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**ABOUT TRADITIONAL HOSPITALITY AND BASHKIR GUEST
MEALS**

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Abstract

For centuries, Bashkir people had a highly developed institution of hospitality, which was due to their mentality, pastoral lifestyle, and imperfect communication links. The study of this issue to understand the origins of the moral and ethical outlook of the people may be useful when conducting a comparative analysis of the traditional cultures of various peoples with whom the Bashkirs contacted to contribute to solving actual ethnological and ethno genetic problems. In the past the traditional hospitality and etiquette of the Bashkirs were due to the pastoral life of the people; they reflect the sex, age and social differentiation of society. The article also deals with the rules of behavior of guests adopted at the owner's house. The study of this topic contributes to a more complete understanding of the spiritual culture of the people. The traditions of hospitality are due to the natural-geographical factor, as well as the economy of the Bashkir people and are one of the most important ethno-labeling signs. The article also discusses the norms of communication and table etiquette of the Bashkirs, draws attention to the character traits of the people, which include honesty and kindness of the Bashkirs, as well as disinterested readiness to serve the guest.

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Keywords: Bashkirs, hospitality, material and spiritual culture, ethno-ethics, power system, customs.



1. Introduction

This article is written on the basis of field ethnographic materials collected for several decades in various parts of the Republic of Bashkortostan, as well as on the basis of folklore sources and published literature. A study of Bashkir hospitality, food traditions and ceremonial meals was undertaken by Migranova (2016) in the monograph «Bashkirs. The traditional power system: a historical and ethnographic study». The traditions of hospitality as well as the elements of material and spiritual culture associated with them (the food system, housing, clothing, utensils, ethno-ethics, etc.) are closely linked to the natural-geographical factor, as well as the traditional economy of the Bashkir people. In general, such concepts as hospitality and guest meals can be attributed to persistent cultural and everyday traditions that have an ethno-labeling shade.

Main article

For centuries, the Bashkir people had a highly developed institution of hospitality. The customs of mutual assistance, providing the traveler with shelter and food, were vital in the past nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoral lifestyle of peoples. These norms are also found in Islam. The Bashkirs, like many other Muslim peoples, believed that the Almighty, being on earth in human form, at any moment could test them, presenting to them in the form of a traveler or a beggar. Any guest, especially a stranger, was considered by them as a «sacred person»: “Hospitality has been brought to their true selflessness. Bashkirs for their guest... are ready to give everything” (Konoplev, 1862, p. 379). Earlier in conditions of underdeveloped communication and media, hospitality was among the Bashkirs and one of the channels of communication and information transfer. “You can travel all over Bashkortostan as safely as you can along the large Moscow highway. Bashkirs are courteous and tender” (p. 8), wrote Dal (1981) at the beginning of the XIX century. The researchers also noted the honesty and kindness of the Bashkirs, whom they could «boast to other foreigners». Visitors could stay in any Bashkir aul or wander without fear of being refused admission. Zefirov (1989) in his work «A look at the family life of the Bashkir» highlighted a remarkable feature of the Bashkir character – selfless readiness for services. The Bashkirs rendered any service disinterestedly, and the offer to accept payment for meals and overnight accommodation could be perceived as an insult.

According to the rules of etiquette, while seating, the guests took into account age and social differences: more places of honor were offered to the most senior and noble – aksakals. The first thing the guests were treated was a drink of fermented mare's milk – koumiss. The hosts poured drinks into carved wooden bowls (it was believed that if the drink were poured into iron dishes then grace would go away) and served holding with both hands. In anticipation of further refreshments, the host started a conversation with the guests; there was an exchange of news and courtesies. It was not accepted to ask the guests about the purpose of arrival it was assumed that the latter themselves should inform about it. The responsibilities of the owners also included the need to provide guests with protection. They cared not only for the guest, but also for his property, including the horse, remembering that the guest still had to go on a journey: «Guest has a guest and a horse».

When the male guest entered the premises, the women fell silent and went into the kitchen area of the house. According to the rules of etiquette, the guest had to be fed with the best dishes, which were in the house. If the guests were delayed for a while, the next meal was organized more carefully. If possible

they tried to cook a meat dish for which they slaughtered livestock, usually sheep. The Bashkirs said, «Without slaughtering or giving food we do not let the guest go» and the fattest animal was chosen for the guest. It was considered that «there are eight legs in fat cattle». Even a not very wealthy owner tried to treat guests better.

In Bashkir society greed was ridiculed, «Than to enter the house of a miserly baj, it is better to enter the house of a generous poor man». But at the same, a measure was needed in everything: «You will cut a ram for each guest – there will be no cattle left»; «Peers are cheering, but pockets are empty».

Women used to go out to guests in order to serve food or perform some kind of errand; at the same time, they covered their face with the end of the headscarf, did not raise their eyes, and did not enter into conversations with men.

Guests also had to abide by a number of unwritten laws and orders: «The host blushes because of the guest who does not know the customs of the feast», said the Bashkirs. At a party, it was customary to behave modestly not to show if you had to wait a long time for a treat, do not demand close attention to yourself, respect the rules adopted in the house of the owners. Despite the abundance of food, it was not supposed to eat much and greedily to choose a better treat. If the uninvited guest felt that he had come at the wrong time he had to say goodbye and leave as soon as possible.

The circumstances of life sometimes forced to modify the usual scenario of meeting and receiving guests. There were cases, when women were allowed to share the meal with a guest in the men's circle for special services. It could be a respectable wise old woman or a girl-batyr (physically strong girl) who became famous for her feats.

On a visit it was not accepted to appear empty-handed; meat, dried sausage, butter, kurut, koumiss, sweets, cookies, pies were brought. In general, it was decided among the Bashkirs to exchange gifts on various occasions, it was believed that this brought health to the one who gives and the one who accepts.

