

ÁNGÁDZÁBUR: A REMNANT FROM ANI KINGDOM?

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¹In February 2016, the Armenian Cookery Traditions' Development and Protection NGO in Yerevan² organized an event dedicated to six traditional dishes from Ani, the capital of Bagratid Armenia from 961 to 1045. The event aimed to showcase ancient Armenian recipes and introduce them to the public.³ The presentation of Ani's traditional dishes was the result of four expeditions to Eastern Europe in 2014-2015, initiated and sponsored by the Armenian Cookery Traditions' Development and Protection NGO. During these

trips, ethnographer Khoren Grigoryan documented the recipes of approximately 15 to 20 dishes from Armenian-descended residents. These recipes were collected from various towns and cities, including Kamieniec, Kutu, and Lvov in Ukraine, Krakow and Warsaw in Poland, and the Transylvania region of Romania. This is significant, as Armenians in these countries traditionally claim to have originated from Ani⁴. One might argue that these dishes were indeed part of Ani's cuisine and have survived the challenges of the past ten centuries.

- ¹ The authors express their gratitude to anthropologist, writer and filmmaker, Kinga Kali for providing the text of her documentary on Gherla Armenians, and to late researcher Piroška Krajcsir (both from Budapest) for supplying Hungarian-language references.
- ² The NGO was established in 2007 with the goal of promoting and popularizing traditional Armenian dishes. Over the past years, the organization has engaged in extensive activities, organizing competitions, seminars, and events focused on traditional Armenian feasts and the ritual cuisine associated with them. For instance, the NGO hosts the traditional barbecue festival in the village of Akhtala. Sedrak Mamulyan, the founder and president of the organization and a cuisine specialist, also hosts the "Araratian Cuisine" program on Yerkir Media TV.
- ³ In recent years, there has been an unprecedented academic interest in national Armenian cuisine, both in Armenia and the Diaspora. Contrary to popular belief, Armenians do possess a unique traditional cuisine. A common perception is that Armenian food is merely a reflection of the broader Middle Eastern culinary landscape ("A fact many people do not know is that there actually is no such thing as 'Armenian food.' The food is basically Middle Eastern. True, there are those same dishes that appear in all Middle Eastern countries, and each of those countries claims them, yet each puts its own stamp on it, either through cooking methods or spices," *Kavkaz: A Biography of Yervand Markarian*, 1996, p. 246). While

this perspective has some truth, discussions surrounding the precedence of specific dishes—particularly on social media—suggest that the topic of Armenian cuisine is among the most debated. These discussions can be resolved through both philological (etymological) and historical approaches. However, the philological method of defining the origin of dishes is sometimes unhelpful, as many dish names have changed over time, often borrowed from the language of the dominant culture. The historical method, on the other hand, is more reliable because it allows us to trace the precedence of certain culinary phenomena based on their first written mentions.

It is also essential to recognize that a variety of dishes specific to various regions of Armenia exist, distinct from neighboring cultures, and can be classified as unique Armenian foods. Examples include *masrapur* (rosehip soup, very different from Swedish *nypon-soppa*) and *zhengyalov hats* (flatbread stuffed with herbs), typical of the Artsakh and Syunik regions. The loss of certain culinary traditions has been a deprivation that Armenians experienced alongside the loss of statehood and various artifacts of their material heritage.

- ⁴ As historian Leo noted, "Ani was forgotten, but Ani's inhabitants were not. It was a pride to descend from Ani, as Ani was known for its highly cultured, elite, honest, and surprisingly capable people. No other province or city has created such a high title of nobility. To be of Ani origin was a great honor" (Լեո, *Ազի-Վանիի երկեր», հտ. 8, Երևան, 1985, էջ 185*).

Currently, Armenian cuisine holds a significant place in the lives of the “old” Armenians in these Eastern European countries, particularly in the city of Gherla (Armenopolis) in Transylvania. Although many of these Armenians have forgotten their mother tongue and have converted to Catholicism, they still prepare Armenian dishes on what they refer to as ‘Armenian Day.’

