







Albanian Gastronomy



ALBANIA
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Introduction

The cuisine of special nations has preserved the culinary antique traditions and at the same time, has enriched them with the experience of the culinary art of the other peoples. The direct geographical and historical adjacency has made it possible for them to have a significant influence on economy, culture and particularly on the lifestyle...





However, apparently, the influences of the culinary art are more sensitive, because the climatic and geographical conditions make it possible for these people to produce the same food products massively.

The tradition of the Albanian cuisine, the traditional and the cultural values, as well as the hospitality of our nation originates from ancient times.

Albania is one of the most ancient countries of Europe and there are tracks of both **oriental and western** cultures and culinary art as a border between the east and the west.

The very favourable climatic conditions of the country create the opportunity for the cultivation of almost all the types of agricultural products. The variety of the vegetables and fruits is particularly of a significant amount. They are a daily-life article and are consumed naturally in the form of separate food, with meat or as canned food.

The favourite vegetables are: tomatoes,

peppers, aubergines, okras, potatoes, cabbage, onion, garlic, bean sprouts, beans, cucumbers, etc. They are most commonly fried and boiled on a low fire as well as baked in an oven.

Among the dishes prepared with pods, the most popular and traditional ones are the beans; they are very delicious cooked in a clay container. They are used to prepare several dishes, cooked with other vegetables or with meat, and in special areas they are used even to prepare pies. The pea and the string beans are also used in delicious dishes.

A series of foods are prepared with the same technology, even though they contain different ingredients. Thereby, the following food groups have been highlighted as they are found in all the peoples of the Balkans: fried cheese and curds, dishes prepared in casseroles, pickles, stuffed grape leaves, steak, chopped steaks, meatballs, etc. Mixtures of vegetables, musaka, meatballs are dishes adapted from the oriental cuisine.

The characteristic form of all the types of food in our country is that they preserve maximally the natural features of the foods that are generally used, their colour and smell.

The olives, which are prepared in different ways and are preferred separately, as well as an addition to several other foods, are particularly favourable. The olives of the region of Berat are used on the table as they are big and have a low percentage of fat.

The olive groves in the region of Vlora, of the coastline of Himara, Borsh and the surroundings of Tirana (Preza, Ndroq) have a high percentage of fat, therefore they are used for the production of natural olive oil. These regions use it even for cooking and also supply entire Albania.

A significant role regarding the quality of food tasting is played by the seasonings and the spices. Our kitchens are characterised by the hot seasonings, spices, sour taste of lemon, tomato, vinegar or yoghurt.



LOCAL FLAVOURS

Even the local aromatic seasonings such as parsley, mender (mint and spearmint), dell, bay leaves, basil, celery, rosemary, etc. are preferable.





The olive groves in Borsh ◀

In the traditional dishes, the hot flavour from the almost inexistent up to the strong spicy one is benefited from the use of garlic or hot pepper. Even the local aromatic seasonings such as parsley, mender (mint and spearmint), dell, bay leaves, basil, celery, rosemary, etc. are preferable. The mixture of different seasonings in one dish is not practised. One spice is preferred for every food, being in harmony with the natural aroma of the main product. The amount of the spices is determined

pursuant to the regional traditions and the individual tastes, therefore their amount is not noted in the recipes but just their use in the relevant dish.

Milk, dairy products and eggs are widely used, being daily food. Yoghurt is an irreplaceable albuminoidal food, with a significant biological value and very good aromatic values and taste. Apart from being consumed naturally, yoghurt is consumed as a supplement for lots of foods, dough and cakes. Another dairy product is

even dhalla (yaran), which is consumed with pleasure through all the seasons, particularly during the hot summer days. The cheese is organized in different types according to the milk from which it is produced. The famous white cheese, particularly the southern one, made from the milk of the sheep has a considerable place in our kitchen.

