

CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE FOOD TRADITIONS OF THE SAKHA PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

The paper emphasizes the importance of studying the traditional Yakut/Sakha food as a historical, sociological, psychological and economic factor in the life of the ethnos.

The Sakha are one of the most ancient Turkic peoples. Throughout many centuries, the Sakha managed to preserve their food traditions. Life in severe conditions and sharp continental climate affected the specific features of the Sakha nutrition. The Turkic dishes of the nomadic peoples were adapted to the conditions of the North under the influence of the local inhabitants. This special feature is characterized by the use of northern fish and berries as part of nutrition, while the traditional northern meal mainly consisted of horse meat and dairy products. Like many other Turkic-Mongolian peoples, the Sakha subdivide all food into white/*үрүҥас* [urung as] (dairy food) and black/*хара* [khara] (meat food). In their cultural tradition, the Sakha would only begin eating the “black” food in winter after butchering cattle/*идэһэ* [ideghe]. In summer, after the national holiday *Ыһыах* [Ykhyakh] and during the haymaking season, the Sakha would eat “white” food and fish. Vegetables and flour were introduced to them later with the coming of the first Russians to the territory.

Key words: food traditions, cultural heritage, Turkic culture, white (dairy) food/urung as, black (meat) food/khara.

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) occupies a fifth of the territory of the Russian Federation, 3.102 million square kilometers. This multinational Russian region has its own ethnic

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specifics. Today, more than 100 nations live in the territory of Yakutia. In the middle of the first millennium, the ancestors of the Evens and Evenkis appeared on the territory of Yakutia. By the XIII century, the Tungus tribes settled along the Vilyui, Olekma and the middle reaches of the Lena. It is supposed that there were several waves of the Turkic tribes' migration to the territory of the modern Yakutia, the last of them occurring in the XIV-XV centuries. The Yakuts (self-designated as Sakha) as an ethnos, was formed in the Middlebasin of the Lena River by the amalgamation of the local paleo-Asiatic tribes and the migrating Turkic tribes, Mongolian Khoris and Tungus.

The spread of animal husbandry caused significant changes in the life of the region. The ancestors of the Yakuts developed crafts — smith craft, gold work, pottery trade — and built permanent homes. By the beginning of the XVII century, the Yakut tribes spread to the basins of the Indigirka and Yana, advancing cattle breeding and horse herding to the Arctic regions of Yakutia.

Throughout their long history, the people of Sakha have developed their own original system of balanced nutrition with rational correlation of all its elements necessary for healthy metabolism. The nutrition style has come about as a result of close interaction with the neighboring peoples.

The importance of food in an ethnos' culture and its social aspect were studied by the first explorers of the Yakut region including A. A. Savin, the first Yakut researcher who studied nutrition systematically. Many rituals, traditions and taboos are connected with food. The Yakuts prefer fatty and rich food, which is explained by the physiology of human body in conditions of the northern nature. Simple, low-calorie food was considered a sign of poverty: *От-мас аһылыктаах* [Ot-mas ahylyktaakh] — lit. They eat grass and trees. Fat and butter were the main elements of Yakut ritual food and were believed to be the best food for gods: *Арыылаахалаадыыннанкүндүлээтилэр, саамалкымыһыннайахтуттулар* [Aryylaakh alaadyynnan kunduleetiler, saamal kymyhynan aiakh tuttular] — They were treated to pancakes with butter and koumiss. Baianaiu, the hunt god, was treated to fatty dishes; Aiyhyt, the fertility goddess, liked the fatty porridge *саламаат* [salamaat].

The representation of food (*ас, аһылык* [as, ahylyk]), the concept of nutrition (*ас- үөл* [as-uel]) are among the most important concepts in the worldview of the Sakha. They are represented by a colorful play of words and images. The proverbs reflect the attitude of the ancient people of Sakha towards this concept, underlying the whole existence of the people. The concept of food is often represented through its connection with home, pleasure, feasts, awards for good work, and labor [1]. Difficult living conditions of the Sakha left their traces in

the language. The basis of all the different cultures is known to contain the systems of values which manifest themselves in proverbs; the linguistic analysis of these proverbs helps to objectively distinguish some of the values in the cultures under comparison[2: 13].

