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ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

Topography of Taste: Landmarks of Culinary Identity
in the Romanian Principalities from the Perspective of
Foreign Travellers (Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries)

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Drawing on criticism in food studies (particularly culinary history, anthropology and imagology), but also in spatial studies and geocriticism, history of mentalities, and discourse analysis, this dissertation explores how taste and space are interconnectedly charted in the texts of the voyageurs who crossed the Romanian Principalities in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This interdisciplinary approach fills a part of the gap in current Romanian food cultural studies, in which the relationships between food and ethnic or national identity have not been largely scrutinized in comparison with the abundant international literature. This dissertation examines testimonies regarding food practices in the Romanian Principalities, which refer to Wallachia, Moldavia, Transylvania, but also to Dobrudja and the Danubian-Pontic city-ports. The temporal array starts with the seventeenth century because, in this period, the first exhaustive accounts that approach a large variety of social, political, cultural and religious aspects of the Romanian Principalities were crystalized. The analysis takes into account excerpts from travel writings belonging to sixty-one voyageurs of various professions and nationalities: most of them western Europeans (mainly British, Scottish and Irish), seven east Europeans, one American and one Arabian from the Ottoman Empire. This corpus choice enables the study of the dialogism of voices across time and space.

Travellers' accounts on food practices in the Romanian Principalities function as comprehensive maps which, when superimposed, generate the topographic profile of an emerging culinary identity as a multifaceted construct harmonizing Oriental and Occidental influences. The relationship between food and space is analysed in the light of spatial studies and geocriticism, starting from Robert T. Tally Jr.'s emphasis on the multisensory approaches implied by this critical perspective: "Geocriticism explores, seeks, surveys, digs into, reads, and writes a place: it looks at, listens to, touches, smells, and tastes spaces" (*Geocritical Explorations* 3). In the same line of thinking, Bertrand Westphal argues that geocritical experiences derive from all the senses (134). Sight is not the exclusive guiding sense anymore, which controls walking trajectories. This dissertation examines taste as a cartographic trigger of the textual memory web, in relation to the local spatial matrix. The concept of space is understood in the view of Michel de Certeau's theory, according to which space (*espace*) is the dynamic actualization of place (*lieu*), it is "a practiced place" (117).

While place is "an instantaneous configuration of positions" (Certeau 117), characterized by univocity and stability, space involves mobility and polyvalent interpretations. Travellers' accounts connect their culinary experiences to their spatial apprehension and indicate productions of space and taste which combine over time, in a polyphony of voices and interpretations. The term "production of space" relates to Henri Lefebvre's theory, which highlights the relationships between mental and real space, mirrored in the conceptual triad of spatial representation—perceived space, conceived space, lived space (33). Differences between real and mental spaces often create conflicting feelings, ranging from discontent, anxiety, and contempt to delight, wonder, and enthusiasm. The gaps between the elements of the triad, combined with the travellers' cultural, social, ethnic or religious patterns of thinking contribute to a kaleidoscopic topography of taste, woven by the multitude of conflicting or complementary voices.

The diachronic study of textual networks provides a cross-section view of the dynamics of taste and foodways under the impact of social, cultural, religious, and political factors. This approach leads to a topography of taste, understood as a topographic profile which allows for a tri-dimensional representation, enlarging the mode of visualization provided by a simple, bi-dimensional topographical map. Food items and customs recurrent in these texts are landmarks of taste, functioning as plotting points that create the elevation contours of a gustatory map. Travellers act as taste topographers because they gather, examine and interpret the culinary details circumscribed to a well-delineated spatiality. Their cartography bears the imprint of their background, of their directly or indirectly disclosed prejudices and stereotypes. The result is an interplay of shadows and lights, where taste turns into "architaste," a multidimensional textual architecture of taste, which is textually transcendent. This makes culinary identity a versatile construct, in the sense of an ideated structure whose volatile existence relies on subjective contextualization.

The dissertation is structured in six chapters: the first two provide a general framework which configures the current status of the relationship between food culture and culinary identity in a globalized world, scrutinizes the mechanisms of formation of food prejudices and stereotypes and explains the influence of the voyageurs' socio-cultural background on their production of taste and space. The objectives of the subsequent chapters are to identify and analyse the main economic, social, and religious culinary identity landmarks; to elucidate why the topographers' points of interest have modified over time, and how the different types of cognitive maps and the shifts in focalization reflect the red threads which connect the nodes of taste topography in the Romanian Principalities.