The variety of the desserts is also very rich. The desserts with milk, creams, fruit juices, the desserts with sherbet (baklava, sheqepare, kadaif), hashuret, syltiash, etc. are used. Also, another common dessert is hallva and hasudja.

Boza, produced mainly in the northern part of the country (Kukes), is very popular. Its raw material is corn and it is used as a refreshing drink during summer.

The abundance of fruits in some seasons makes them preferable as a dessert mainly fresh but even as compost, juice or jam. The favourite fruits are: apples, cherries, peaches, pears, watermelons, melons, figs, grape, lemons, oranges, apricots. The



SWEET WORLD

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Revani Vlore (prepared with flour, eggs, sugar and vanilla) ◀

fruits with a shell like the nuts, almonds, hazelnuts, are consumed as fruits but they are also used in desserts.

Our country has a tradition even in the production of the alcoholic drinks. The traditional alcoholic drink is raki produced from the grape. A very popular and overrated raki is the one produced in the artisanal way from the vineyards in the area of Skrapar and Permet at the southern part of the country. In the areas with a cold climate, such as in Dibra, Korca and Pogradec, even the production of wine from plums (shliva) is popular.

Viniculture and wine production have a very old tradition. The art of wine processing in our country has been popular since antiquity. It flourished at the south-western Balkan coasts three thousand years ago. Illyrians had an ancient tradition in the cultivation of grape and the production of wine. The archaeological findings in Lin (Pogradec), Tepa (Elbasan) and Zgerdhesh (Kruja) refer to the antiquity of the vineyards cultivation.

In these areas, different containers, used for wine, have been found. As the old geographer Straboni would describe Iliria, he would state: *"This country is warm and fertile because it is full of good olive groves and vineyards. The Illyrians used to export wine to Rome in wooden containers"*.

With regard to the development of the Vineyards, there is other evidence such as the coins of Dyrrah and Apollonia as well as the amphora which used to be exploited for the transportation of wine. They were found in the Illyrian graveyards of Çimanka in Kukës, in the Illyrian castle of Xibri (Mat) as well as in the Illyrian town of Gajtan (Shkodra). During the Byzantine ruling (VII-VIII century), the viniculture became the main economic activity, where wine would bring incomes from the export.

Today, in our viniculture, the range of the varieties of grape has increased, creating an opportunity for the production of different types of red and white wines. Among the red wines, we can mention:

- Shesh i zi (Tiranë Durrës),





WINE FOR THREE THOUSAND YEARS

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- Kabërnët and Merlot, (Berat, Lushnje, Përmet, Vlorë etc.), Kallmet (Shkoder Peshkopi), Pino Nero and Mavrud (Leskovik, Shkodër, Lushnje). Among the white wines, the following are mentioned: Shesh i Bardhë (Tirana), Riesling (Durrës) etc.

Among the alcoholic drinks with colours, we may mention Konjaku Skenderbeg, which has won prizes in international competitions.

The geographical position of our country creates the opportunity for the cultivation of all the types of fruits and vegetables and it also favours the variety of the livestock of almost all the types, such as the soft and wild one, including even the variety of the domestic and wild poultry. This is the reason why Albania offers something more and more specific, traditional, part of the daily life, something that is provided through the cuisine of our country in all its regions.







A mixture from Gods

Characteristics of the Albanian cuisine spread
according to the regions of our country





*Eels cooked
in a casserole* ◀

Region of Northern Albania

As the corn is highly cultivated in this area, its flour is used not only as the basic food for bread, but even for the preparation of different traditional salty and sweet dishes

The cold climate of this area makes it possible for every family to have some food stock that is preserved for a long time, such as pasterma (dried meat), stuffed intestine, trahana, jufka, etc., which are used during winter time. These elements are produced in an artisanal way in every house in the north.

Among the most characteristics and commonly used vegetables in the kitchen are the beans, potatoes, cabbage with which different delicious dishes are prepared. The onion and the garlic are highly used. Their arrangement in strings and the drying is characteristic

and a tradition for the families in the mountainous areas, in order for these items not to miss throughout the year.