- Үчүгэй асхаалыабынаабай,* lit. Instead of letting tasty food rot, it
куһабаһанисхааллын [Utchugei as is better for the bad stomach to suffer.
кһаалыаһунааһар, куһаһан is кһаалын].
- Аскаабыйах, үлэбэүгүсүчүгэй* [Aska lit. The fewer eaters the better, the
аһуиакһ, улегһе угус утчугеи] more workers the better.
- Халлаантана түһүөдиэн айаххынатыма* lit. Do not wait for food to fall down
 [Khallaantan as tuhyio dien aiakhkhyn from the sky.
атыма].
- Үлэни хаһаныма, аһы хаһаан* [Uleni lit. Do not store work, store food.
кһаһаанума, аһу кһаһаан].
- Үлэлээ, оччо бооллөнүөң* [Ulelee, lit. Work, and you will have food.
отччогһо иоллионуйон].
- Сылдыбыт сыйаһылыктаах,* lit. The one who works, eats meat; the
утуй бутуу аһылыктаах [Syldiubyt sya one who sleeps is only left with water.
аһулыктаакһ, утуибут уу аһулыктаакһ].
- Или хамнаатабына, айах хамныыр* [Ilii lit. If the hand moves, the mouth will
кһамнаатаһуна, айах кһамнуыр] chew.
- Хоһуункиһи хоргуйбат* [Khohuun kihi lit. A person full of energy will never
кһоргуибат] starve.
- Ким сүрэбэлдыир, олиһэаччыктыыр* lit. The lazy ones always hear their
 [Kim suregheldiir, ol ihe atchtchyktyyr] stomach growl. (Appeared in the
 Soviet period.)
- Ким үлэлээбэт, ол аһаабат* lit. Those who do not work, do not eat
 [Kimuleleebet, olahaabat] either. (Appeared in the Soviet
 period.)
- Үлэ аһатар, сүрэбэ суох ытатар* lit. Work feeds you, while doing
 [Uleahatar, sureghesuokhytatar] nothing makes you cry later.
 (Appeared in the Soviet period.)
- Алаады арылааба үчүгэй, үлэ* lit. It is good when oladii are with
көхтөөбө ордук butter and work is with people.

[Alaadiyaryyilaaghautchugei,
ulekiokhtioghioorduk].

In 1886, A. I. Shimansky, who studied the traditions of everyday life of the peoples of Yakutia, emphasized that, along with other reasons, food played a significant role in the Yakuts' struggle against the severe nature of the Lensky region. The national cuisine is determined by the food that helps the Sakha in their hard work. The Yakut food is very nourishing and nutritious, absolutely healthy and tasty as well. For this reason, the people of the North still keep to their traditional nutrition, passing on the recipes to the next generations, enriching and improving the national food and drinks. For a long time, the Sakha people have been laying their tables with various meat, fish, dairy dishes with plants and herbs [3: 10].

R. K. Maak, the researcher of the traditional way of life of the Sakha living in the Vilyusky region, noted the great significance of the Yakut food, which has a positive effect on human health. The people's food, customs and the way of life affect their health condition to a greater extent than the physical properties of the environment. Among the factors listed above, food plays the most significant role [4: 61]. In his research, he also noted that sour milk *map* [tar] plays the main role in the local people's nutrition.

In 1842-1845, A. F. Middendorf organized an academic expedition to Yakutia. Later, remembering and carefully listing all the Yakut dishes that he had tried, he called *salamat* "a divine dish, the best food to please one's tongue and stomach" [5: 109]. V. L. Seroshevsky was also very impressed by this dish made of butter and flour, describing it as a wedding meal, the food of powerful spirits, rich people, sick people, and women in labor [6: 714]. Throughout the centuries, *salamat* has always been a unique and favored dish, served during special occasion meals. In addition, Middendorf gave a detailed description of making the thick drink *yopə* [uiore]—pine sap — and wrote that it tasted "exceptionally nice" [6: 109].

The research publications of the pre-revolutionary period give detailed descriptions of different ways of making and eating traditional Yakut dishes. Dozens of different dishes and drinks can be made from milk. For example, I. A. Khudyakov colorfully describes cooking methods for 33 different dishes [7].

Professor M. A. Tyrylgin notes that with the coming of the Sakha, the northern nutrition style underwent significant changes. Before the Yakuts came, this vast region was inhabited by 30 northern peoples, yet their nutrition did not include milk, cream, sour cream, butter, cottage cheese, or any other dairy products, koumiss, tar, beef, horse meat, or sap flour. Having improved their fishing tools, the Sakha greatly expanded the variety of fish in their nutrition as well [8].

S. I. Nikolaev (Somogotto), an ethnographer, describes the Yakut cuisine as multilayered, which makes it unique. It consists of the cuisines of the Yakut-speaking, Turkic-speaking, Tungus-speaking peoples, with Samoyedic layers and, finally, elements borrowed from the Russian cuisine[8].

In fact, with the coming of the Russians to the Yakut land, the local nutrition has changed and expanded greatly; people started growing wheat and potatoes; moreover, Russian *оладьи* [oladii] made from wheat flour have become an inseparable part of the traditional Yakut cuisine. The daily food of the old times, which consisted of horse ribs, belly bacon [khas], guts [kharta], liver, milk and cream foam, whipped cream, koumiss, salted fish, stroganina (sliced frozen fish), is returning to the traditional Yakut cuisine and is now considered to be delicatessen. These meals, which are very popular, are served at all festive events (weddings, anniversaries and other important occasions). Moreover, treating guests to some national meals is an important part of hospitality.

Since 1957, the Yakut cuisine has been experiencing a true Renaissance in the foodservice industry. The initiative of the Suntar region's cooks to revive the traditional food was supported by their colleagues from Nyurba and Ytyk-Kyuel, and the menus of cafeterias included *salamat*, *көрчэх* [kerchekh] (whipped cream), *суорам* [suorat] (sour milk), koumiss, *хаан* [khaan] (blood sausage), *ойоҕос* [oiogos] (dishes made of colt ribs), Yakut soup, etc.[8]. In 1975, a brochure entitled "Yakut national meals" was published. It was created by *Kholbos*, a Yakut Republican Consumers Union and the Ministry of Trade of the Yakut Autonomous Soviet Social Republic (ASSR)[8].

