

## TRADITIONAL JEWISH COOKING

Because of the obligation to observe the ritual and dietary laws, the Jewish diet is very complex. Ritual diet includes: (1) regulations about foods that may be consumed, (2) regulations concerning *shehitah* – the ritual slaughtering – and the preparation of meat meals, (3) regulations about the consumption of meat and milk products, and (4) regulations about cooking and running a *kasher* household.

The Jewish diet was strictly defined by laws listed in the *Bible* and later codified in the *Talmud*. These laws about ritually fit or unfit foods are known as *kosher* diet, according to the Hebrew word *kasher*, meaning pure. (The word *kosher*, broadly used today, is, in fact, the Yiddish pronunciation of the Hebrew word *kasher*.)

The dietary laws specify the foods which can be consumed, the manner in which they must be consumed, as well as which foods can be prepared or consumed together:

The laws about fit or unfit foods refer mainly to the use of animal meat, since vegetables and fruit are used without restrictions. It is prohibited to eat pork, but it is allowed to eat animals that have cloven feet and chew the cud. These include cow, sheep and goat. These laws are based upon the biblical verse from the Third book of Moses *Whatever parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud, among the animals, you may it (11:3)*

*Nevertheless among those that chew the cud but does not part the hoof, you shall not eat these: The camel, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof is unclean to you (11:4)*

Other animals which are considered unclean and unfit to eat are listed in the continuation.

The meat of many birds is also forbidden. Poultry is allowed, and the *Bible* explicitly lists all other bird species that are forbidden. (The likely rea-





son being that some among them are predaceous birds whose diet may include infected meat.)

In Chapter 14 of the *Fifth Book of Moses (Deuteronomy)*, it reads as follows:

*You may eat all clean birds, (14:11)*

*But these are the ones that you shall not eat: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, (14:12)*

*The buzzard, the kite, after their kids, (14:13)*

*Every raven after its kind; (14:14).*

Many more forbidden birds are listed in the continuation. Also forbidden are the insects, excluding certain kinds of grasshoppers. This is stated in the *Third Book of Moses*:

*Yet among the winged insects that go on all fours you may eat those which have legs above their feet, with which to leap on the earth. (11:21)*

*Of them you may eat: the locust according to its kind, the bald locust according to its kind, the cricket according to its kind, and the grasshopper according to its kind. (11:22)*

The *Bible* regulates the usage of what „moves in the water and lives in the water” in the following way:

*These you may eat of all that are in the waters. Everything in the waters that has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat. (11:9)*

*But anything in the seas or in the rivers that has not fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and of the living creatures that are in the waters, is an abomination to you (11:10)*

Finally, all fish without scales or fins (such as eel or catfish) and all the molluscs, anthropods, shellfish and reptiles are forbidden.

A second group of laws regulates the manner in which animals fit for eating are slaughtered. These laws are called the *shehitah* (Hebr). *Shehitah* may be performed only by an especially trained person. In our parts, the person who performs the ritual slaughtering of cattle and fowl is known under several different names: *koljič*, ritual *koljič*, *shahter* (Yiddish). The latter was used by the Ashkenazi Jews in Croatia and Vojvodina. The Sephardim used the original Hebrew term *shohet*. In most cases, this title was borne by a specially trained rabbi<sup>1</sup> or a person who did it as his main profession. Such a *shohet*





traveled from one Jewish congregation to another and ritually slaughtered the animals. The poorer congregations used *shohet s* services only for festivals, when it was obligatory to prepare luxurious meals, some of them with meat.

For ritual slaughtering the *shohet* uses special, very sharp knives, the size of which varies according to the size of the animal which is to be slaughtered. The slaughtering is done in a single uninterrupted sweep and it must cause instant death to spare the animal from suffering and enable all the blood to drain from the body. After the animal has been killed, the meat is examined (Hebr., *bedika*) in order to establish whether the animal was healthy. If any kind of abnormality of inner organs is found (such as pleura sealed to the lungs), the meat is considered ritually unfit and not *kosher/kasher*. It has to be established whether any bones are broken or any organs missing. The terms designating ritually unfit meat are *terefe* (Hebrew), *trayf* (Yiddish), and *trefe*, most frequently used in our parts. The colloquial use of the terms *kosher* and *trefe* to designate that something is good and fit, or bad and unfit persists even today.

Finally, one more regulation based on the prohibitions from the *Bible* needs to be mentioned: the removing of the fat, with special reference to abdominal fat. „*It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places, that you eat neither fat nor blood*’ (Leviticus, 3:17). This law is repeated in the *Bible* one more time (Lev. 7:23-25):

*„Say to the people of Israel, You shall eat no fat, of ox, or sheep, or goat;*

*The fat of an animal that dies of itself, and the fat of one that is torn by beasts, may be put to any other use, but on no account shall you eat it;*

*For every person who eats of the fat of an animal of which an offering by fire is made to the Lord shall be cut off from his people.”*

When the meat is found to be fit for eating, all the blood must be removed from the animal's body. This is done by pre-soaking and salting the meat after a prescribed period of time, or by burning certain parts of the animal's body (liver, for instance). These procedures are called *making kasher*, and are also based on the laws from the *Bible* (Lev. 7:26-27):