Among the traditional dishes of this region we can mention: *birjan Peshkopie*, *petulla të Lumës*, *jufkat*, *tavë e Gorës*, *paçe e Kosovës*, *suxhuk i Cjakovës*, *harapash or memëlikë*, *qeshqek with chicken*, *çervish*, *gurabie with corn flour*, *qumështor with corn flour*, *haxhimakulle*, etc. The cuisine of Shkodra has a special place in this region, where among the most popular dishes we can mention: *corba shkodrane*, *meat stew* (ram meat is cooked in little fat and the followings are added: onions, garlic, dried



Harapash qingji (prepared with corn flour and lamb) ◀



Kukës ◀

plums without seeds or pistil, sauce, a little sugar, salt, pepper. Then, it is put on low fire adding water bit by bit until the meat is boiled and a thick unit of stock remains). The richness of this area with salty and sweet waters, as well as the fishing tradition popular since the Illyrian times makes it famous not only for the abundance of the products from these waters but even for the traditional way how they are cooked. The most recognized ones are: *carp in very stew, mullet baked under the tile, stew eel, dried saraga, etc.*

Even the *eggplants stuffed with cheese, parsley and eggs* are widely used and traditional. They do not miss in occasions of family gatherings due to their special taste.

“For the preparation of the latter, the eggplants are selected of an average measure and regular shape, the stalk is removed, they are peeled in some places and then they are cut in the middle per se lengthwise, then they are fried or baked. In a container, the stuffing is prepared with crushed cheese or curd, with finely minced

eggs and a little flour. After they are mixed well, the internal part of the eggplants is stuffed. Then, they are positioned in a row in the casserole and they are baked or fried on the stuffed part. It is served in a plate decorated with tomatoes and parsley”.

We cannot ignore the reserve of Kune-Vanit in the district of Lezha and the surrounding lagoons which are rich in water poultry and wild animals such as: ducks, geese, woodcock, pheasants, cormorants, wild rabbits etc. Their hunting is highly requires for the delicious meat of these wild poultry and animals have, which can be tasted in the restaurants of this area.

The favourable climate for the development of arboriculture, such as the characteristic plum of Dibra, apple, cherry, almond, nuts, etc. creates the opportunity for the production of plum raki (shliva) as well as the production of jams. A special fruit in this region is the pomegranate of Shkodra with big juicy and sweet seeds.



Jufka Dibre ◀





Region of Middle Albania

The variety of the livestock biologically grown in this region is accompanied even with the variety of the domestic poultry (turkey) and the swimming poultry (geese, ducklings, ducks and ducklings)