I. I. Tarabakhov, an honored worker of the Yakut ASSR and honored trade worker of the Russian Federation, made a huge contribution to the professional description and systemization of the Yakut recipes that had been long forgotten. He combined the recipes in his book entitled *Эностуолуңсахалыыастара* [En ostuolun sakhalyu astara] — Yakut food on your table [9]. In the post-Soviet period at the end of the 1980s — the beginning of the 1990s, the work on reviving, developing and promoting the traditional culture moved to a new level. The popularization of cultural heritage gained a new quality and goal; high-qualified young experts were actively engaged into the process of bringing the best traditions of the Sakha into life. During this period, nutrition as cultural heritage of the Sakha became a research topic. In 1989, a research seminar was held devoted to the problems of preserving, developing and popularizing the folklore of the Sakha. K. D. Utkin, E. N. Bokova, B. F. Neustroyev, V. D. Pinigina, M. N. Gabysheva, and I. I. Tarbakhov — distinguished representatives of science and culture — took part in this seminar. In 1992, the Yakut

television began broadcasting a series of shows called *Тарбаховталбаастарынтаабырыннара* [Tarbakhov talba astaryn taabyrynnara] (lit. The secrets of Tarabakhov's magic kitchen). Since gaining sovereignty, Yakutia has undergone a stage of true rebirth of its national self-identity. The Yakut language has been recognized as a government language together with Russian. Schools have started teaching Yakut national culture, national book printing has gained popularity, etc. As one of the signs of the national culture revival serves the decision of the first president of the republic, M. E. Nikolaev, to open the first national cuisine restaurant *Tygyn Darkhan*. In 2005, the Vice-President of the republic A. K. Akimov and the Chair of the State Trading, Material and Technical Resources Committee R. I. Fedorov organized a very important event in the attempt to generalize the experience in restoring and popularizing healthy nutrition. This was a conference devoted to social nutrition in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), its status, trends of development, and problems; it marked the 10th anniversary of the *Tygyn Darkhan* restaurant. Many distinguished citizens and scholars of Yakutia took part in this event [10: pp. 41-43].

The biggest achievement of this Conference was the publication of fundamental works by the outstanding Yakut ethnographers, such as A. A. Savvin, S. N. Nikolaev-Somogotto, I. I. Tarabakhov.

URUNG AS — WHITE (DAIRY) FOOD

Urung as, or white (dairy) food plays a significant role in the Yakut nutrition. Travelers and researchers that visited Yakutia left good descriptions their dairy food. They, first of all, named the special features of the main Yakut drink of the warriors — **koumiss**. This drink was first mentioned in the memoirs of Isbrand Ides and Adam Brand, who described koumiss as a kind of vodka made from milk, which the Yakuts usually drink during *Ыһыах* [ysyakh] (local festivals)[11]. V. L. Seroshevsky, who gave a thorough description of the Yakut way of life, called koumiss a drink which stirred appetite and filled people up with vital energy. According to him, young koumiss got into your nose because of a high concentration of carbon dioxide, and it made you slightly drunk, but not for long. It wore out quickly, got completely digested; it enhanced the blood circulation and strengthened all the other natural processes in the human body. Along with horse meat, it remained a delicatessen for the rich people and it was praised in songs as the food of the heroes. Not very long ago, koumiss used to be a very significant part of the Yakut nutrition. In 1896, Seroshevsky also noted that the local population preferred their traditional food to the Russian food. He emphasized that the elderly people of the time, like their ancestors, did not like the Russian food — tea, bread and sugar. They preferred the natural Yakut food — mare's milk and

koumiss. They said that a person that drank them became strong and energetic[6].

Many researchers point out that the Yakuts can feed solely on koumiss all summer, because it is very high-calorie. Koumiss has a special place among the ritual dishes as a beverage that symbolizes divine grace. Only pure men used to be allowed to drink it during festivals. For a long time, people who had participated in funerals could not touch koumiss vessels for a while, as koumiss was considered to be the food for the most senior gods Aiyu. For a slightest violation of the sacred rituals and taboos, gods could punish the whole family.

Koumiss is called differently in different languages. In Turkic languages, it is represented by a word of the same origin; cf. the Yakut *кымыс*[kymys], the Tuvian, Kirghiz, Kazakh and Bashkir *хымыс*[khymys], the Kara-Kalpakian *хмыз*[khmyz]. The drink has a different name in the Buryat and Mongol languages — *сэргээ*[serge].

The descriptions and data provided by A. A. Savvin and M. A. Poryadin show that in the past, the Yakuts made three different types of koumiss:

(1) *Көйүүкымыс, көөнньүүкымыскөйүргэн*[kioiuu kymys] or [kionnyu kymys koiurghen]—ripe strong koumiss with a larger concentration of alcohol and carbon dioxide. When consumed in large amounts, it might cause light drunkenness.

(2) *Саамалкымыс*[saamal kymys]— fresh, short-brewed koumiss.