*Moreover you shall eat no blood whatever, whether of fowl or of animal, in any of your dwellings.*

*Whoever eats any blood, that person shall be cut off from his people.*

A third group of dietary laws has to do with the prohibition to use milk and meat simultaneously. This prohibition is based on Biblical verses from the *Second Book of Moses* (Exodus 23-19):





*The first of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God.*

*You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk. The Second Book of Moses (Exodus 34:26):*

*The first of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God.*

*You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk. The Fifth Book of Moses (Deuteronomy 14:21):*

*You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to the alien who is within your towns, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner; for you are a people holy to the Lord your God.*

*You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.*

The observance of this law complicates substantially the *kosher* cooking, since one has to make sure that one entire meal is made exclusively of dishes made of dairy products, and the other exclusively of dishes with meat. Thus special terminology was developed. The diet which includes dishes made of milk and dairy products is called *milhik* (Yiddish), from the German word *Milch* (milk), while the meat meals are called *fleschig* (Yiddish), from the German word *Fleisch* (meat). There is also the term *pareve* (Hebrew) to designate neutral foods – all vegetables, fish and eggs. In order to avoid mixing milk and meat, orthodox households used separate utensils during the time of preparation.

Consecutive consumption of meat and milk is subject to very strict regulations. After eating a meal with meat one has to wait for at least three hours (among the Jews from Eastern Europe it is six hours) before eating a dish made with milk or butter, such as a piece of cake with *crème*. If food containing milk is consumed first, one does not have to wait to eat meat, but between the two dishes one has to wash one's mouth and eat a piece of bread (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, Jerusalem, Vol. 6 Di-Fo, Dietary Laws, p. 40).

There are quite a few documents about the kosher diet of the Yugoslav Jews. In Zemun, for instance, there existed a location known as the „Butcher's Meadows”, where „facilities for fattening and slaughtering the cattle”, owned by meat merchant Frantz Levy, were erected in 1822 (IAB, ZM, 1822, R 988).

It is clear from a document dated March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1823 that „a useless bull owned by the municipality was sold to meat merchant Frantz Levy for 36 forints” (IAB, ZM, 1823, P447/428).

In his *Short History of Jews of Zemun and on the Border Between Slavonia and Srem*, Dr. Slavko Gavrilovic quotes the following document: „June





1823, Zemun. With reference to the application by Perl Mayer for a permission to open a shop for the sale of kosher wine, brandy and aliments for the local Jews – the local hairsplitters claim that to their knowledge there is no such thing as kosher goods and ask that the application be turned down to avoid growing competition, and the Jewish congregation already has one food store. The application is turned down.”

Documents from the Zemun Archives prove that the Jews from Zemun ate goose liver just like most Ashkenazim did: January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1785. Raphael Salomon, a Jew, and Nikola Lovacic, a shoemaker, exchanged insults during a bargain over one pair of geese. ‘One can’t buy anything anymore because of the damn Jews’. They are to pay a fine of 1 forint each” (Fd 1 Rats Protocolle 1785, Inv. Br. 1706).

In the book *Obitelj* (Family, Zagreb, 1996, p. 90), Vera Deutsch remembers: „My grand-mother’s cooking had to be kosher, but when buying the provisions she would sometimes ‘smuggle’ something. Nevertheless, the food had to be *milhik* and *flašik*. After my grand-father died, and all her children already held jobs, she did not observe the *Sabbath* on Sabbath, but being a practical woman she transferred it to Sunday.”

In the same book, on page 95, Dragan Wollner says: „Because at home we adhered to the *Kashruth*, the utensils for milk and meat were kept separate, and the *shahter*; a certain Mr Reininger, who also slaughtered chicken for *broha*, used to visit us regularly.”

It is difficult to make a distinction between a typically Ashkenazi and a typically Sephardi cuisine in the Balkans. This is due to the fact that Bosnia, the onetime main Sephardi center, used to be under Austro-Hungarian rule and thus subject to the influence from Central Europe.

In contrast to the Ashkenazi cuisine – very Central European and continental – the Sephardi cuisine is Mediterranean. This results from several hundred years of life on the Iberian Peninsula, during which the Sephardim adopted the local way of life, language and customs.<sup>2</sup> However, after they were expelled from Spain, most Sephardim found refuge in the countries under the Ottoman rule and their cooking was once again influenced by the local tradition. Sephardi cuisine is, in fact, a mixture of Mediterranean and oriental cuisine.

Some characteristics of Mediterranean cuisine include: light food and plenty of fish, greens and fruit. Dishes adopted during the life in the countries under the Ottoman rule as of the 16<sup>th</sup> century form a separate segment. These include meat, cheese and vegetable pies – *burikitas*, *pastelikas*; pastry in sugar syrup – *baklava*, *tishpishti*. The most frequently eaten meat is lamb and occasionally beef.







## הי

The use of different aliments in Sephardi and Ashkenazi cuisine results from the geographic differences between the two. The Sephardim use a lot of brinjal, leek, tomato, peppers and cucumber. All the other vegetables are also used, but the above mentioned ones are very typical and used in abundance in the Sephardi cuisine. In the Balkans, their cooking is enriched with baby marrow, pumpkin and spinach.