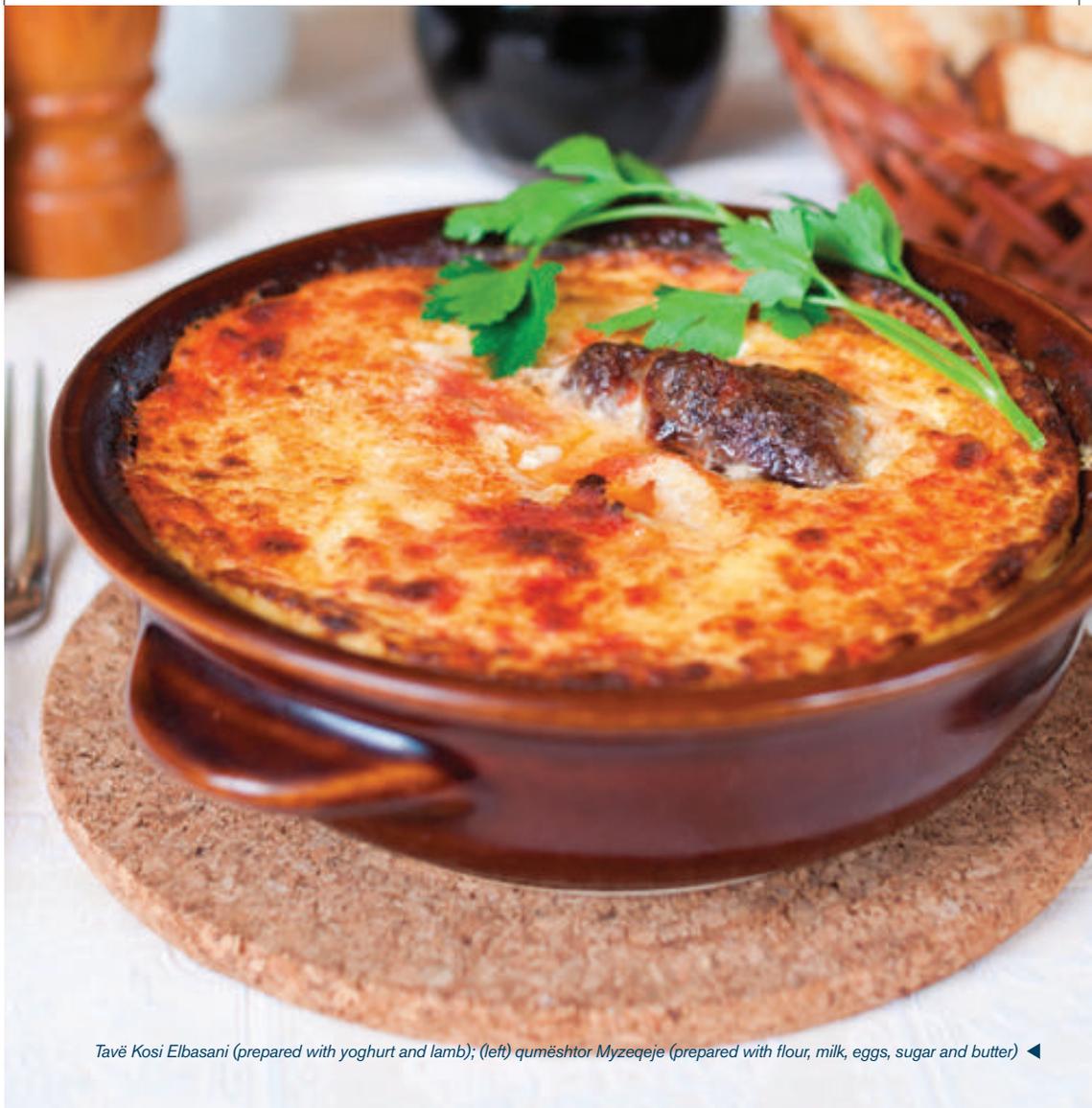
In the region of the forest of Divjaka which lies along the Adriatic coastline, wild poultry and animals grow, including: ducks, wild geese and the wild pig.

Fishing is important as fish that migrate from the sea arrive here, such as: turbot, bass, wrasse, eel and mullet. Traps are used in the canals that connect the lagoon with the sea to catch them. The local and the foreign tourists as well as the daylong visitors, who prefer

to frequent the relaxing nature of this area, cannot leave without enjoying the variety of the fresh fish offered by the surrounding restaurants.

The very appropriate climate and land in this region create the conditions for the cultivation of all the types of vegetables and fruits that are used throughout the country. One of the most special fruits is cornel and cranberries. The broad variety of the raw material is the basis of a rich menu in this





Tavë Kosi Elbasani (prepared with yoghurt and lamb); (left) qumështor Myzeqeje (prepared with flour, milk, eggs, sugar and butter) ◀



Stuffed calf spleen ◀





Lamb with milk ◀

zone.