(3) *Саамал кымыс*[khara kymys]—koumiss made without adding butter, cream or cow milk during fermentation. Back in the old days, people used to add cream or boiled butter to koumiss before serving it. This way of serving was called *арах*[arakh]. Sometimes koumiss is also made of cow milk, but the Yakuts do not call it koumiss, there is a different word for it — *быппах* or *быыппах*[byppakh] or [byyppakh][12].

The ritual porridge **salamaat** was used to gain favor of all the gods of the Yakut pantheon. It is made of flower sautéed in butter, which is later diluted with cream. Various kinds of salamaat are known, one of the most widespread is *Айыыһытсаламаата*[Aiyyhyt salamaata] — the salamaat of Aiyykhyt, the goddess of fertility. It was the food for the goddess, and also was given to women right after giving birth. *Уруусаламаата* [uruu salamaata] — wedding salamaat — was served during weddings, and special attention was paid to the process of cooking it. It was believed that if the wedding salamaat came out good at the first attempt, the marriage was going to be long and happy.

Суорат[suorat] is a special Yakut type of sour dairy products. It resembles the Kazakh ayran, Russian varenets (clotted cream), or Ukrainian ryazhenka (fermented baked milk), but it is quite different from all those drinks. Other dairy products are added into suorat and this gave it an additional name of *тума* [tuma], which stands for condiment. Thus, when speaking of

suorat with tuma, one would need to add the name of the condiment. For instance, suorat with tuma made of barley porridge or suorat with sour cream tuma and so on. When edible plants and berries were added to suorat, the name of it was completely changed in some regions of Yakutia. Such suorat was called *аҕараан* [agharaan]. The Turkmens have the same name for sour milk without any plant condiments. Some Turkic peoples call it ayran. The following plants were added as condiment into suorat.

(1) *Кииһилэ* [kihile]— sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*). (2) *Хааллаайыото* or *истиһи* [khallaayyoto] or [istii]— angelica (*Angelica silvestris*). (3) *Кирүэн* [kirien]— a Yakut variation of wild horseradish (*Armoracia sisymbroides*); it was added into suorat in small amounts, and only its young leaves were used. (4) *Аакхта* [aakhta]— pieplant (*Rheum*), only the young sprouts of this plant were used. (5) *Сардаана* [sardaana]— candlestick lily (*Lilium dahuricum*), only its bulb was used. Suorat with candlestick lily was considered to be one of the semi-delicatessen. (6) *Моңуо* [monguo]— a variety of lily (*Lilium martagon*); only the bulb of this plant was used in suorat. The lily bulbs were gathered in early spring or autumn. (7) *Унньуула, күөлаһа, or анаҕаһын* [unnuula], [kuol aha], or [anaghahyn]— different names for the same plant called susak or susatok by the Russians of Siberia (*Butomus umbellatus*). It was first crushed in a mortar to make flour, and then added to suorat. (8) *Кубааһылыга* [kuba ahylyga] — cattail (*Typhalatifolia*); its flour and young roots were mixed into suorat. (9) *Ымыйах* [ymyiakh]— burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*); its roots cut into small crumbs were added into suorat.

Сүүмэх [suumekh] was made from suorat. To make it, suorat was poured into a hair-sieve and after a few hours, when all the whey was sieved out, what was left was suumekh — a dense cheesy substance.

Тар [tar] is a variety of sour milk stored for the future. Tar was always stored in a cold cellar in birch-bark vessels or wooden tubs. There are several versions of the Yakut tar: (1) pure tar without any additives; (2) tar with berries, sugarless jam made of red and black currant, huckleberry, blueberry, or brier berries used as a mixture to this tar; (3) tar with roots and herbs.

Бөлөнөх [byolyonyokh] is Yakut curdled milk. It was not cooked intentionally being an accidental result of non-boiled milk getting sour.

Күөрчэх [kuertchekh] is a typical northern dish made of overchilled cream that is in a nearly frozen state. If the temperature is slightly higher, regardless of the skills and efforts, kuorchekh cannot be made. Kuorchekh is called differently in different parts of Yakutia, here are some of the names: *дагда* [dagda], *көппөкү* [көппөкү], *көппөөкү* [көппөөкү], *морюос* [moruos]. The last name seems to belong to the Russian old-timers

who spoke Yakut, possibly they were the Russians of the Russian Ustie (a village in the valley of the Indigirka River of Yakutia). V. L. Seroshevsky wrote about one of the types of kuorcekh (kyoppyoyoku), which resembled fresh whipped cream, “a very tasty drink” made of Arctic raspberry and wild strawberry boiled with cream and crushed into a creamy substance using a whisk. The berries turned the substance into a dense sweet-scented drink, which could truly be called “Yakut chocolate” [6].

Сардааналаахкөппөкү[sardanalakh keoppeoku] is a dish which consists of fresh cream, whipped together with candlestick lily. Tarkoppoku koppoku is “a piece of the best tar whipped in milk and puffed up with a special whisk”, — a description given by I. A. Khudyakov [7].

“Yakut women are skilled in making whipped cream (kuertchekh)”, wrote R. K. Maak. In order to make whipped cream, there was a whole set of whisks of different shapes and forms in the household. The whipping was done very fast, and it was usually performed in a cellar, sitting on ice; moreover, in order to speed up the process, women added some ashes. Mixed with berries, whipped cream is called *отонноохкөрчяx*[otonnookh kuertchekh][4].