The cuisine of Transylvanian Armenians has been well-researched for some time by both Hungarian Armenians and Hungarians,⁵ yet without referring their possible origin. For instance, Esther Kisban noted that she did not investigate the origins of certain dishes among the Transylvanian Armenians.⁶

The purpose of current article is to trace the possible origin of perhaps the most typical dish of Transylvanian Armenian cuisine—*angadzabur* (also spelled *aganchabour*, *angadzhapur*; in Hungarian, *angadzabur*, *anhadshaboor*, *angads-abur*, or *angadsabur*). The Hungarians refer to it as *Angadzaborleves ormeny fulleves* (Armenian ear soup) because of the ear-shaped dumplings. The name is derived from the Armenian words *ականջ* (*akanj*

– “ear”) and *սուրճ* (*apur* – “soup”). This nutritious and delicious festive soup is not widely available to the public; it is considered an exotic dish that remains mostly unknown. It is typically prepared for the *Madagh* (sacrifice) during the Armenian church ritual at the *Hacigadar Monastery* in *Suceava* or for the *Grigor the Illuminator festival* in *June*.

The recipe

Angadzabur is a hot meal, and its initial and essential component is *khurut*⁷ (aka *hurut*, *chort’an* or *chorat’an* in Armenian), made of cow’s milk. To prepare *khurut*, one needs to collect boiled milk in buckets during the summer and ferment it for 40 days. Each day, 100 ml of fresh milk is added, and the mixture is stirred twice daily until it sours. On the 40th day, the product is boiled over low heat, and chopped greens (such as minced parsley leaves, tarragon, and celery leaves) are added. After cooking, small balls are formed and allowed to dry. Later, these balls are scrubbed and mixed with sour cream.

The dough consists only of eggs and flour, while the filling is made from ground beef seasoned with salt and pepper. The dough

5 See: Szongott Kristóf: *Ormeny etelek es keszitesi modjuk, Szamosújvar szab.kir.város monográfiája. A magyarországi ormenyek ethnographiaja. Szamosújvar, Todoran, Aurora, 1903, p. 81-82; Mór Janos Révay, Ismeretek enciklopediaja, Revai Testvérek, 1914, p. 397. Kövi Pál: Angads-Abur Ormeny fulleves, Erdelyi lakoma, Corvina, Budapest, 1980, pp. 58-59; Հարթր Վիշբան, Հայերի սասնական ուտեստները Տրանսիլվանիայում և Հունգարիայում (վերապրուկներն ու խորհրդանիշները).- «Պատմաբանասիրական հանդես», 2008, թ. 2, էջ 119-130; Krajcsir Piroška, *Ormeny motívumok*, Ararat Kulturális Egyesület, Kométas Kiado, 2014, Budapest, pp. 326-28.*

6 Հարթր Վիշբան, Հայերի սասնական ուտեստները..., էջ 122:

7 “Kashk (Persian: کشک Kurdish: keşk Turkish: keş, peyniri), qurt, qurut (Kazakhқырт, Turkmen: gurt, Uzbek: qurt, Azerbaijani: qurut, Bashkir: kopot, Kyrgyz: кырыт, Turkish: kurut, sürk, taş yogurt,

kurutulmuş yogurt, Shor: кырыт), jamid (Arabic: جميد, افط): chortan Armenian (չորթան, [chor. meaning “dried”, plus tan]), aaruul (Mongolian: ааруул) is a range of dairy products used in cuisines of Iranian, Turkish, Mongolian, Central Asian, Transcaucasian, and the Levantine peoples. Kashk is made from drained yogurt (in particular, drained qatiq) or drained sour milk by forming it and letting it dry. It can be made in a variety of forms: rolled into balls, sliced into strips, and formed into chunks. Chortan is mentioned in the Armenian epic poem, *Sasuntsi Davit*, as an oral tradition dating from 8th-century, which was first put into writing in 1873. Chor means dry in the Armenian language. Kashk is also mentioned in the 10th-century Persian book of poetry *Shahnameh*. *Khoshk* (Persian: خشک meaning “dry”) which indicates that the *kashk* or *kishk* is prepared through a drying [خشکیدن] process. *Qurut* or *kurut* means dried in Turkic languages”.

is cut into square pieces, with minced meat placed on each square, which are then shaped into the form of human ears. If any meat remains, small balls (without dough) are made and are called *dolvats*.⁸ It is believed that those who receive *dolvats* will be successful in life. This dough is boiled in broth, after which *khurut* is added.

Clearly, this is a labor-intensive dish, which may suggest its unusual (noble) origins. Similar dishes can be found in the cuisines of other regions in Armenia. For example, in *Musa Dag*, *angjig* (small ear) is a special dish made from dough stuffed with meat, cooked in a yogurt soup or a tomato paste and garlic broth.

