Magiczny Kraków

Kaszka krakowska - from a Tatar yurt to the royal court

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Polish nursery rhyme states that groats are better than the peas, as they don’t give you stomachache. Let’s have a look at kaszka krakowska - white, fine buckwheat - the once popular porridge.

The importance of buckwheat groats in the Polish culinary heritage is evidenced by the fact that Adam Mickiewicz mentions them in the Invocation - next to wheat, rye, clover and spruce cherry - among the plants that shaped the landscape of the homeland he longed for. Few people know that these groats used to be called Tatar in southern Poland, and their appearance in Poland is attributed to the Tatars. This legendary origin is the source of another naïve name: pagan (poganka). Currently, the term 'Tatar-grass' is considered by linguists to be Krakow's regionalism.

As we read in the weekly 'Społem' of 1926 (original spelling) 'Good groats should be white, light yellowish in colour and contain as little flakes as possible. They prepare groats in two ways: grind whilst dry (usually on the borderlands) and grind whilst wet (near Olkusz or Skala)'.

Unburnt, finely peeled buckwheat has a delicate taste and a lot of nutritional value, and is a source of potassium, selenium, iron and B vitamins, magnesium, phosphorus, zinc, copper and manganese, and is easily digestible, so it is often served to children and the sick.

It was also liked by royal families. At the court of Casimir III the Great (1310-1370), buckwheat groats were served in “royal style”, i.e. they were cooked with the egg white. Apparently, this kind of porridge was also one of Anna Jagiellonka's favourite meals.

Cracovian porridge with raisins, called "royal".

Pour 1/2 l of boiling milk with 6 dag of butter and 1/2 of a vanilla pod (cut lengthwise) over 1/4 l of porridge mixed with egg white and then well dried. Cook the porridge over low heat for a while without stirring. When it begins to thicken, bake it in a covered pot for 45 minutes in a moderately hot oven, as the porridge should not get brown during baking. Now whisk four raw yolks with 15 dag of sugar, adding a little bit of lemon zest. Combine the egg yolks with the cooled porridge, add 10-15 dag of raisins. Place the prepared porridge into a richly buttered saucepan (mould) and bake again in a moderately hot oven for about 40 minutes.

Put the baked porridge into a round plate sprinkled with icing sugar and serve for dessert, decorated with cherry jam. The cherry juice can be served separately”.

The buckwheat groats were also served with pork greaves or dried mushrooms or used to as stuffing with meat or dumplings. A recipe for the latter can be found at Monatowa’s cookbook (original spelling)

"Cracovian dumplings.

Soak a glass of fine kaszka krakowska in hot milk, enough to cover it completely; and let it cool down. Then grind it in a pot, adding one by one 5 yolks, a quarter of thick cream, a spoonful of butter and some salt. When the mass is completely smooth, use it as dumplings stuffing”.

Buckwheat groats, along with other groats, were the staple food for the poor, as they grow on poor soils and have been used as a form of soil reclamation.

In magnate cuisine groats are almost absent from the menu. The groats appearing in Polish Baroque cookbooks are usually cookery tricks aimed to enchant the guests with the food which resembles something else - in this context, it is no wonder that the recipes for "brain groats" or "kidney groats” do not contain groats.