The description of dishes in the Dictionary of the Yakut Language by E. K. Pekarsky is very important for restoring ancient recipes. According to this dictionary, *күөрчэх*[kuertchekh](cf. Abak. Tat. korchik— a felt spindle for making sweet foam inboiled milk) is (1) a whisk for whipping cream (*ытык*[ytyk]); round-shaped flat whisk; (2) milk foam made by whipping and adding ashes; sweet whipped cream made with a whisk, (3) Yakut cream (dagda), to which sometimes crushed candlestick lily or berries were added (otonnokh kuertchekh). “This dish is considered to be a delicatessen, and it is served to very special guests” (13: 1320). Dagda:(1) whipped cream made using a whisk, Yakut cream (kuertchekh); (2) dessert made of water (cream?) and milk, which is fermented with the help of a whisk [13: 662].

Moruos (cf. Rus. moroz = frost) is a dish which consists of a combination of frozen and crushed tar (milk that was fermented over the summer), with skimmed, or, preferably, not skimmed milk; it is mixed using a whisk [13: 1594].

Үрүмэ[yurume] is a very difficult dish to make, it is also a delicatessen. In order to make it, Yakut pot makers designed special low and wide clay pots. Yurumeliterally means foam, that is, a thin layer of froth that is formed on the surface of milk heated for a long time.

There were other sour dairy products, such *асуэдьэзэй*[iyedzhegey] cottage cheese, *хойуннарыйлыбытүүт*[khoyunnaryllybyt yut] curdy milk, and milk with susak (flowering rush, *Butomus umbellatus*).

Чохоон [tchokhon] is called differently in different regions of Yakutia. In Central Yakutia, it is called chokhon, in the Viluy region it is called *көбүөр* [kyebyuyer] and *бөһүүкэ* [byehuke]. Chokhon is one of the oldest and most interesting Yakut dishes. Despite the popularity of this dish, in the 1950s it almost disappeared, and only recently the local expert chefs have started to cook it again.

Итир дээхүүт [itirdeekh uut] is milk with beef abdominal fat. Pieces of the fat were put into boiling milk to make this dish.

Отонноохсүөзэй [otonnookh syuegey] — local berries with sour cream or cream; mashed blueberry or cowberry was mixed with sour cream or fresh cream and served.

Сугуннаах, отонноохүүт [sugunnakh] or [otonnokh yut] is cold milk mixed with blueberry and cowberry. Milk is boiled with roebuck berry and served cold.

Viluy agharaan is tar or suorat mixed with berries. In the past, berries that were put into tar were first boiled in water. Nowadays, this dish is prepared slightly differently, without boiling the berries first.

Өңүр эстээхүүт [yengyurgetekh yut] is prepared by whipping boiled milk with a whisk. Then, the white and the yolk of a chicken egg are poured slowly into boiling milk. The result is milk with egg flakes.

Food is a language of ethnic culture, and it has its own symbolism. It is demonstrated, for example, in oneiromancy — interpretation of dreams. Dreaming of milk products, “the white food” is a sign of wealth, gain and well-being, the more, the better. But if butter or chokhon don’t beat well, and milk or cream turn sour quickly, they are clear signs of the intrusion of dark forces — *абааһы* [abaahy].

Unlike many other cultures where it is habitual to talk during a meal, the Sakha culture praises silent meals. It is supposedly connected with a large amount of game and fish in meals and, therefore, the danger to choke. The ritual gathering for a meal, the order of dishes, the taboos on different food depending on sex and age are all specific ethnic features of the Sakha. The ritual meals have special significance at crucial moments of people’s lives. They mostly consist of the “white food”, but in most important occasions, cattle were butchered, which are the source of the “black food”.

KHARA — BLACK (MEAT) FOOD

Khara, or black (meat) food plays a significant role in the traditional meals of the nomadic people living in severe climatic conditions.

Koumiss, a white food dish, was the first important dish in sacred rituals. The second important food product was horse meat of the “black food”. Horse meat was cooked at

celebrations as well as funerals and commemorative rituals; a horse — *хоолдуга* [khoolduga] — was slaughtered and buried together with the deceased. In the past, the Yakuts rarely ate meat; it was used as sacrifice food in the times of crisis, when the life-or-death issues were being solved.

Meat dishes have a special place in the Yakut cuisine and food traditions. Their popularity is self-evident: they are rich in vitamins, nutritious, and they have a remarkable ability to revive strength. For a long time, the Yakuts ate the meat of wild animals and fowl that inhabited their rich forested lands. Elk, deer and hare meat were considered to be special delicatessen.

Apart from ritual and sacramental, food had other common everyday meanings; some kinds of food were appropriate, others were forbidden, especially certain parts of game or fish. Among food rules, the dos and don'ts for pregnant women and children stand out. For example, it was forbidden for pregnant women to eat bear meat as it could lead to the child's having a bad temper. The kids who hadn't yet started to speak were forbidden to be given crucian tongue, which was otherwise considered a delicatessen, as the child could grow mute. Kids could not eat tongue tips, or they would become quarrelsome and cantankerous. Eating tail tips could result in profligacy. For many reasons, burbot, coot, gull, loon meat was tabooed for pregnant women. Yet, hunting and fishing, game and fish were very important in the Sakha's diet.

