts to acclimatize sugarcane. For this purpose, he brought sugar cane from Persia (Mazandaran). The difficulty was that the cane does not tolerate harsh winters. To avoid the consequences of harsh winters, it was planted at the bottom of a lake that dried up in summer. In winter, the roots would have been covered by a layer of water and ice. But the winter that year was so harsh that the ice on the lake froze almost a meter thick, and the roots became frozen.

A similar attempt to acclimatize sugarcane was made by Dmitry Agathi, director of the General People's School. D. Agathi was a member of foreign academies, a naturalist and traveler. It is hard to say how his experiments would have ended, but he died in 1795.

In the second half of the 18th century the spirit of innovation prevailed in the region. During this period, many talented explorers lived and worked here. Among them was the German traveler and naturalist Samuel George Gottlieb Gmelin, who visited Astrakhan twice, and even lived there for some time (Gmelin, 2012). He left us a detailed description of the foodscape of the region.

In Astrakhan gardens all kinds of culinary plants, lettuce, beets, carrots, turnips, radishes, mustard, cucumbers, pumpkins, watermelons are planted, and of European vegetables potatoes, ground apples and artichokes are missing, but in their place they plant a great many badynzhanu or demianki¹ and capsicums. (Gmelin, 1777, p. 162).

¹ Badynzhanu or demianki – eggplants, modern Rus. 'baklazhan'. The name 'demianki' usually is used among the Ukrainians, but it is still in use among the inhabitants of Astrakhan.

Vendors at the local bazaar sold a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, as well as nuts, some of which were locally grown and some imported from Persia or the Caucasus:

Walnuts, a thousand of which are sold for less than one ruble; some confections, and a few dried fruits, such as dates, Kyshmish, or small raisins without stones; large raisins; pistachio nuts; almonds; Sheptala, or dried peaches; prunes; Alitsha¹, or small tartish prunes; fresh and dried truffles of Baku, garlic, and rice (Pallas, 1812, p. 227)

Astrakhan became a center of international trade, so locals have a variety of agricultural products from Central Asia, Persia, the Caucasus and Transcaucasia, and even India. A special role in trade with these countries was played by the Bukhara, Persian and Indian Merchant's Courts.

An active cultural exchange takes place here. Some of the agricultural products eventually begin to be produced here as well. Probably the tradition of growing some fruit trees dates back to the Khazar era. This is evidenced by local varieties of apples, apricots, plums, peaches, quinces, cherry plums (*alycha*), etc.

Among the fruits and vegetables grown in the region, Astrakhan apples deserve special attention. According to numerous references by old residents, Astrakhan was not only a fish town, but also an apple town². World famous Astrakhan varieties grew here: *Yandykovsky*, as well as *Astrakhan white* and *Astrakhan red*. Astrakhan white and Astrakhan red became especially popular in the world. They are grown in Europe, America and even Africa.

It is generally believed (Leroy, p. 79) that the first mention of the Astrakhan white allegedly dates back to 1653 and was made by the French agronomist Nicolas de Bonnefons in his "French Gardener" (Bonnefons, 1654). I couldn't find any mention of these apples in the 1654 edition. But in it, Bonnefons among different apple varieties mentions "ice apple", which is often synonymous with "Astrakhan white". Even in Sweden this apple was already known in the 18th century. (Eneroth, p. 1).

It does not matter when exactly Astrakhan apple varieties turned out to be in demand in the West, the important fact is that the popularity of some Astrakhan varieties has gone far beyond the region and reached international level.

Local apricots and peaches were also very popular and could compete with similar products from Central Asia or Persia. In addition, dried fruits and even vegetables were constantly sold in the markets of Astrakhan: plums, apricots, dried melons, etc. Dried wild apricots, or as the Astrakhan people called them *kuryaga*, were brought from the Caucasus. They were gathered on the slopes of the mountains in Dagestan. *Kuryaga* was very sour, since these apricots were harvested relatively unripe.

¹ Pallas means *alycha* or cherry plums (*Prunus cerasifera*).

² Even at the beginning of the 20th century Astrakhan orchards occupied huge areas. The Nachalovsky or Cherepashinsky Orchards stretched for 10 km. from the village of Nachalovo to the Old Cemetery on the modern Sofia Perovskaya Street.

In Astrakhan, dried apricots were called *uryuk*, which, as a rule, were brought from Central Asia, since local varieties of apricots were not subject to drying. Although they were also very sweet.