The most common counterpart to *ángádzsábur* among other Armenian dishes is *mantapur* (soup of mantis – dumplings), which is also found in the cuisines of other cultures and is thought to have Mongolian origins.⁹ In another recorded Armenian meat soup with dumplings, known simply as *akanjapur*, the dumplings are not stuffed but consist of pieces of dough shaped like human ears.¹⁰

Interestingly, *ángádzsábur* remains almost the only national attribute for Transylvanians of Armenian origin today. It is featured in the Hungarian documentary *Hayr mer* (*Pater noster*) by Kali Kinga (2008), which presents the descendants of Transylvanian Armenians who sing parts of the Armenian Mass in broken Armenian and describe the preparation of *ángádzsábur*:

“And there is another food, the *ángádzsábur* soup, which is truly, truly Armenian—divine! Anyone would like it, even the highest

ranks... but it is very complicated to make. My mother would rarely prepare *ángádzsábur* soup; she made it for holidays, at Whitsuntide, for Christmas, and sometimes on Sundays too! Well, it's long, drudge work! The butter is spread... So, this is the *hurut*! It is pickled and made only from cow's milk! And chopped parsley! It is so delicious in broth, oh my! It makes it all sour! You need sour milk; you let the milk get sour for six weeks. You stir it at least twice a day and cover it with gauze so nothing gets in. After six weeks, you have to cook it. If the parsley is dried, you need about one and a half tablespoons of dried parsley, or a good deciliter of fresh parsley if you cook it in summer... And it should be cooked right afterward. But every day, you have to add some milk. When you cook it, you do so until it becomes dense, then you just add the parsley. The milk should boil for about five hours to thicken. After that, you add the parsley, whether dried or fresh. You need to cook it for approximately five to six hours until it becomes very thick. It's best to cook it in a copper cauldron, as it will turn green. Then you pour it into a bag to drain for the next day. Once it has drained, you must knead the *hurut* mass in a pan to even it out, as the bottom will be drier than the top. This is *hurut* that takes about five or six days to prepare. It's not very well-known... and it's expensive at the market, around 3500 lei a piece. My mother used to make a square piece like this. She pinched the edges together and then added a bit of meat, about the size of a large pea, which she seasoned with salt and pepper. She placed that into the dough square and pressed down the edges. Then she grabbed the two sides

8 Both *dolvat-dovlat* versions are available. For more information, see: Գ. Գաապարեան, Ա. Գրիգորեան, Ա. Յակոբեան, Հայոց լեզուի բարբառաշին բառարան, Եր., «Գիտություն», 2001, էջ 343.

9 Some researchers suggest that *mantı* first made its way to Cilician Armenia as a result of cultural interactions between Armenians and Mongols during their alliance in the 13th century (Irina Petrosian,

David Underwood, *Armenian Food: Fact, Fiction & Folklore*. Lulu.com, 2006).

10 Ա. Ս. Փիրուզեան (խմբ.), Հայկական խոհանոց, Երեան, «Հայաստան», 1963, էջ 58:

and stuck them together, so it resembled an ear—we called it the ‘ear of the monk’—with the meat inside. We would cook this angadzabur in broth instead of using ribbon noodles. This is real Armenian food! Then, they added the hurut afterward... if it was dried, it would be grated into the broth, as sour as anyone likes. So spicy and delicious! Well, this is Armenian food!”

People also cook angadzabur for Great Lent; however, this time, the dough is not boiled in meat broth, and instead of meat, mushrooms or omelets cut into squares are used.

Armenopolis: the place where the dish survived

The Armenians in Transylvania, particularly in Armenopolis (Gherla), have inhabited the region since 1705. Armenopolis is located in the center of Transylvania, although large numbers of Armenians also lived in other cities in the area. The name Armenopolis itself suggests that this was a region populated by Armenians, but today, that name is no longer in use; the city is now called Gherla. According to legend, the locals filled the entire fur of a buffalo with gold, paid it to the prince of the region, and built the St. Solomon Church, along with numerous houses, naming the land Armenopolis, likely an exonym. The recognition of the area as Armenian was delayed due to the absence of official documentation until Bishop Oxendius Verzeresky (Auxentiu Varzărescu or Oxendius Verzellescus, 1655-1715), who played a pivotal role in the Catholicization of Armenians,¹¹ was able to complete this task.