The years of drought, when hunters did not have much luck, were the hardest for the Yakuts. There were objective reasons as well as natural and climatic conditions that forced the human population to struggle for survival and to always keep cattle. Throughout the centuries, a unique breed of a Yakut cow and horse has been developed by adapting to the severe climate.

The Yakut cuisine has its own equivalents of soups and second course dishes. The Yakuts have the following types of soup, which have their own names in the language: *сүлүмахмин* [sulumakh min], which is a broth, and *сэлиэйдээхмин* [selieideekh min]. This kind of soup appeared later, when flour was introduced to the Yakut culture; the name of the soup reflects its Russian origin. *Seliei* is an adapted Russian word for “jelly” which originally comes from the French “gelée”. Most Yakut soups are cooked of meat products. For example, *хааннаахмин* [khannakh min] is made of wild reindeer or elk blood, which is added to broth. *Исүөрэ* [is yuyore] is made of cattle pluck. After a careful washing, heart, liver, guts, kidneys, tripe, and lungs of domestic animals were cut into small pieces, mixed and boiled, adding flour and onions. *Чоҕочу* [tchoghotchu] is made of pieces of horse or beef liver carefully wrapped into a layer of abdominal fat resembling a small pasty. The edges of the fat layer are kept together with a thin rod, and finally choghochu is boiled quickly in broth.

The Yakuts are avid hunters, and use all kinds of meat in their dishes. The names of these dishes retain the names of the animals used in preparing them. For example, **туллык[tulluk]** is a dish made of snow bunting birds which are called tulluk in Yakut. To simplify the process of plucking feathers and skin, the birds are frozen first and after that fried on a pan.

In the Yakut culture, there are many beliefs and taboos connected with eating bear meat. Meals with bear meat would turn into a full scale show. People would pretend that a raven was eating the bear meat, and they would imitate the cry of a raven. The bear's paw was stewed or fried as one piece and served on a large plate to the hunter himself or to a special guest. This dish is one of the most ancient hunting ritual dishes; to cut the paw is forbidden. In the past, this meal was served to young hunters as their first trophy.

Луорпакх[luorpakh] is a dish made of bear meat which is first stewed. Then, it is cut into small pieces, mixed with an equal amount of boiled bear's guts, poured with rendered abdominal fat of the bear and boiled; served hot together with the fat. Luorpakh is used during the ceremonial semi-ritual lunch after a lucky bear hunt. The same is done with elk meat and fat. **Elk lips** is a hunter's delicatessen, along with reindeer tongue. They are eaten both stewed and fried.

Duck meat is cooked in many different ways. **Куссаламаат [kus salamaat]** is duck pluck, stewed and cut into small pieces, poured over with warm duck fat, mixed and served. **North Yakutian sausage** is made of cleaned stomach or skin of large fish (taimen, burbot or others); it is further stuffed with stewed meat pieces of wild ducks and geese, covered with boiled fat and tied up.

The Yakuts make use of all body parts of homestead animals. For instance, a dish called **мэйиу[meyii]** is made of cattle brain fried with fat and onions, served only hot. **Сэмсэ[semse]** (Yakut: 'addition, supplement'[14: 367]) is a dish with small pieces of meat and onion rolled into a layer of abdominal fat; the edges of the layer are folded up several times and pierced with a rod. **Симиу[simii]** is a type of sausage made of meat pieces mixed with wild onions and garlic together with abdominal fat, stuffed into a horse or beef gut and boiled. **North Yakutian муоманай[muomanay]** is made of stewed bowels covered with boiled fat. **Этсаламаат [et salamaat]** is made of stewed and dried meat cut into small pieces and fried in melted fat. This meal is common among the northern Yakuts. **Central Yakutian хаан[khaan]** is a blood sausage which is made of fat guts of homestead animals. Different types of blood sausages are called differently: **харта[kharta]** (made of horse's large gut), **быысас[byysas]** (made of cattle's large gut). When the guts are fat-free, some abdominal fat is cut into small pieces and added to the sausage together with the blood. Unlike khaan, north

Yakutian **субай** [subay] is made not of fresh blood sausage but of blood that has been left overnight. **Табахаана**[taba khaana] is made of reindeer blood, poured into a clean reindeer tripe. **Хаанбутугас**[khaan butugas] is a mixture of abdominal fat (cut into small pieces and dried) with blood; it is stewed in small amounts of water on a pan. Green onion, pepper and salt are used as condiments. **Таал**[taal] is made of spleen, which is stuffed with a little abdominal fat previously cut into small pieces. Then, fresh blood is poured into it, seasoned with pepper and green onion. Next, it is tied up in the same way as other types of blood sausages. Taal is served only hot, right after it is prepared. In the past, the spleen sausage could only be eaten by the elderly people. It was a forbidden meal for all the young people. The taboo came from superstitious beliefs that if a young man or woman tries it, then in the most important moments of their lives (during hunting or in everyday life) they would be hit by a pain in the spleen.