The already mentioned watermelons and melons were also the pride of the region. As pointed out by Gmelin, the province was also famous for its onions. So Krasny Yar County, located in the east of the region, became the center of onion production in the 18th century. Despite the fact that traditionally this area was considered as cattle breeding, most of the population of the county spent a lot of time on vegetable farming. As Gmelin points out, even the poorest could make a living from selling onions, which here reached the enormous size of two male fists (Gmelin, V. 2, pp. 108-109). S. Pallas tells us the same about the Krasny Yar County:

The gardens of the inhabitants are particularly celebrated for delicious autumnal pears, called Duli, and for their apples, among which are a remarkably large species, and another which they call Mamutofskye yabloki, or the Boukharian sort. The gardens likewise produce a very large species of white onion, which is much esteemed. (Pallas, 1812, p. 124).

It is noteworthy that for some time Astrakhan even turns out to be a kind of center for the production of chillies and cloves, which are exported to Azerbaijan and Persia, and even India (Hasanov, p. 61; Magomedov & Magaramov, p. 107).

To the minds of many Russians, Astrakhan is a fairyland. A land of plenty! A.S. Pushkin's friend, the famous Russian person of *belles lettres* Count Vladimir Alexandrovich Sollogub, dedicated poems to their common acquaintance Sophia Timiryazeva – a wife of Astrakhan Governor Timiryazev – on her departure to Astrakhan:

Where the watermelon is native,
Where the pineapple is ripening,
My student muse
Blesses you now (Sollogub, p. 545).

But do we really have to emphasize the fish and agricultural specificity of the region? We should not forget that the word Astrakhan itself is also a term referring to animal husbandry. And although it defines the type of sheep skins, we should not forget that there is no skin without meat. In addition to sheep breeding, the province also developed horse breeding, camel breeding, pig breeding, and cattle breeding. Although, apart from sheep breeding, other branches of livestock breeding have not brought special fame to the Astrakhan inhabitants, but they should not be disregarded. Severe climatic conditions did not allow to keep dairy cows or bulls. They required additional care, which was impossible for a variety of reasons.

The inhabitants of Astrakhan also received meat from seasonal hunting: wild boar, wild antelope (saiga), hares, poultry – all this was in sufficient quantity. Not infrequently, seasonal hunting for some animals was rather barbaric in nature. But this type of hunting developed as far back as the Middle Ages. Local herdsmen

were actively engaged in seasonal saiga hunting, especially during its winter and spring migrations, when numerous herds of this animal made seasonal migrations (Davydov, Yeskov, Rozhkov, & Kiryakulov, p. 45) from east to west or from north to south, often crossing the Volga River on ice in winter, which provided additional opportunities for hunting animals that lost mobility on slippery ice or fell through the river ice (Danilkin, p. 69).

Similar, almost poaching methods of hunting were common for hunting hares during the floods, when there were few dry places left and the hares would gather on small uplands:

If for their safety they choose such high places, above which the hollow water never rises, then they are waited on those places by knowledgeable hunters, and in this case they catch these animals alive by hand; therefore the hare hunt is at no other time more glorious than in this (Gmelin, p. 115-116)

It was not uncommon for captured hares to be placed in pits dug near houses. They could be kept there for quite a long time, consumed as needed. They were fed with grass, hay, and food scraps.

A special role was also played by seasonal hunting of game birds, which were abundant in the Volga delta. In some cases a good hunter had no difficulty in shooting various ducks, geese and other wildfowl. In the 16th-17th centuries falconry and hawk hunting were widespread in the region. However, in the 18th century. it was coming to naught. In the first half of the 18th century, there was a "Poultry yard" in Astrakhan, where different birds were brought, they were over-exposed and then sent to St. Petersburg and Moscow. A significant number of birds were hunting birds. As a rule, such birds were part of gifts to foreign sovereigns and nobles.

In general, in addition to game, a variety of "gifts of nature" were commonplace in the markets of the town. Capers grew in abundance on the numerous hills of the region, water chestnut (*Trapa natans*) – *chilim* – was numerous in the rivers, blackberries grew along the banks.

Rural residents from downstream villages brought chilim in the fall, usually already peeled and boiled. But sometimes the chilim nuts were simply chopped in half, leaving a seed inside the shell. Often *chilim* was used to make a tasty porridge¹.

In the 40s of the 17th century Kalmyks came from Western Mongolia and added to the population of Astrakhan region. And at the very beginning of the 19th century, Kazakhs moved here. Some ethnic groups ceased to play a significant role in the territory of the Gubernia, while others increased in importance. In some cases, the distinction between certain ethnic groups became increasingly thin, and at some point it was no longer possible to fix these differences. It is true that in some cases some ethnic food traditions became region-wide, retaining their ethnic affiliation in the name, as was the case with "the Kalmyk tea"

¹ To date, chilim has been put in the List of endangered species, so its collection is prohibited by law.