The city was designed with four vertical streets and six horizontal ones. An architect of Armenian descent, Alexis, was invited from

Rome. For many years, Armenopolis was autonomous from both Romania and Hungary, maintaining its own Armenian legislation and an Armenian school that functioned until the 1930s. In Armenopolis, there is Strada Armena (Armenian Street), which features the only Armenian church at the center of the city, as well as various Armenian references, including gravestones with Armenian lettering and beautiful houses designed by Italian architects, who carved Armenian letters into the facades to indicate Armenian ownership.

Armenopolis had ten Armenian churches and a population that reached 22,000, predominantly Armenians. Today, the population is also about 22,000, but only 155 individuals identify as Armenians. Some of these may not have a strong sense of Armenian identity, while others simply consider themselves Hungarian or Romanian. Some representatives of the local Armenian community argue that the rest of the population are also Armenians, albeit ones who “do not know about it.” The local populace is aware that this is an Armenian city built by Armenians.

In the 1700s, when Armenians began to settle in the area, the first challenge they faced was Catholicization. Consequently, soon after the death of the last apostolic cleric, the process of Catholicizing the settled Armenians commenced. An Armenian Catholic church was established, where rituals were performed in Armenian. However, by the 1930s, the number of Armenian speakers had dwindled. Today, the only remaining Armenian speaker is Garbis Martaian, whose grandfather, Harutiun Martaian (1902-1980), emigrated to Gherla from Nigde (Turkey) in 1923.

¹¹ Helmut Pushhousen, Miqlosh Yakubovich, Livia Trtkoy, Nikolay Kaztovich, Eneo Muradin, Nikola Sabu, Ana-Maria Seoke, Luchia Augusta

Sherdan, Azatuhi Varduka-Khorenyan, *Armenian Culture and Art in Gherla*, 3rd adopted edition, Bucharest, Ararat Publishing House, 2010, pp. 9-11.

Sunday (duminica in Romanian), is considered the Day of Armenianization for the Armenians. On this day, all families claiming Armenian descent gather in the Armenian Catholic church, where the Sunday liturgy is conducted in Hungarian by a Hungarian pastor. After the Armenian community took over the church's custody following the collapse of Communism, a close relationship between the church and the community developed. Alongside those of Armenian descent, both Hungarians and Romanians also play significant roles in the community and church activities.¹²

The Armenian cuisine of Armenopolis

Transylvanian Armenian cuisine is unique, as it has remained largely unchanged by external influences. Culinary traditions have been passed down through generations and are now of fundamental importance to Transylvanian Armenian identity. One could argue that Armenians differ from Hungarians in their cuisine, which has prompted reactions from Hungarians who remark: "This dish is not part of our culture; it is not ours; it is strange," and so on. It may seem unusual that Sandor Teleki described Armenians by referencing just five dishes: khurut, angadzsabur, dalauzi, pilaf, and the use of goat fat.¹³

Today, if one examines the identity of Armenians in Armenopolis, where a crucial component of identity—the language—has

largely vanished, it becomes evident that these Armenians are mostly the product of mixed marriages. They possess not only Hungarian identity, clearly expressed through language and other cultural features, but also various ethnic identities, including German, Romanian, Jewish, and others. Armenian identity in this region is primarily tied to the church and cuisine, which remain the last expressions of their Armenian heritage.

As previously mentioned, the main and ritual dish is angadzsabur. Due to the extensive labor involved in preparing this dish, Armenians from nearby villages and even from Bucharest gather in Armenopolis-Gherla a few days before the celebration to begin the cooking process for angadzsabur.

During the preparation of the dish, an interesting camaraderie develops among families, friends, and the broader community. They talk, sing, and discuss their everyday hardships and the changes they experience.¹⁴

Interestingly, today Armenian dishes are regarded not only as nutritious and served to guests but also as integral to Armenian cultural heritage. The editor of the Hungarian-language magazine *Armenia* magazine, Kristóf Szongott (Khachik Songotian), urged all young Armenian women to collect and document the recipes from four traditional settlements: Armenopolis/Gherla, Dumbrăveni/

12 "It is a reality that in the last decade, because of the persecutions and massacres of Armenians, Armenians from the East settled in Armenopolis... and the forgotten Armenian language began to revive" (Ա. Է. (Ալեքսիս Էփուահար), Հունգարները կը ջնայնանան երբ հայ ոգին կը մտնէ Աստուայի հայութեան մէջ. «Յուսաբեր», Գահիրէ, 10.02. 1936).