In the Yakut cuisine, there are some analogs of hot and cold snacks, many of which are prepared using meat products. **Чооңку**[tchongku] is considered to be one of the meat delicatessen of the north. It is bone marrow from the shin or the hip bone of elk, domestic and wild reindeer.

Horse meat for the Yakuts is a product of first priority. **Силии**[siliï] is made of pipe bonemarrow of horses or cattle. **Көмүрүө**[keumurue] is chunked heads of horse pipe bones; many people like to chew and suck out its limp, loose and spongy part. **Хаха**[khaga] is horse visceral fat, **саал**[saal] is horse chine fat, both are served salted or frozen. **Сынныытүөс**[synnjy tues] is frozen chest gristle of a colt, which is chunked up into small pieces with a hatchet or any other sharp tool. This mince-like substance is mixed with small pieces of frozen khaga and colt chest fat. **Быар**[byar] is colt liver which was usually served with salt, raw or frozen, as a cold snack. **Horse stroganina** was made of frozen horsemeat, which was cut into thin slices and served with onion, pepper and vinegar. Stroganina made of fat horse ribs had a special name — **ойоҕос**[oyoghos]. Later, the Yakuts started to boil, smoke and force oyoghos. **Yakutian horsemeat roll** is made of the meat of the back and chest parts of horses and colts. **Шашлык**[shashlyk], **үтүллүбүт**[utullubut], **саллыбыт итир** [sallybyt itir] are the dishes made of local sorts of meat fried on hot coals.

BALYK AS FISH FOOD

Fishing for the Yakuts is a source of many rituals and taboos, which are still respected. Crucian fishing is a popular and widely spread type of fishing, very precious for the Sakha. In the past, for example, a person who had participated in a funeral ceremony was considered **кирдээх** [kirdeekh] — dirty for 40 days, and was not allowed to fish. Yakutia is the only place

on earth that boasts a statue of crucian (*собо* [sobo]).

Балыкас[balyk as] — **fish dishes**— became a part of the nutrition culture with the migration to the north. The Yakuts of the central region ate fish only as a supplement to meat and dairy food, whereas the population of the northern and Viluy regions used fish as the main source of nutrition. River crucian, gudgeon, sterlet, omul, broad whiting and dogfish were typical for the northern Yakut nutrition. The Yakuts, as well as other peoples, mastered different kinds of cooking fish—salt-drying, smoke-drying, drying on wooden sticks. Apart from this, the Viluy region Yakuts knew the technology of souring fish —**сыма**[symba], and they were called *сымаһыттар*[symahyttar]— syma eaters. This dish is similar to the Vietnamese smelly soured fish sauce. I. G. Vasiliev writes that a properly prepared syma is healthy, rich in vitamins and high-calorie [8].

Fish was used to make first and second course dishes. **Балыкминэ**[balyk mine], common fish soup, was made using perch, sterlet and taimen heads. There are many fish proverbs in Yakut: *Эһилги бил баһын мин сиэм диэбиккэдылы* [Ehiilgi bil bahyn min siem diebikkedyly] — lit. As if there was an agreement that he would eat a fish soup from the head of taimen next year.

Sobo, or crucian, has a significant place in the worldview of the Yakuts. Having being the main source of protein for the poor farmers in the past, it is still popular today. The fishing ceremony has many traditions and taboos. Winter fishing for crucians turns into a real festival. The Kobiay region crucians are especially popular. The Yakuts make **хоһуламмыт мин** [khohulammyt min] — double fish soup with crucians. Large and fat crucians do not require long cooking time. If overcooked, they may fall apart. For this reason, crucian fish soup is usually quite light. First, a regular fish soup is cooked using small crucians or minnows, and once it is ready, large and fat crucians are added. **Stuffed crucians** are made by stuffing them with crucian caviar and onions. Fried crucians are prepared without taking out the insides.

Истэх бутугаһа [istekh butugaha] is made of caviar; the caviar is mashed in a plate with a spoon, salted, and boiled in a small amount of fish broth whitened with milk. **Балхай**[balkhai] is made of dog-fish heads, caviar and bowels in a small amount of water. **Бүтэй балык**[butey balyk] is prepared using fresh fish fillet and caviar; first of all, mince is made by mashing the ingredients in a traditional arctic mortar. This mince, seasoned with salt, pepper and onion (or garlic), is stuffed into fish skin. **Үтүмэх**[utumekh] is prepared by kneading small fish into dough while it is still hot after frying on a grilling stick. Next, the dough is rolled into balls and fried on a pan — the utumekh is ready. **Былаабыт**[bylaabyt]

is made of boiled fish which is fried after removing the bones. Next, the crispy fish is mashed to a grain-like texture; hot fish fat is added, and served hot. **Чэлээнэй [tcheleeny]** is made of fish fillet; it is mashed together with a small amount of salt and green onion and rolled into balls. **Талаха [talakha]** is a gourmet kebab of small sterlets. The Yakuts also make kebab of river fish. **Бааркы [barky]** are fish toasts made of sun-dried Pacific salmon fried in boiling fish fat. **Бөтөҕө [beuteugheu], кюочука [kuotchuka] оркюорумаан [kuorumaan]**, are prepared of well-washed, chopped insides of big fish, seasoned with green onion and pepper and boiled in a small amount of water. This meal is served as second course, hot, covered with boiled fish fat. **Fish in ashes** is uneviscerated fish cooked by burying in hot ashes of a bonfire.