(*Kalmytsky chai*). This name implied that the tea was made from pressed green tea with milk. In some cases, tea was salted and lard was added. Black pepper and nutmeg could also be added to the tea.

But it was not only ethnic variety that distinguished the province. Social diversity was also characteristic of Astrakhan, since for a very long period the region was also a center for peasant migration. Peasants from various parts of Russia fled here. Here they could find work relatively easily, since the authorities were somewhat lenient about hiring such people for a number of industries in the region. Above mentioned I. Parobich always hired such people for his orchards. They could also be hired by the fish parties (*vataga*) that fished in the delta or in the Sea for fish or sea mammals. All kinds of gangs also often gave shelter to fugitive peasants.

The famous Russian publicist, poet, one of the active members of the Slavophile movement Aksakov, going to Astrakhan with the revision in 1844, heard in Saratov how one of the coachmen called Astrakhan “Razbaluy-gorod” (Indulge-town), and the province was named “People’s”.

This name (Razbaluy) has a lot of meaning – it is a town of indulgence, but also a city of debauchery – asocial or rambunctious behavior. A well-deserved name: Repeatedly, Astrakhan has been the center of social unrest, uprisings, and outright discontent with the policies of the authorities.

At the same time, it would be unfair to think that Astrakhan was a town of easy life. The already mentioned Aksakov found the town very expensive:

For the first week we are going to eat lean food. I have a feeling that I will get tired of this already boring caviar. You can have this stuff cheap and excellent, but the high price and bad quality of other food are unbearable. You can hardly have any good beef, veal, or fresh lamb, but you can have salty grapes. Not only edibles, but Asian goods, which I had promised to send to any friend, imagining that they were here as cheap as cucumbers, are terribly expensive. (Aksakov, p. 70)

Of course, Aksakov finds the reason for this situation in the town fairly easily:

All the best are sent to Moscow, and in Astrakhan proper trade in these goods is poor (p. 70).

This characteristic indicates that the region has largely constructed its economic and cultural life with a focus on the production and supply of products to the central regions and the capital. It is this that brings maximum benefit to certain strata of the region: first and foremost, the fishmongers and merchants:

Today I heard Prince Gagarin's cook complaining about the ignorance of the local people in the art of cooking: you can't get beef here during fasting, calves are killed almost just born, one potato costs a penny, some roots a hryvnia, and you can't get live fish, because the sterlet caught in winter is immediately frozen and sent to the upper provinces; there is almost no Chukhon butter, a bottle of milk costs 40 kopecks, almonds, which should be cheaper here, are more expensive. That's the price of local supplies! (p. 70)

The conclusions of the great Ukrainian poet T. Shevchenko are equally categorical and even dramatically negative:

What a place Astrakhan is! What a port town! There was not a single tavern where I could have a meal, nor was there anything to say about a hotel apartment. I went into one of the so-called hotels on Gerap Spit (on Astrakhan's Golden Horn) and asked for something to eat. And the stained fidgety waiter answered me that anything you want, everything is there, except for tea. But it turned out that there was nothing but tea, not even a usual fish soup. This is in Astrakhan, in a town which feeds half of the vast Russian kingdom with sturgeon! (Shevchenko, pp. 140-141)

In general, the overall picture of Astrakhan's foodways is very contradictory. Visitors to the town leave a wide variety of impressions of their visit. In contrast to the negative comments about the town made by Taras Shevchenko, the French traveler A. Hommaire de Hell has very flattering impressions of her visit to Astrakhan. By the way, she visits a Kalmyk prince, and even there she finds *haute cuisine*:

The cookery, which was half Russian, half French, left us nothing to desire as regarded the choice or the savour of the dishes. Every thing was served up in silver, and the Avines of France and Spain, champagne especially, were supplied in princely profusion. Many toasts were given, foremost among which were those in honour of the Emperor of Russia and the King of the French (Hell, p. 174).

In general, Adèle de Hell was astonished at the influence of French culture on Russian culture. Practically all members of high society spoke French, knew French literature well and regularly received newspapers and magazines from Paris or Brussels. They were aware of fashion trends, and were knowledgeable of certain aspects of life in France better than some French (Hell, p. 184). Aksakov, who was in Astrakhan a few years after the Frenchwoman visited the town, also speaks of French trends in local cuisine:

Lunch is good, a French one, and therefore unsatisfactory for me, especially since there are no breakfasts and dinners. So I drink tea three times a day (p. 68).