The main vegetables in the Ashkenazi cuisine are carrot, red beet, potato, cabbage, beans, with barley being the main cereal. They consume a lot of goose meat, smoked in particular, as well as entrails and various peripheral animal parts (stuffed goose neck or stuffed veal intestines) and, particularly, marinated beef. The Ashkenazim used mainly goose cooking fat, in contrast with sunflower and olive oil, used by the Sephardim. Both used margarine to prepare sweets, since it is easier to use than butter. The latter being a dairy product, the dishes prepared with it must not be eaten during the meal if any meat is served.

The Ashkenazim lived all over Eastern Europe and Russia, mostly in poor congregations. Typically, they were unable to afford meat every day of the week, and ate it on *Sabbath* only. A second reason why they did not eat meat during the week was that the poor congregations could not pay a *shahter* (the man who performs the ritual slaughtering of animals). The *shahter* was invited on festivals and special occasions such as weddings, when rich meat soup was enjoyed. Their cooking was dominated by vegetable dishes, dairy products and milk. They consumed a lot of noodles, dumplings, doughnuts, pancakes, strudels and different kinds of bread for solemn occasions and festivals.

Because of the hot climate in which they lived, the Sephardim could not use milk, which turned sour in the heat. Instead, they use yogurt in generous quantities. The Ashkenazim used a lot of spices to make the dishes more savory, with onion and garlic being the most commonly used ones. Garlic in particular became characteristic of the Jewish cooking. Cinnamon, cloves and ginger were generously used in the preparation of sweets. Different kinds of fish typical of each cuisine also reflect the geographic differences. The Sephardi cuisine is dominated by sea fish and carp in the Balkans. The Ashkenazim of Central Europe eat a lot of pike, which they also prepare for the *Sabbath*. Cod, herring and other fish are also consumed.

The Jewish cuisine is best known for its baked products and breads: *matzos* and *halla*. *Halla* is a festive braid-shaped bread made on Saturdays. Variations of *halla* are endless.

*Matzos* (as the Ashkenazim call it) or *matzot* (as called by the Sephardim) is known around the world as the hallmark of both Jewish tradition and Jewish cuisine. „Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the first





day you shall put away leaven out of your houses, for if any one eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel (The Second Book of Moses, Exodus 12:15).

It is difficult to say what exactly the Jewish cuisine borrowed from the Balkan cuisine and vice-versa. To establish that, extensive research would be needed, since the Balkan cuisine already represents a mixture of influences, from oriental in the south, to Central European in Vojvodina and Slavonia. Nevertheless, certain influences are unquestionable. Take *patišpanj*, for instance (in some parts it is called *patishma*): the dialectal version of *pan di Spagno* (Spanish bread), a traditional Sephardi cake, which is used nowadays to designate a certain kind of dough.

The most interesting is the custom of eating and letting the guests help themselves to *slatko* (fruit preserves). It is probably a result of reciprocal influence. In former Yugoslav republics, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Turkey the custom exists among Jews and Christians alike. In Yugoslavia, it is far more common among the Sephardim than among the Ashkenazim.

It seems, however, that *slatko* is typical of the Sephardi cuisine. The Spanish (Ladino) word *dulce*, literally translated into Serbian as *sweet*, is not found in most other languages because what it designates does not exist either. In Bulgarian there is a word *sladko*, and *dulceata* in Romanian. The custom to offer *slatko* to guests was practiced among Greek and Turkish Jews, as described in many books of travel. Unlike in our parts, where it is customary to serve only one flavor of *slatko* at the time, Turkish Jews used to serve two flavors on the same plate. The Jews from Bosnia kept the expression *dulsi*. In Vuk's *Dictionary* from 1852 the word *slatko* in the sense of comestible sweet does not exist. Vuk thinks that the word *pekmez* (Serb., jam) is of Turkish origin and translates it as *syrup*. It seems likely that the Sephardim in Serbia at that time still used the Ladino terms, including the word *dulsi*, and that it was only by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the word *slatko* was accepted for a particular type of food which was then included in the local menu. In *Jewish Regional Cooking* by Richard Haase, in the section dedicated to the Yugoslav Jews, the following two dishes are mentioned:

*Watermelon Slatko* and *Strawberry Plum Slatko*. Obviously, the word *slatko* is not translated into English in the lack of an adequate term.

## Festive Meals

The main Jewish festival, the *Sabbath*, is observed every Saturday to commemorate that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, and as a reminder of the times when the Jews were slaves in Egypt.





The *Sabbath* is observed from sunset on Friday, called *Erev Sabbath*, when the first stars appear in the sky, to nightfall of the following day, *Motzae Sabbath*.

Abstention from any type of work is fundamental to the *Sabbath* observance. Food is therefore prepared on Friday for the two following days. The fact that the work prohibition includes making fire represents a serious problem. Hence the custom to prepare dishes that take long to cook and are kept on low fire, lit before the *Sabbath*, which is then kept by a non-Jew over the holiday.

The festive menu for the *Sabbath* includes several meals with various types of food. It is obligatory to have *Shalosh Seudot* (Hebr., three meals) – a person is thus spared three misfortunes. Some take a fourth, usually light, meal.

On Friday evening – *Erev Sabbath* – festive dinner is prepared in every Jewish family and there is usually one guest at the table (a traveller, or a poor relative, or a student from out of town...) To have a guest for the *Sabbath* dinner is *Mitzva* – deed pleasing to God.