Chapter 1 examines "Hypertastes of Globalization" in opposition to space-connected tastes and their implications in shaping otherness and identity in the multicultural, heterogeneous contemporary society. The analysis starts from assessing the reasons and the consequences for the general rising interest in food issues and the relationship between food culture and culinary identity. I have pointed out that mass-media and cyberspace generate simulacra of tastes, as they reproduce recipes *ad infinitum*, until the connection with the referent fades away. I have defined these distorted, artificial copies, which sell the illusion of authenticity, as "hypertastes." Volatile and polymorphous, they display various postmodernist facets: hypertastes forged in television shows or in web gastronomic portals invite to participation, performance, happening and theatrical representation; the playful hypertastes of fusion cuisine imply deconstruction and endless combinations; hypertastes of molecular gastronomy challenge and trick the senses by suggesting apparently incompatible textures; the hypermodern hypertastes obtained by means of high technology—such as edible food packaging, synthetic aliments, 3D-printed food, multisensory dining experience—are associated to alluring simulacra of reality. As a counterbalance for the emergence of hypertastes, interest in space-connected tastes has strongly developed. The notion of *terroir* stresses the close relationship between culinary identity and the specific spatiality to which this is circumscribed. I have pointed out that, from a metaphysical point of view, the concept of *terroir* reminds of the model of stylistic matrix developed by Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga, in the sense that cultural differences mirror various spatial patterns.

The symbiotic link between spatiality and taste also echoes the dynamics of the inhabitants and their interactions with exogenous factors. Just as space-connected tastes are an answer to the need for rootedness in a permanently changing globalized world, the popularity of taste travelogues reflects the search for stable landmarks. Visual or written narratives about local, regional, or national cuisine acknowledge an ancestral heritage and reconnect with the values of tradition. I have shown how the triangular relationship between food, space, and identity is configured in food narratives, and I have provided an overview of twenty-first-century travel writing, with focus on the accounts about Romania. The productions of space and taste portray the paradoxes of a space, in which modernity and tradition, western and eastern vectors coexist, and where hospitality is a significant identity landmark. The chapter investigates the latest, upper layer of the topographic profile of taste, while the other chapters are dedicated to the examination of a diachronic cross-section view of the multi-layered evolution of culinary identity.

Chapter 2, entitled "Taste Topographers: Foreign Travellers Writing about Food Practices in the Romanian Principalities," focuses on taste as a cartographic generator and demonstrates that travellers act as taste topographers because they assemble and interpret the culinary details related to a specific spatial matrix. Their topography of taste provides the textual encapsulation of the particular flavours and dietary rituals. The chapter explains that gustatory maps are characterized by like-, dislike-, or even disgust-patterns that depend on a variety of internal and external factors, which can be related to individual personality structure, food properties, and social, cultural, or economic background. Identification of factors that affect taste perception has proved important for understanding the contradictory productions of taste in relation to the same cognitive referent. The geocritical polysensory approach to reality indicates that travellers differentiate from the point of view of the senses they mainly use in the representation of the encountered realities. Most travel accounts are gaze-oriented, but there are also productions of space and taste which display a high kinetic, acoustic, or gustatory sensitivity.

The mechanisms of formation of food prejudices and stereotypes (especially the socio-cultural factors) are surveyed, starting from various examples of exogenous and endogenous stereotypes regarding the identification through food at the global and national level. Negative stereotypes are especially analysed in order to identify the elements that distort the travellers' perception of taste and cause them to produce mainly depreciative labels for the food patrimony of the Wallachians, Moldavians, Transylvanians, and of other ethnic groups, such as Hungarians, Greeks, Tartars or Turks. The chapter investigates how voyageurs' productions of space and taste are influenced by their social and cultural background. The travellers' professions are particularly taken into account, as they often influence the type of details they emphasize, their judgements and their productions of taste. Taste topographers provide different representations of the same reality, according to their background, biases, and gustatory sensitivity.

All these factors influence travel writings in the same way as measurements operated by means of aerial surface topography instruments are altered by variables concerning tools or environment. Therefore, the same referent undergoes different representations. Travellers' productions of space and taste are enthusiastic or poetic, and articulate a rhetoric of excellence and perfection; they are critical and ascribe a rhetoric of contempt; or they are balanced and depict both positive and negative sides. The topography of taste displays a composite structure, in which Oriental and Occidental elements are fused in resonance with a polymorphous space, an in-between territory which reunites a mix of contrasts and tastes:

braga, beer, wine, sherbet, paprika, sour soup, cheese, Turkish-Slavic stews, such as *iaknia* (white bean stew), *sarmale* (minced meat in cabbage or vine leaves), and *ciulama* (poultry or mushroom stew in white sauce). Despite all the variables which distort travellers' spatial and gustatory representations, the overlapping of their cognitive maps creates a complex, multi-layered topographic profile, harmonizing Occidental and Oriental contours.