Among the traditional dishes of this region we can mention: *Elbasani* casserole cream, *Tirana* fried cheese and curd, *pie* with dry pastry dough casting, *turkey* with *pershesh*, *birjan* with milk and rice, *qumështor* *Myzeqeje* (*yshmer*) etc.

Among the traditional dessert is *ballokume* which are typical of Elbasan. They are prepared by the local housewives professionally on the celebration of Summer Day (14th March), but even on the events of family



Ballokume ◀





Turkey from Myzeqe ◀

gatherings. For their preparation, the following ingredients are used: white corn flour sieved finely (we should take 1 kg out of 4-5 kg flour), butter, fine sugar, eggs and lye (sieved ash, boiled in water). The use of the entrails of the ruminants and cattle in the preparation of different dishes and starters is a tradition in this region. A plate with fried livers, kidneys and hearts of the cattle, or lamb head accompanied with grape raki, would impress everyone with their taste.

The tradition of the production of raki, wine (according to the variety of the grape from which it is produced), the juices of non alcoholic fruits and the production of the jams and compote with the fruits that are produced are characteristic for this region.

The region of Berat has plantations with the biggest surface planted with figs. Therefore, for the locals, the preparation of fig jam and gliko (jam) is a tradition. The figs of Kroshnik (Berat) are mentioned for their quality. They are used dried, in strings or buk fiket (minced fig in form of

bread and dried in a clean environment). In this region, the area of Myzeqe is mentioned for breeding the turkeys, consequently it is recognized for the preparation of the *turkey with pershesh* (*small pieces of grain or corn bread*). This traditional specialty is prepared throughout the country but it is more delicious in this area, where all the guests might enjoy the restaurants which are there.

The turkey is cleaned, covered in salt and butter and it is baked completely adding some water in order for the casserole not to be burnt and stock is collected for the pershesh. The scone prepared earlier with grain flour (and water, salt, little oil) or corn bread is separated in small pieces and is left in a container. Then, the bread is mixed on the fire until it becomes a thick unit. When the turkey is served, it is accompanied with the pershesh.



Salad ◀





Region of Southern Albania

Albania is known as an agricultural country, especially this region for the breeding of the ruminants (sheep and goats) based on the many natural pastures and on their extensive growth

The types of the ruminants grown biologically in this area compose the basics of the raw material for the production of dairy products. The characteristic dairies of this region, particularly in Gjirokastra and Delvina are known for the production of the different kinds of soft and tough cheese with a very high quality and very delicious. This assortment but even the cottage cheese (a byproduct of milk or yoghurt) have one of the main positions



in the food menu of the population not only in this region but even in the middle Albania and beyond. This region is popular for the *sheep yoghurt* with a compact consistency that permits us to cut it with a knife.

The climate in the coastal part of this region favours the growth of the citrus and olives. In every family as well as in all the restaurants of this region the olive is served as a starter in the form of a sole salad or accompanied with other vegetables.



White cheese; (left) raki produced from grape ◀



Shqeto Përmeti (prepared with lamb and vegetables) ◀

The tradition of the production of raki, wine, according to the variety of the grape produced in Narta, Skrapar, Permet, Himara, Leskovik, Kelcyre, Pogradec, Delvina is a characteristic for this region. During the random diggings in the village Lokove of Cjirokasra, two big stones were found in the shape of the washtub. They were used to press the grape whose liquid was received from the narrow passage in the form of a canal. Then the liquid was processed in wine or raki. This testifies the tradition of the vinery processing at that

époque when it is said that the wine was used instead of the water.