Most poor Jews tried to have a more solemn dinner for the *Sabbath*, a tastier bread and a bit of meat. Before the meal *Kiddush* (Hebr., sanctification) is pronounced, a benediction and a prayer to acknowledge the sanctity of the day and the festival. As a rule, *Kiddush* is pronounced over a cup of wine (or bread, if there is no wine), while a loaf of bread made especially for the occasion must be on the table. The Ashkenazi word for the *Sabbath* bread is *halla* or *barhes*, while the Sephardim call it *pitikas*.

*Sholet* was the traditional Ashkenazi meal served for lunch on Saturdays. Other typical *Sabbath* meals include *ričet* (beans with barley), poultry pieces in aspic, *sholet* eggs (boiled in onion leaves for two days), *gefilte fiš* (stuffed fish) and other fish dishes.

The Sephardi menu for the *Sabbath* was not as strict as the Ashkenazi. On Saturdays, they ate the usual pies, fish and poultry. *Hamin* was the traditional *Sabbath* meal.

Beans are a symbol of the *Sabbath*. Various dishes with beans were eaten on Friday evenings or, more frequently, for lunch on Saturdays. Among the Ashkenazim, the most popular dish with beans was *sholet*. The Sephardi (Ladino) word for beans is *fižon* or *fižonis*, and in Macedonian *fižon di noći di šabat*.

In order to keep the pre-cooked food warm for Saturday, because making fire was forbidden, special furnaces for warming up food were designed. They were usually small, just about the right size for a pot of *sholet* or any other dish. There are many documents to prove that such furnaces were broadly used in Vojvodina and Slavonia. They were usually built inside the house, while the firebox itself was on the outside, so that on Saturdays







a neighbor and a non-Jew could come and check the fire. In some places, in orthodox congregations in particular, the food was warmed up in bakeries. A special Talmudic law allowed the Jews to carry things and walk during the *Sabbath* under certain conditions. Thanks to this provision, the food could be brought home from the baker's.

Many Sephardi families had the furnaces for warming up food or, rather, keeping the food warm. They called them *furnjaja di baru* and *furnjala*. The following is a description of a *furnjala* by a Sephardi Jewish woman from Sarajevo: „*Furnjaja* is a long furnace made of clay, with corrugated iron and ring on the top side. It was fired with logs and coil early in the morning on Friday and kept warm until Sunday. All the dishes, in pots with lids, *pastel*, *burikitas*, *soups*... were always warmed up” (Questionnaire 27). A Sarajevan Jew describes *furnjaja* in the following way: „*Furnjajitja* – furnace, in translation – is made of old pot or tin washbowl, covered with a layer of clay, with little holes on the sides to allow the air to flow” (Questionnaire 10). A document from Banja Luka: „It was called *furnjaja di baru*, a small round furnace made of clay and put on a washbowl containing hot charcoal” (Questionnaire 36), and another one from Žepča: „It looked like a jar made of clay and it preserved heat. It was called *njinja*” (Questionnaire 96).

According to the results from a survey conducted by the Jewish Museum about festivals, when asked whether they used a special tablecloth for *Erev Sabbath* the respondents offered the following answers:

• **Solemn tablecloth for *Sabbath* (p.16)**

105	– Yes	(73%)
28	– No	(19%)
11	– N/A	(8%)
<hr/>		
144		(100%)

• **Cover for bread made for *Sabbath* (p.19)**

99	– Yes	(69%)
33	– No	(23%)
12	– N/A	(8%)
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144		(100%)

• **What was the *Sabbath* bread called (p. 29)**

82	– Barhes	(57%)
50	– Pitikas	(35%)
8	– Halla	(6%)
1	– Other	(1%)
8	– N/A	(6%)





• **Did you have a furnace for warming up food for *Sabbath*?**

117	- No	(81%)
18	- Yes	(13%)
9	- N/A	(6%)
144		(100%)

The annual cycle of Jewish holidays starts off with the Jewish New Year *Rosh Hashanah*, observed on the first and second day of the seventh month – *Tishri* (beginning of September – end of October, according to our calendar).

For the New Year's feast sweets must be prepared as omens of „sweet life” in the coming year. *Barhes* was customarily dipped in honey, *slatko* and sugar. Next to the bowl with honey and *slatko* there was fruit, usually the fruit of the season, eaten for the first time that year: pomegranate<sup>3</sup>, grapes, apples... The Ashkenazim typically prepared *cimes*. The Sephardim from Bitolj recall: „A benediction for *dulse di kalbasa*, *dulse di mansana* and for *mangrana*”.

The Ashkenazim did not consume the apple *slatko*. However, they ate apples dipped in honey and even carrots, as was customary in Subotica.

Head of fish, lamb or fowl was usually eaten for *Rosh Hashanah*, after the following benediction: „Let us be the head and not the tail!” It was also customary not to eat salad, pickled or spicy foods.

For the New Year's dinner, the Sephardim traditionally ate *kalda di gajina*, *gajina kum verduras*, *pastel*, *sungata*, *mina*...

*Yom Kippur* – the Day of Reconciliation, but also the day of atonement, forgiveness, the day without any evil thoughts and the day of total devotion to God. This holiday is marked by very strict fasting – abstention from food and drink during 24 hours.