Chapter 3, entitled "Vocalizing Taste across Time and the Production of Space," investigates the network of travel narratives that provide dialogic representations of space and taste about the Romanian Principalities between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The analysis focuses on the way travellers' voices interconnect across time (different centuries) and space (western vs. eastern) and produce a polyvalent construction of space and taste. The chapter scrutinizes a complex text which harmonizes western and eastern points of view: F.C. Belfour's nineteenth-century English translation from Arabic of *The Travels of Macarius, Patriarch of Antioch*, written by the archdeacon Paul of Aleppo—Macarius' attendant and son. The translator tries to complete the information offered by the seventeenth-century Christian Arab voyageur as regards the less-known territories of the Romanian Principalities and inserts, in the *paratext* (footnotes and appendix), quotations from other writers (such as early nineteenth-century travellers Adam Neale, William Wilkinson, Sir Robert Ker Porter, J. C. Hobhouse, or Thomas Thornton). The multivocal playful dialogism of the volume synchronizes Paul of Aleppo's seventeenth-century eastern perspective with western viewpoints expressed two centuries later.

The chapter examines various examples of open dialogues—materialized by travellers who quote, allude to, or even gratefully acknowledge their predecessors' contribution—and their effects on the production of space and taste. More numerous are the cases of hidden dialogues—when travel writers reproduce fragments from other sources and take over their forerunners' judgments. Such discourses generate a multi-layered structure of the text, which often creates confusion and affects the authenticity of the experiences. Travellers' productions of space and taste oscillate between a paradigm of picturesque and abundance and one of barbarism. The analysis focuses on the way these paradigms are constructed in the dialogues with the readers around semantic dichotomies such as "civilized" vs. "rudimentary," "refined" vs. "barbaric," "tasteful" vs. "disgusting." The perspective of the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (Keller 2–3) is applied in order to assess western travellers' role of social actors that shape the borders between "centre" and "periphery" through their discourses. The conceived and perceived spaces display the same polyvalence as they are mirrored by travellers, who also bear their social, cultural, religious,

and ethnic patterns. The nexus of travellers' voices that intersect synchronically and diachronically configures a hybridized, kaleidoscopic topographic profile of an emerging culinary identity, coalescing western, eastern, and autochthonous elements: soup with dumplings, beef stew with cabbage, confiture and coffee, or plum brandy and wine. The transubstantiation of opposite flavours (hot–bland, pungent–astringent, and sweet–bitter) is circumscribed to a specific spatial matrix with multi-ethnic influences, polarized between Occident and Orient.

Chapter 4, "Mapping the Economic and Social Dimensions of Culinary Identity Landmarks," demonstrates that travellers' production of space and taste is like a neural network created by means of associative memory, which groups and regroups elements of reality, rearranging them according to a certain stimulus. The differences in perception result in diverse types of cognitive mapping (such as fabulous mapping, the realistic mode of X-ray mapping, marvellous mapping, mythical mapping, romantic mapping, or desolation mapping), emphasizing other gradients, shades, or patterns, which constitute a web made up of blocks of complementary aspects. The travellers' accounts trace both tangible food consumption elements (such as wine or *dulceață*) and intangible items (such as hospitality or *terra mirabilis*), with economic and/or social implications over the centuries. The study reveals the dynamics of these elements in diachrony and the way some foreign food (such as coffee or maize) have become landmarks of taste in the Romanian Principalities. Food practices involved in hospitality commensality are compared, taking into account the higher and lower social strata. The field of investigation is enlarged to the public sphere, when economic and social functions of coffeehouses and confectioneries in urban life are commented upon. Coffeehouses and confectioneries are interpreted as Foucauldian heterotopias of compensation (48), where bitter or sweet tastes offer a delightful escape from mundane reality. The importance of these consumption spaces in the urban sign systems, and as landmarks of sociability, is analysed, with focus on their Orient–Occident polarization.