Cold fish snacks are very popular. First of all, it is **stroganina**, a cold fish snack made of thin slices of freshly frozen fish. The fish should be frozen immediately after it was caught; it is killed right after catching by hitting it hard on the head; then it is frozen on ice as fast as possible. **Өрөҕө [eureugheu]** is made of the bellies of the fish used to make stroganina. **Тоңистэх [tong istekh]** — frozen caviar, frozen kebab, and frozen maksa (burbot liver) are served frozen.

PLANT FOOD

Plant food is not very popular in the Yakut culture, as evidenced by certain idioms and proverbs. But there are many plants that are used in Yakut dishes despite the popular saying: *Сахаынахбуолбатах, отунанаһаабат* [Sakha ynakh buolbatakh, otunan ahaabat] — A Yakut is not a cow, he does not eat grass. There are few edible plants in Yakutia, A. E. Kulakovsky mentions 19 types of them — wild onion, wild garlic, wood sorrel, wild horseradish, wormwood, candlestick lily, flowering rush, forest grass, etc. [15: 67]. Later, under the influence of the Russian cuisine, the local population started using other plants, adding them as condiments. The names of these plants in Yakut comprise a specific part of the vocabulary.

Киһилэ [kiihile] — **sorrel** (*Rumex acetosa*) grows in damp valleys and pastures. The Yakuts used fresh cut sorrel leaves with milk and sweet suorat. **Angelica** (*Angelica sylvestris*) somewhat resembles cabbage, which is why it is sometimes called *istii* (a phonological adaptation of the Russian *shchi* — cabbage soup). The locals call it *халлаайыото* [khallayy oto]. It is used like common cabbage. **Кэйүгэсүга [keyighes uga]** — **silverweed cinquefoil** (*Potentilla anserina*) was usually collected in autumn, when it finished blooming. Boiled silverweed cinquefoil powder was used as a condiment for milk and tar. The leaves of **кириэн [kirien]** (cf. Rus. khren) — **wild horseradish** (*Armoracia sisymbroides*) — were used as

condiment. When prepared for long-term storage, they were soured with tar. **Wild onion and garlic** are widely spread. They are stored and used in exactly the same way as the cultivated types of these plants. The bulbs of wild lilies— **candlestick lily** (*Lilium dahuricum*), **sardana**, and pink lily (*Lilium martagon*), **моңуо [monuo]**, are widely used. **Flowering rush** (*Butomus umbellatus*) is a water plant called *уннуула* [yunnula], *күөлүһа* [kuol agha], *анаҕаһын* [anagakhyn] in Yakut. In autumn, the Yakuts went out into swampy lakes on boats and with special gaffs pulled out long black roots from the lake bottom. They also collected the roots from the bottom of lakes that went shallow. The valuable roots, collected with so much effort, were washed, dried and mashed by hand until the dark thin bark came off. Cleaned from the bark, the root was further ground into white flour similar to potato starch. Like flowering rush, **кубааһылыга [kuba ahylyga]**, or **бөөтүүртэбиэн [byetur tebien]**— cattail (*Typhalatifolia*) grows in boggy-bottomed lakes. The Yakuts used its roots to make flour. The roots of burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*) are known as *ымыйах* [ymuyakh] in Yakut. They were eaten both raw and boiled (in porridge). Brier and wild strawberry were used to make a tea-like drink. Berries, such as cowberry (*отон* [oton]), bearberry (*уулаахотон* [ulakh oton]), wild strawberry (*дьэдьээн* [djedjen]), blueberry (*сугун* [syugyun]), Arctic raspberry (*ыттиңилэбэ* [yt tingilege]), red currant (*хантаҕас* [khaptaghas]), black currant (*моонньоҕон* [moniogon]), hawthorn berries (*долохуна* [doloikhuna]), bird berry (*харас* [kharas]), fen berry (*моруоска* [moruoska]), raspberry (*биээмийэ* [bieemiye]) were eaten fresh or frozen as well as an additive to dairy products. Unlike other northern peoples, the Yakuts did not eat berries with meat. Also, mushrooms were not used as food.

CONCLUSIONS

The Yakut cuisine can be rightly seen as their cultural heritage. It reflects the history of the ethnos, bears the mark of the climate, and reveals interethnic contacts. It embodies the worldview and beliefs of the people, has ritual and sacred meaning. Apart from simply being the means of sustaining physical life, it has important social functions, becomes a uniting factor in the life of the ethnos.

Yet, for a long time, food and nutrition traditions have not been recognized as part of the cultural heritage of the Yakut people. Now, as the situation has changed, the national recipes need to be revived and studied in two directions. On the one hand, they can broaden our knowledge of the Yakuts' physical, social and spiritual history. On the other hand, nowadays ethnic cuisine functions as an ethno-psychological, social and economic factor, emphasizing

ethnic originality, promoting ethnic identity and developing ethnic tourism. The gourmet dishes of the Yakuts should take their place in gastronomy studies and in restaurant menus.

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