The fast begins after dinner on the eve of *Yom Kippur* and lasts over the next 24 hours, until the evening on the next day. There were many ways to end it. In most families a cup of coffee and a piece of cake – *patispan* among the Sephardim and a *kuglof* among the Ashkenazim – marked the end of fasting. Others would have a glass of spirit – cognac or brandy. Our survey showed that in Macedonia, Prishtina and Belgrade fasting was ended with *slatko* and a glass of water or lemonade. Some Sarajevan families took a piece of bread with apple *slatko* and a glass of brandy, and in Zvornik a piece of freshly baked bread with plums or grapes. In some places, fasting was ended with a cup of black coffee or *tishpishti*.

The custom known as *kapara* – transferring someone's sins to poultry – is associated with *Yom Kippur*. It comes from ancient times, as far back as the Babylonian period, and it has survived in spite of numerous arguments and strong opposition among the rabbis.





A day before *Yom Kippur*, a white han was turned three times above a woman's head and a white rooster above a man's head and a special prayer was pronounced: „This is my ransom, my replacement, my sacrifice. It will die, and I shall continue on the path of good, peaceful life”. In German, a similar invocation said: *Mir zum Leben ihm zum Tod* (to me for life, to it for death).

• **Was the custom of *kapara* observed in your congregation (p. 76)**

97	- Yes	(67%)
40	- No	(28%)
7	- N/A	(5%)
144		(100%)

After the ritual, the birds were taken to the *shohet*. It was customary in many congregations to offer the meat to poor families after the *kasher* slaughtering. Some would give the meat to the woman who was coming on the *Sabbath* to keep the fire. A Jewish woman from Sarajevo says that her mother used to cook the meat and invite ten poor Jews over for lunch (Questionnaire 41). Many families used half of the meat to make a soup eaten before the fast, and gave the other half to the poor. This soup was very savoury and usually with *kreplah*, dumplings stuffed with meat. The poorest families kept poultry for food.

*Hanukkah* is observed to commemorate the struggle of the Jewish people against the Hellenic conquerors during the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes from the Seleucid dynasty. A Hebrew word, *Hanukkah* means *dedication*, and the name of a holiday is probably an abbreviation of *hanukkat habayit* – dedication of the home, the Temple.

Dishes prepared for *Hanukkah* are inspired with legends about oil. Hence so much fried foods. The Jews of eastern Europe prepared *latkes* – grated potato fritters, in Yemen – *zalaviye*, in Tripoli – *spanzes*, and in modern Israel *sufganiyot* and *levivot* – batter and potato fritters. In the Middle Ages there was a custom to eat various kinds of cheese cakes to commemorate the legend about Judith, who offered cheese to Holofernes so that he would ask for more wine<sup>4</sup>.

The Sephardim in the territory of the former Yugoslavia used to prepare various kinds of halvah – *halva di Hanuka*, *halva de kučara*, *halva preta*, *tišpišti*.

In her study *The Jews of Vardar Macedonia*, Ženi Lebl writes that it was customary in those parts to fatten geese for *Hanukkah*. „They would eat one half and dry the other. *Halva di Hanuka* was prepared at home. They cooked a kind of *zaprška* – wheat flour browned in oil and poured over with dark, boiled sugar – which was then poured into various „moulds”. The more af-





fluent families also prepared *baklava* and *kadaif* and the others *tišpištil*, the so-called poor man's baklava" (1990:393).

The festival of *Tubishvat* is known among the Yugoslav Sephardim under the name of *Hamišoši* or *Frutas*, and *Hamišoser* among the Ashkenazim. In the *Mishna* it is described as the New Year of the Trees and is one of the most joyous. It is observed at home, with the family, in the congregational home or at any of the cultural, art, youth or women's associations. The celebrations organized by „Matatja” or „Omladinsko kolo” in Sarajevo, „Wizo” in Belgrade and „Jarden” in Split, were well-known.

The children were particularly fond of this festival. It was celebrated in the winter, and one had to provide as many kinds of fruit as possible. It was held that each family should come up with at least 15 to 18 kinds of either fresh or dried fruit. Bearing in mind the seasonal restrictions and a very meager winter offer, that was not an easy task. Therefore, it was not uncommon to wrap the fruit in straw during the Autumn or pack it in some other way to make it last until the Winter (Questionnaire 27; according to Bošković, 1985:55-56).

*Purim* is the day of joy and merriment observed on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Adar (March – April) to commemorate the survival of the Jews from the massacre prepared, according to the legend, by Haman, a minister of the Persian king Ahasuerus. The name *Purim* derives from Hebrew word *pur* – lots, dice, because Hainan set the day for massacre by throwing dice (Danon, 1974:43).

The five *Mitzvot* – deeds pleasing to God – to be performed on *Purim* include: fasting before the holiday, attending the public reading of the *Megilles* (Hebr., *Megillot*) at the temple, sending gifts to relatives and friends, the children and the poor, and attending the *Purim* celebration...