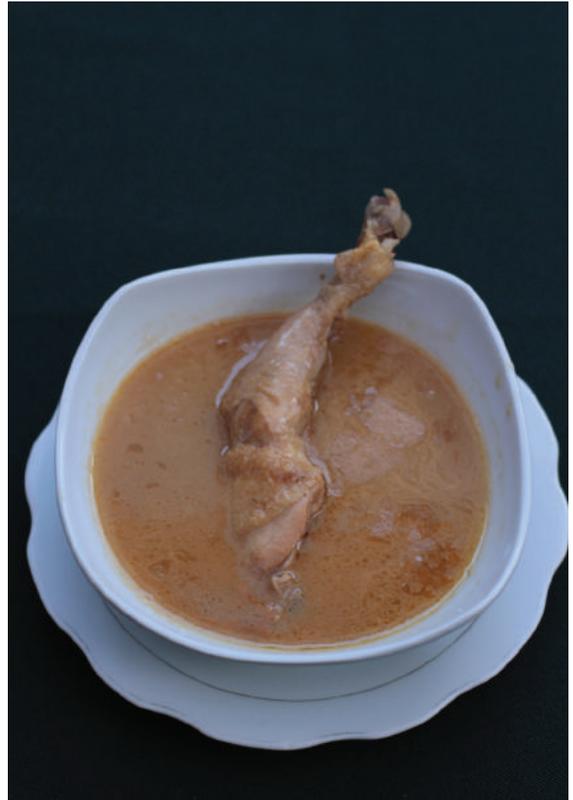
The region of Pogradec is popular for the production of wine or raki personally. Almost every house produces wine pursuant to the recipes inherited generation after generation. The wine is preserved in casks, in cold premises. The wine of Pogradec is soft and aromatic (the aroma of the rose).

Apart from the production of the alcoholic drinks, the production of *rehani* in Skrapar is very popular and traditional. This is a

non-alcoholic drink produced from the liquid of the grape.
Also the preparation of glikos in this region according to the type of the fruits is the tradition of the population in Permet. Among the most special ones is the gliko



of nuts. Furthermore, the production of raki from the mulberry is a characteristic for this zone (Erseke, Leskovik).
The Albanian Riviera lies along the west-southern part of the country, where the combination of the fresh mountainous air with the warmth of the sea makes it the pearl of the touristic destinations of Albania, which are preferable not only for



Rosnica (prepared with chicken, butter, eggs, milk or yoghurt) ◀





Fish with yoghurt ◀



Pie with leeks and cottage cheese ◀

the wonderful climate but even for the very delicious food of this Region. On the way to the Riviera, along the seaside, there are several restaurants which prepare plates whose basis is the fish and just-fished seafood. Among them, the quality and the taste of the shrimps, cuttlefish, squids and mussels is impressive.

Qafa e Llogarase (Neck of Llogara) as the only terrestrial passage towards Riviera is an eating-relaxing station, where the tourists might enjoy the typical cuisine of the region, such as the meat baked in the broach, the warm plate with harapash

(prepared with corn flour) with the entrails of the lambs, jelly with honey and nuts as well as other traditional dishes.

The meat of this area is the most delicious one throughout the country. The approach to the sea and the quality of the pastures give an incomparable taste, particularly to the lamb of Karaburun and to the surrounding highlands. It is prepared in a skewer (an entire lamb) on the ember or in the oven.

Even the pasterma (dried meat) is characteristic for the cold regions of this area. It is tinned meat in dry conditions, cooked with beans and it is used widely not only among the families but it is found even in restaurants.

Other traditional dishes, which are highly preferred even by vegetarians as no types of meat are used: riceballs (qifqi), pie of Lunxhi (koftopite), rice with rosnice (dough prepared with flour, eggs, milk, which are all prepared in dried balls), pie with beans (Korce), fake meatballs with garlic and yoghurt used in the region of Gjirokastra in weddings by the end of eating to digest the food.



THE PREPARATION OF RICEBALLS (QIFQI)

Per 1 kg rice 5 to 6 eggs are necessary.

The cleaned and rinsed rice is boiled in water with salt until it becomes dry rice. Then, it is left to cool mixing it with a wooden spoon. The eggs are added one by one; mint, black grinded pepper and salt are added. The measure for the riceballs is taken with a spoon and then they are fried in olive oil in a frying pan with holes.







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