Aksakov, a Slavophile, is disgusted by everything foreign, so the cosmopolitan Astrakhan is alien to him. The abundance of caviar and sevruga soon gets boring, and the original Russian food is lacking on the tables.

In fact, Aksakov, who is fed up with fish, does not realize that ordinary Astrakhan citizens live differently. They do not overeat on sturgeon, although they do eat it, and instead of sturgeon they have small fish on their tables: bream, roach, rudd, sabrefish, etc., which they started to catch actively in the 19th century. It was boiled, fried, and salted. The smell of Astrakhan in the second half of the 19th and in the till 70s of 20th century is a smell of dried fish, hanged on every balcony or windows. The smell of Astrakhan in this period is a smell of this overdried and very salty fish boiled in water with potato. Sometimes it is the only food of some citizens in Astrakhan in the first half of the 20th century.

In the middle of the 19th century the citizens began to salt actively the Caspian herring (*Alosa kessleri*), the blackback, or the black-spined herring or crazy fish – *beshenka*), which previously was used to fertilize the fields or to melt it for fish oil.

In general, there are many new moments in the 19th century in the foodscape of the region. The population stops growing cloves, peppers, but gradually begins to move to the cultivation of tomatoes, which eventually become one of the main agricultural brands of the region along with watermelons. Viticulture is also declining in importance.

From the middle of the 19th century, beer brewing began to emerge in Astrakhan. And here, as with many other aspects of Astrakhan culture, the multi-national character of the Astrakhan people played a special role. The Volga Germans begin to make attempts at beer production. The first to start a brewery in Astrakhan was the pharmacist Maxim E. Gellert, who practically started beer activity at home. In the early 1960s, Peter Weiner moved here from Vladikavkaz and began the brewing business.

Over time Gellert's business was taken over by a rich Astrakhan fisherman, who then sold it for huge money to Weimer's company. In the 70-80s P. Weymer and his sons managed to create a beer empire that supplied beer to a large part of Russia. The Weimers' beer was brought as far as Yaroslavl in Central Russia and practically to the whole territory of Asian Russia. Weimers' warehouses were in all major cities of the Caucasus and Transcaucasia, Dagestan, Merv, Ashkhabad, etc.

The Weimer factory produced more than 10 different kinds of beer, there was even a non-alcoholic beer. The company's products were awarded medals of honor at the World Exhibition in Paris (1900), the Christmas exhibition in Vienna (1904), the International exhibition of healthy food and hygiene in London (1906). In addition to beer, the Weimer breweries also produced mineral water, which was also in demand among the inhabitants of the town and far beyond its borders.

As we can see, in many directions the alimentary landscape of Astrakhan was notable for its exclusivity. This was largely the result of the multi-ethnic character of Astrakhan culture. The frontier character of the city - the abundance of resources, the rapid development of the region's economy, and the initiative and enterprising nature of its inhabitants led to the fact that in many directions Astrakhan was not only not a remote undeveloped provincial city, but represented an economically active boiling city, where a variety of social groups could realize themselves. Even for common workers, life here was much easier than in the rest of Russia:

Fish is plentiful, fruits are also in abundance, and chikhir¹ is cheap – it is difficult after such a luxurious maintenance to return home, where only black bread awaits and even that sometimes mixed in halves with chaff. The most ordinary, common laborer, usually a Kalmyk or a Kirghiz, gets in Astrakhan three pounds of baked rye bread, a pound of Russian millet or wheat flour, and as much fish as he can eat. All other workers are fed even better, receiving white wheat bread, kalachi², and tea as much as they like (Taranov, p. 112).

¹ The term was used to define young and cheap wine.

² Kalach – white bread of twisted form.

Instead of Conclusion: because there is no end of the story

Astrakhan is a Promised Land for many ethnic groups who find their home here, integrate into the local culture, but also enrich it with their traditions. The foodscape of the region has constantly transformed, changing under the influence of many internal and external factors. The region, located at the crossroads of diverse human flows, was a kind of melting pot in which different ingredients were fused. It is fully a hybrid (Burke, 2009), emerging from a multitude of ingredients, and in culinary terms, it is a *pot-pourri* or *olla podrida* – a dish cooked with a great variety of ingredients.

However, the First World War ended this period of development of both the region itself and the culture of its inhabitants. But I will talk about the second stage of the development of the region's alimentary landscape in the next article.

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