„Sending gifts to relatives and friends is the most popular *Purim* custom. The Sephardim called it *platikus di Purim*, after *platikus*, a large plate in which the gifts were sent around. The Ashkenazim called it *šlahmones*, from the Hebrew words *mishloah manot* – sending gifts. The rule says that the gifts have to be sent, not presented in person. Usually the children did that and took much joy in it. Some families sent their gifts by a servant or even by mail. Gifts were exchanged among close relatives, especially in-laws, known among the Sephardim as the *kunsvergus*.

There are more examples. In the orthodox family of Jichak Engl, a merchant from Subotica, it was customary to send gifts – not just money but fabrics too – to the rabbi and the *shohet*. The gifts were wrapped in napkins and carried on plates. The persons receiving the gifts would take them from the plate and put the return gifts in their place. Thus the plates were always full of presents for the children to carry them around, and they were rewarded





for their effort with small coins and sweets. Most frequently, the sweets were exchanged as gifts. No rules applied to what could be sent as a gift and this varied from one congregation to another. Crescents with walnut, *roskitas di alšahu*, were compulsory, and so were macaroons – *čaldikas*, eggs in flaky dough – *fularis*, *patišpanj* with sugar coating – *tišpišti*, nut and honey sweets – *juzlima*, baklava, sweet bread, etc.

In Vojvodina, it was customary to send *hamantašne* (*hamantaschen*) – three-cornered pastries with poppyseeds and nuts, and even more popular was dough with poppyseed and raisins filling, in a form of a child on a cushion and hence called *kindle* and *flodne*... Some would send tropical fruit, a bottle of wine or even a small present” (Bošković, 1985:61-2).

*Pesah* is observed to commemorate the exodus from Egypt and the servitude that preceded it. It is celebrated from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the month of Nisan – eight days in the Diaspora, and seven days in Israel and among the Reform Jews. *Pesah* is also called *Hag ha-aviv* – the Festival of Spring, and *Hag ha-matzot* – the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

The preparations for the festival included searching the home thoroughly – *las Hadrās di Pesah*, as the Sephardim called it – for any trace of leaven<sup>5</sup>. This ritual cleaning of the home, known under the names of *bediqat hametz*, *akužer il hamec*, *boškar bokados* or *hamec batlenen*, was performed by the head of the family before the festival. After the evening prayer, feather duster and cone-shaped paper bag in hand, he would tour the house looking for *hametz*, i.e. the remains of food with leaven. He was followed by his wife, carrying a candle, and children, who found it all very entertaining. Since the house had already been searched and cleaned of all *hametz*, and the ritual still had to be observed, the mother would leave pieces of bread with leaven (usually ten of them) in obvious places and the father would find them and put them in his paper bag using the duster.

*Hametz* thus „found” was burned in the furnace the following morning or destroyed in a fire lit in a schoolyard or in the court of a synagogue. This ritual was called *bi’ur hametz* – burning the *hametz*. „In Belgrade before the First World War, the *hametz* was burned on *Erev Pesah*, and children went from one Jewish home to another from early morning chanting, „A kimar hamec” (We burn hametz). They would then bring bags full of the remains of bread to the synagogue court for the *shamash* (the sexton) to burn them after pronouncing a special benediction. This meant that the homes were clean for the next eight days of the holiday and that bread or any other food with leaven would not be consumed in them. The *Talmud* prescribes that during *Pesah* one must not possess anything *hametz*. Observant merchants, bakers, brewers... symbolically sold their goods to non-Jews. This custom was known as *mehirat*







*hamec* (selling out *hametz*). In every town there was a non-Jew willing to buy up *hametz*. In rabbi's presence, a fictitious contract was signed temporarily dispossessing the owner of the illicit goods. After the holiday was over, the contract was annulled and the owner free to reclaim his belongings.

„*Matza* is a special kind of bread eaten for *Pesah*. It is also called *Lehem oni* – the Bread of Affliction (*The Fifth Book of Moses*, 16:3). The dough for *matza* is made very quickly, without leaven or any other additives, in order to prevent fermentation (...) In the old days, *matza* was a primitive bread. When people realized that dough can ferment, they started making tastier breads. *Matza* remained the bread of the poor, who could not afford to wait for the dough to ferment. It was also suitable for emergency situations, when an unexpected guest would drop by and bread had to be made very quickly” (Danon, 1978:38-9).

During the Talmudic period, *matza* was made every day. It was approximately four fingers thick. In the Middle Ages, its thickness was reduced to one finger. In time, *matza* was getting ever thinner and more brittle (...)

In the beginning of this century, with the invention of the baking machine, the process of making *matzot* was simplified. Still, a small number of pious Jews think that only a hand-made *matza* is *kosher*.

The making of *matzot* occupied an important place in the preparations for *Pesah*. The use of manufactured *matzot* is a recent practice. Historically, *matzot* is made by hand and many authorities in religious matters think to this day that only hand-baked *matzot* is ritually pure, i.e., *kasher shel Pesah*. *Matzot* is made entirely of wheat flour and water. Wheat had to be checked over to make sure that it was completely free of contact with humidity, which causes fermentation. The purest and ritually most suited for the first two festive nights is *matza shemura* or *shmire matzes*. This kind of *matzot* is made of wheat checked over from the moment of harvesting to the actual preparation of the bread. Ordinary *matzot*, which was made of wheat checked over from the moment of milling, was also used, but during the rest of the festive days. Its ritual purity was believed to be slightly lower” (Bošković, 1985:71-2).

