



Barbara Radziwiłłówna's cuisine: offal and violets

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Zygmunt August's second wife, Barbara Radziwiłłówna, was treated incomparably better by the king than his first wife, Elżbieta. "All the expense and excess to which the king treats his wife is a wonder to all, and arouses general aversion," reported Jan Lang, Emperor Ferdinand Habsburg's envoy, during his visit to Vilnius in 1549.

The account books from the years of King's marriage to Barbara have been preserved in full. They were scrupulously ran by steward Jelitkowski, but, as researchers point out, they are rather disappointing with their monotony of shopping lists throughout the year, which are diversified only rarely with seasonal inclusions - capers, olives or violets, lavender and rose water.

The exceptional thing about Barbara's taste was that she preferred mutton to pork, and her lists show demand for meat from castrated rams, rarely bought by the court. She ate pork rarely, and her officials usually bought specific pieces of meat, not whole animals. Queen Barbara would also order offal - liver, heart, tongue, head meat, tripe and "kruski" - veal tripe and cow's udders. It is not known, however, whether they were purchased for the queen herself or her courtiers. The list of birds consumed at the court is quite diverse: beside farmed poultry, there are many wild species - partridges, hazel grasses, pheasants, wild geese, quails, wild pigeons, waxwings, fieldwings, capercaillies, poisons, chasers, black grouses or garganeys.

The court menu of Radziwiłłówna is even more varied when it comes to fish. The court's earlier account books showed mainly the purchase of herring, while, thanks to Jelitkowski, we know that Barbara valued diversity - such fish as carp, pike, ropes, perch, salmon, trout, burbot, bream, sage, crucian carp, bleed, goby, river barb, grayling or roach were imported for her. The dishes were seasoned with spices and herbs.

The dairy list is quite usual - the court bought milk, butter and new butter, eggs, cheese, cottage cheese as well as cream, from which sometimes the kind of cheese called "małdrzyk" was made. The list of vegetables is rich, but qualitatively it does not differ much from what could be found in earlier records. Januszek-Sieradzka points out that the court purchased many seasonal products, such as radishes, spinach, peas, mushroom (of which ropes were particularly favoured), which were difficult to store, and that gives us a picture of the cuisine preferred by Barbara. Interestingly, it is worth noting that a lot of citrus fruit was bought.

When it comes to sweets, one must guess that they were made in the court kitchens. Only gingerbread and rose candy was bought, though the candy was purchased much less often.

Source: Agnieszka Januszek-Sieradzka "The Kitchens of Queen's court, or Barbara Radziwiłłówna's cuisine" in: Jagiellons and their World