13 Հարեր Կիշբան, Հայերի ատանդակաւ ուտեստները, էջ 121:

14 The participant of the documentary *Hayr Mer* shares another Armenian dish that wasn't documented during the expedition: 'I will tell you about one more

Armenian food that you may not know, and it's quite challenging to make. It's called *pirouli* with meat. You take chopped pork with a pinch of salt and pepper and spread out a noodle dough. Then my mother would cut it into pieces about the size of half a newspaper. She'd place the pork mixture on top, spread it thinly—about a centimeter thick—roll it up, and seal the ends. Finally, she would fry it in hot pork grease, almost like doughnuts. That's *pirouli* with meat, an Armenian dish!" (from *Hayr mer* documentary by Kali Kinga). So far, we could not find any other information about *pirouli*.

Erzsebetvaros, Gheorgheni/Gyergyoszentmiklos, and Frumoasa/Csikszepviz. The first edition of these collected recipes, titled *Armenian Cuisine*, was published in 1889 in *Armenia*. It featured 40 dishes commonly used in everyday life, as well as their significance on special occasions.¹⁵ This marked the starting point for the revival of the Armenian cuisine among the Armenians of Armenopolis, a movement that continues to this day.

Interestingly, angadzabur is also mentioned in Hungarian literature. A chapter of the novel “Limpopo avagy egy strucckisasszony naplója” (Limpopo or the Diary of a Maiden-Ostrich), written by Hungarian-Transylvanian author Szocs Géza (1953-2020) and published in 2007, is titled “A Voice in the Night. Soup angadzabur.”¹⁶

Ani origin?

Now, returning to our initial question: how can the origin of this special meal be attributed to Ani, a city that was devastated nearly a thousand years ago?

Although there is no written evidence, there are compelling arguments that suggest such a claim is both legitimate and plausible.

First, culinary specialists assert that the noble (royal) origin of certain traditional foods can be inferred from the inclusion of meat (a product typically available to the wealthy) and the labor-intensive nature of their preparation (such as stuffed meals). For example, it is believed that the dish kololik (now more commonly known by its Turkish name, kofte) originated in the Cilician Armenian kingdom.¹⁷

Secondly, these same dishes are widespread among Armenians living in the same region, all of whom originally hail from the same area. For instance, Armenian-born Russian writer Marietta Shaginyan (Shahinyan), who also was claiming that her maternal ancestors were from Ani (Crimean Armenians settled in Don), recalled in her autobiography that in Rostov-on-Don, she and her sister were treated to Armenian dishes. Among those she described were smoked lamb tongue, ereshkik (sujugh), and “Tatar dishes with farinaceous small ears, stuffed with spiced mutton and greens—khashik-byorek (soup with ‘ears’ in sour milk) and tatar-byorek (a soup with small ‘ears’ in yogurt with fat), seasoned with dry ground thyme. These are still prepared by housewives of Crimean-Armenian origin. I have never eaten anything more delicious anywhere.”¹⁸

Shaginyan is mistaken in referring to those dishes as Tatar, as she was likely confused by their Tatar names. In fact, as previously mentioned, Hungarian-born Armenians who originally came from Ani (and have no connection to the Crimean Tatars) also prepare exactly the same dishes, which they refer to by the Armenian name—angadzabur.

Regardless of whether angadzhapur/angadzabur dates back to the time of Ani, it is clear that it is one of the ancient and quintessential dishes of Armenian traditional cuisine. It has survived within Armenian communities and is currently experiencing a resurgence in its historical homeland.

15 See “Az örmény konyha kezikönyve,” „Armenia,” 1889, pp. 188, 206, 265, 282-83.

16 See the Russian translation of the novel: Г. Сёч, *Лимпопо, или Дневник барышни-страусихи*, «Иностранная литература», 2012, no 3.

17 Սոսիա Թաշեան, *Հայկական ասիոնական խոհանոց*, Երևան, «Մատանիկ», 2012, էջ 110:

18 Н. С. Авдулов, Н. В. Мирзабекова. М. С. Шагинян, *Нахичевань в жизни и творчестве*, Ростов на Доне, 2013, стр. 27.