Isak Sion wrote that in Štip „*matzes* was baked in volunteer communal work groups. Several Jewish families had small built bakeries at home, just for baking *matzes*. Ten to twenty or more housewives, often related to each other, gathered to collectively bake *matzes*. Every one would supply the necessary quantity of flour *paskual*, milled especially for *Pesah*. They kneaded and baked the *matzes* for ten or more days before the *Pesah*. Apart from *matzes* they also baked *bojus*, small thicker breads made of the same dough” (Sion, 1985).

According to the ritual laws, each household had to have separate utensils for *Pesah* and they also had to be prepared in advance. Since many





households could not afford to abide by this rule, the utensils had to be cleaned of *hametz* in a special manner. The cooking utensils were soaked in boiling water, glass dishes in cold water and fire-resistant utensils were exposed to flames. This procedure was called *kašerovanje* and it was done at home or in public. In the Jewish part of town in Belgrade it was called *skaldar el kovri* (washing in boiling water). „In the yard of the Sarajevo temple, called *Kal grandi*, fires used to be made and housewives used to bring their cooking dishes and the *shamash* turned them inside a cauldron with big wooden spoons. Afterwards, the dishes were rinsed with boiling water. For best washing results, melted lead, caustic soda, red-hot stones or ashes were added to the water in the cauldron. The Ashkenazim had the same custom called *kašern*, and they put red-hot bricks in the cauldrons.

The custom of public *kašerovanje* of the dishes was gradually abandoned. In the period between the two world wars, most housewives fulfilled this obligation at home by boiling the dishes in hot water. In Bihać, for instance, this was called *skaldar los tepsinas*. In some observing families it was not unusual to clean the stove every day before *Pesah* by first scouring it with lye and only when it was completely clean could the fire be lit in it. When the first smoke had come out from it, the stove was considered to be *kasher*” (Bošković, 1985:75).

In Žepče the utensils were tied together with rope before they were soaked in the cauldron, and each utensil was soaked three times.

The main celebration during the *Pesah* is the *seder* evening. It is a moment of family gathering. It is observed according to a very strict ritual prescribed in the *Haggadah*, which explains why *Pesah* and *seder* are celebrated, and describes the ritual. During the ritual, verses from *Haggadah* are read. It was customary in the old days for each family member to have a copy of the book, and the head of the family or any other person acting as the master of the *seder* had to have his copy of the *Haggadah*.

To observe the ritual, a big plate called *kearat Seder* with all the prescribed articles in it has to be on the table. These included:

- *Shalosh matzot* – three pieces of *matzot* covered with white napkin, a symbolic representation of Koen, Levy and Yisrael.
- Two dishes: *zeroa* (chicken wing) and *betza* (egg boiled in onion leaves).
- *Maror* – bitter herbs to remember the bitter life of the ancestors in bondage.
- *Haroset* – to sweeten the bitter herbs, and serve as a symbolic reminder of the mud out of which the Jews made bricks for buildings – *zeher letit*.





- *Karpas* – celery or parsley.
- *Hazareth* – horse radish to be eaten with meat or fish, and vinegar to dip the herbs in.

„*Seder* is guided through by the head of the family. He first reads the usual benediction *Kiddush* which marks the beginning of every festive dinner. After that, all drink from the first of the four glasses of wine prescribed for the evening. The head of the family then washes his hands over a specially prepared washbowl, and that is the so-called *urhatz*. He presents celery or parsley dipped in salt water or vinegar to all participants and they later eat them up while a special benediction is pronounced. The head of the family takes the middle piece of *matzos* from the *seder* plate and breaks it in two pieces, and that is called *yahatz*. One half is returned under the napkin which covers the plate, and the other called *afikoman* is put on the side to be used towards the end of the dinner. *Maggid* marks the beginning of the reading of the *Haggadah* and its commentaries to everyone present. It was not unusual to read it passage by passage, in several languages. The head of the family would start reading in Hebrew, and someone would follow in Ladino, German, Hungarian, Yiddish or Serbo-Croat, depending on the language spoken in the family. The *seder* plate was lifted over the table and the first passage of the *Haggadah*, known as *Ha lahma anya* (This is the bread of misery) was recited. It was customary in many families to then open the front door and keep it open during the *seder*, for it was held that any visitor was welcome to join the celebration on that night.

*Ma nishtana* (Why does this night differ from all other nights) is the common name for the four standard questions, commonly asked by the youngest participant in the *seder*. Their purpose is to explain why the symbolic foods are eaten on than night only, and what the ritual means. The head of the family gives answers to the questions by reading the relevant passages from the *Haggadah*.

The story about the four sages, the parable of four sons and the story about the birth of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt are read. The latter ends with a list of ten plagues that God afflicted upon the Egyptians. At that, it is common to dip a finger in a glass of wine and shake off the drops, as if wanting to say, *Perish the thought!* It is customary in some parts to pour a bit of wine and water in the washbowl at the mention of each of the ten plagues (Papo, 1983:11).

After that, everybody drinks from the second glass of wine. Several other ritual acts precede the serving of the festive dinner.