Chapter 5 identifies "Religious and Archaic Layers in Landmarks of Taste," revealed by travellers' writings that approach the rites of passage, religious holidays and food taboos and superstitions in the Romanian Principalities. The overlap of these layers creates a dual profile of the topography of taste—connected both to historical and mythical time. The term "archaic" is used in reference to pre-Christian rites and beliefs, connoting the sacred, mythical time that Mircea Eliade opposes to profane duration (72). The "religious layers" strictly indicate here the rituals and practices associated with Church and the Bible. Travellers' mapping of food practices and items involved in rites of passage, such as wedding

and funeral, reveal strict sequences of steps, which I have defined as "food-paths." Food-paths accompany the passage from one ontological state to another and reunite archaic and religious layers, like a stratigraphic matrix which, in archaeology, shows the relationships and dynamics of various historical strata. The analysis emphasizes the roles of these food-paths in nuptial and funeral ceremonials and reveals the landmarks of taste—such as bread, wine, or *coliva*—characteristic of the rites of passage, for Christmas, Easter, and Lent. The cartography of the immutable food-paths involved in the dynamics of the rites of passage, of the homogenous space of religious holidays, and of the idiosyncratic space dominated by food superstitions and taboos, configures the intricate multi-layered structure of the topographic profile of culinary identity.

Chapter 6 ("Changes in Focus: Comparative Perspectives on the Production of Space and Taste in the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries") points out that the diachronic study of the productions of space and taste projects a multifaceted contour of culinary identity in the Romanian Principalities. Travellers create a decoupage of reality, according to their different cultural and mental patterns, but also in compliance with the time's conventions. The seventeenth-century voyageurs, who offer accounts that contain information about local food items and customs, are coined as explorer topographers, because of their enthusiasm in depicting realities encountered in the new territories. The most illustrative voices taken into account come from the Islamic world: one belongs to Paul, Archdeacon of Aleppo, and the other to Evliya Çelebi, a reputed Ottoman travel writer. Seventeenth-century taste topographers approach space with favourable, appreciative views and their wander-and-wonder production of space and taste is a mixture of fictional (hyperbolic and fabulous) and factual modes of representation, characterized by a rhetoric of abundance. The productions of space and taste of eighteenth-century travel writers differ according to their status of observers—such as Antonmaria del Chiaro, the Italian secretary of the Wallachian Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu, or Baron Leyon Pierce Balthasar von Campenhausen, a Russian statesman—or passengers, and highlight strong Oriental notes which reverberate the Ottoman dominance and the Phanariote regime. Both observer and passenger topographers emphasize this increasing contradiction between the natural richness of the Principalities and the poverty of the people, triggered by the acute internal exploitation (Phanariote regime) and external domination (the Ottoman Empire). Travellers' cognitive maps indicate the introduction and evolution of new items, such as maize, punch, or beer. While foreign beverages do not gain much popularity, as wine and plum brandy are preferred, maize is adopted as a staple cereal, used for *mamaliga*—a major landmark of taste. The

eighteenth-century gustatory cartography displays a prevalence of local flavours, Oriental contours and only few Occidental notes.

As concerns the nineteenth century accounts, research distinguishes between business and leisure topographers—each category having different approaches to food items, as if applying different topographic measurement instruments. In the case of the former category (represented by voyageurs such as the British journalists William Beatty-Kingston and James William Ozanne, doctors Adam Neale and William Macmichael, or Italian archaeologist Felice Caronni), the importance of the conceived space prevails, and it is constructed dichotomically, through the stereotypes and contradictory opinions of others. Alternatively, leisure topographers (a category which comprises feminine voices, such as the British Mary Adelaide Walker and Florence K. Berger), focus mainly on the perceived and the lived-in space and provide picturesque cognitive maps, with many details as regards the gustatory dimension. The diachronic study of travel writing shows the transition from ethnicity to the nascent sense of a national culinary identity, which includes landmarks of taste such as *mămăliga*, plum brandy, wormwood wine, *pastrami*, cheese, fish and caviar, or *dulceaţa* and coffee—a blend of foreign transplantations and autochthonous flavours.

The analysis of the similarities and differences between the shifting points of interest concerning food practices over the three centuries under discussion echoes the transformations of the landmarks of taste triggered by the social, economic, and political dynamics, in a space situated at the crossroads of empires, cultures, civilizations, and religions. The corroborated complementary or conflicting, consonant or dissonant dialogic voices constitute a multimodal support for the development of a local "tasturology"—the analysis of the taste textures encoded in discursive structures with reference to a particular spatial matrix. Travellers' nexus of cognitive maps articulates a volatile, multifaceted construct of the culinary identity in the area of the Carpathians and the Danube, as a result of the interaction of individual and collective, endogenous and exogenous forces, manifested both temporally and geographically, and circumscribed to a spatial matrix which reunites a kaleidoscopic array of vectors of taste.

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