Firstly, the host washes his hands reciting a benediction, and after him all men at the table do the same. This is called *rahtza*. Then two more benedictions – *motzi* and *matza* – are pronounced over the *matzot*. *Motzi* and *matza* are the names for the upper and the middle piece of *matzot* on the *sefer* plate. The host takes a piece of both, passes them around the table and they are eaten while another benediction is pronounced.

*Maror* is a piece of bitter herb, celery or horse radish dipped in sweet *haroset*. This is eaten before *Hilel's sandwich* – two pieces of *matzot* with horse radish or lettuce. Before the dinner everyone takes a piece of hard-boiled egg dipped in vinegar or salted water – the so-called *shulhan oreh*" (Bošković, 1985:76-7).

***What kind of unleavened bread was eaten for Pesah (p. 130)***

- 130 – Matzot, matzes (90%)
- 59 – Bojus (41%)
- 1 – Matza shemura (10%)
- 2 – N/A (1%)

***How was unleavened bread supplied? (p. 131)***

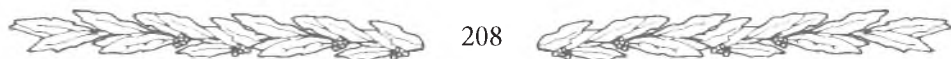
- 69 – Through Jewish community (48%)
- 47 – Purchased from a Jewish bakery (33%)
- 27 – Home-produced (19%)
- 4 – N/A (3%)

***How was kosher wine supplied? (p. 132)***

- 49 – Through Jewish community (34%)
- 38 – Purchased from a shop (26%)
- 1 – Home-produced (11%)
- 41 – N/A/(28%)
- 144 (100%)

*Hag ha-Shavuot* is Festival of Weeks. It is also known as *Hag ha-Qazir* – Harvest Festival, and *Yom ha-Bikkurim* – Day of the First Fruits. In our country it is known as *Šavuot*, *Ševuot*, *Sivo*, *Ševues* or *Švies*. Nowadays it is celebrated for two days, on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Si van, and in Israel on the 6<sup>th</sup> day only. The Talmudic scholars counted that precisely on that day Moses received the *Torah* and the Ten Commandments on the Mount Sinai, and proclaimed that to be the main content of this festival.

In order to mark the original agricultural character of this holiday, the inside of the synagogues are decorated with green leaves, while food and





pastries with milk and dairy products are prepared. It is said that so much milk is used to prepare the festive meal because *Shavuot* is also celebrated in the glory of the *Torah*, compared to „milk and honey” in the *Song of Songs*.

The Sephardim customarily prepared delicacies with rice: *ličikas* (ground rice pudding), *sulač* (sutlijaš, rice pudding), *aroz di leči* (*Magen David*-shaped rice pudding sprinkled with cinnamon). The Ashkenazim made cheese cakes called *milhikes*, *kasedolken* or *delkli*.

Two kinds of pastry prepared for *Shavuot* deserve special mention: *La manu di Moše rabenu* and *Montis di Sinaj* or *Montis di Šavuot*. The first – Hand of Moses – was made in special molds in the shape of a hand. The second – Mount Sinai – looked like a round-shaped bread or a roll with decorative coating, or ornamented with incised designs. They were made of sour dough, often with raisins. The decorations were made of the same dough and had different forms: a staircase, to commemorate Moses' climbing to Sinai; the tablets with the Commandments; tiny cylinder-shaped rolls to represent the *Torah* scrolls, since *Shavuot* is the festival of the *Torah*, and the magical rod with which Moses divided the waters of the Red Sea. And many different birds, the Star of David and so on” (Bošković, 1985:85-6).

A.D.

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<sup>1</sup>Rabbis performed several duties, especially in small congregations. They circumcised male children, i.e., acted as mohels, were present at prayers and acted as cantors (Yiddish term among the Ashkenazim) or hazana (a term used by the Sephardim). Finally, they also performed the ritual slaughtering.

<sup>2</sup>Apart from the Ladino language, romances and proverbs, the Sephardi Jews also imported some dishes.” (Pinto, 1987, p. 30)

<sup>3</sup>Pomegranate is eaten for its numerous seed. The rabbis counted that each pomegranate has 613 seed, which is the exact number of laws to be observed by all practicing Jews – Tairag Mitzvot.

<sup>4</sup>Judith is a Jewish heroine who with courage and ruse helped her people at a crucial moment. Assyrian king Nabuchadnezzar, after conquering Medes, set war upon the Jews. His commander in chief, Holofernes, laid siege to the fortified city of Bethulia. Because of a long siege the city awaited conquest and destruction. Judith, a widow, went to Holofernes' tent and seduced the Assyrian with her beauty and with ruse and made him drink more wine than ever before. Holofernes' inability to resist beauty and wine cost him his head. The Assyrian army, left without the leader, withdrew, and Judith sang a hymn of victory in the glory of the Lord and with her people went to Jerusalem where for three months they celebrated their liberation at the foot of the Temple.

<sup>5</sup>“*Hametz* (Hebr., leaven) is the name used for all food or cooking utensils that are not kosher eshl *Pesah* (kosher for Passover), such as any old dough. According to the *Torah*, it is forbidden to eat or use hametz during the festival. The word *hametz* also designates anything dirty. Any evil drive in man was called *hametz* by the rabbis. Similar terms are also used by medieval Cabalists” (Danon, 1978:44).