The norms of communication in the traditional Bashkir table etiquette implied respect for each other and respect for the elders. According to the rules of etiquette, men and women were seated separately; sometimes in different rooms, but more often a treat for women was organized behind a special curtain. Male feasts were made more solemnly. According to the tradition, the guests sat down legs folded «in Turkish». For convenience, they rested on pillows. It was allowed to sit on one's knees or on one leg (usually left) (Bikbulatov & Fatikhova, 1991).

The participants were offered to wash their hands, approaching each with a washstand a copper basin and a towel. Guests went from right to left and the most honorable were served first.

The signal to the beginning of the festive meal was the call of the host, who trying the treat addressed the guests with the words: «Start the meal, I ate it!». In this tradition, which took place in the traditional cultures of many nations according to researchers, there are echoes of the ancient custom when the cooked food first tried demonstrated that it was suitable for consumption, that it was not spoiled and not damaged (Bayburin & Toporkov, 1990).

Public opinion and clergymen were negative about alcohol consumption but were supportive of traditional low-alcohol milk drinks - koumiss and buz. During large festive meals in the men's circle a person was specially chosen to pour drinks and pass on to his assistant who offered them to guests.

The range of the festive table depended on the social status of the owners, their wealth also varied by the region but the food was always plentiful, varied and always included meat dishes. The best pieces were given to people of greater prestige. It was customary to treat the guests without cutting the meat from the bones since the presence of the bone symbolized the security and wealth of the livestock. Bashkirs preferred ribs, brisket, thighbones, fillets, ram's head, sacral part of carcass, fatty intestines, liver and tongue of the animal. Besides the winners of the batyrs, the long ribs were awarded to chief matchmakers or other honored guests. Brisket was also presented to respected members of society. In some places, at the wedding, the brisket or part of the back of the carcass was served to the bride's uncle, for which he had to invite the young to his treat and give them cattle. Breast was also considered as the female part (Migranova, 2018). The head of the cattle (sheep, cow, less horse) treated the guests during the spring memorial holiday rite «Eating the head» (Ilimbetova & Ilimbetov, 2012). The lamb's head and a part of the fried brisket were earlier offered with honors to Khan.

Olesh Taratyu custom took place among the Bashkirs - the master gave each guest his share of meat. If he wished, he could eat it right away or take it home but more often the guests having tasted the meat, according to the rules of etiquette treated their neighbors with the tastiest pieces. “It would be ignorance if the guest started eating first: he had to first give a piece to the two sitting next to him and then to the next two, the same thing was repeated with another piece – liver with fat” (Migranova, 2018, p. 67). The Bashkirs had an old custom of hogondorou – the host treats each participant with a piece of meat, fat, bishbarmak (a dish consisting of boiled meat, horse sausage and dough pieces) from the palm at the beginning of a meal, thus giving the guest special respect (Migranova, 2017).

The main part of the guest meal ended with the removal of the broth. The sequence of dishes served as the basis for orientation in time of the festive feast (Bhazhnokov, 1987). When, after meat, broth with a diluted dry curd product – kurut or fermented milk – katyk was served in small bowls, this means that about half of the dinner passed. Sometimes the broth was given to each separately, but more often they drank it the same way as koumiss, passing the bowl in a circle. Being emptied it was filled again. A bowl with meals or a drink circled was designed to emphasize the unity and mutual assistance of the members of the collective. The joint entertainment performed important, morally oriented functions: while eating a common meal, people acquired responsibilities towards each other and friendly relations were strengthened between them.

After meat treats and a short break, the guests were offered tea with milk and dairy products (fresh cream, sour cream, cottage cheese, butter mixed with berries), honey, berry pastille, sweets, various pastries, etc. After the treats, the remaining food was distributed to guests in the form of gifts.

The Bashkirs used to have the «guest show» custom, when fellow villagers took turns inviting guests to themselves. The custom of arranging a reception in honor of the guests provided the local people with the opportunity to talk with the visitors and show them their respect and hospitality.

With all sorts of honors, the guests were received for three days: «Guests were honored for three days; on the fourth, let them blame themselves» the people joked. However, if the guests were forced to stay longer then both (guests and their hosts) begin to feel more relaxed.

The farewells were also arranged with certain ceremonies: the owner and the entire household, including women and children, went out into the courtyard and wished the visitor a successful road and all kinds of blessings. The guests thanked the hosts and invited the host to their home with a return visit.

Studying traditional hospitality and guest meals of the Bashkirs in comparison with the traditions of other peoples, including Turkic, Slavic and other peoples (Kurmanova, 2014; Sataev, 2018), can help in solving a number of current ethnological problems.

2. Problem Statement

This article discusses hospitality and guest meals as the most important components of traditional ethnography and the life support systems of the people, being stable cultural and everyday traditions.

3. Research Questions

The subject of this article is the traditional Bashkir hospitality and guest meals.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this work is to study the Bashkir hospitality, food traditions and ceremonial meals, as well as related elements of material and spiritual culture.

5. Research Methods

In this study, descriptive materials, comparative historical methods were used.

6. Findings

In the course of work on this topic, new field ethnographic materials were collected, the available sources and literature were analyzed and data relating to traditional hospitality and guest meals of the Bashkirs were systematized.

7. Conclusion

Analysis of traditional hospitality and table etiquette of the Bashkirs allows us to draw some conclusions:

- these traditions of the Bashkirs were due to cattle-breeding life, and, despite their originality they had some similarity with the etiquette of many pastoral peoples of Eurasia developed in similar natural-geographical conditions. This was manifested primarily in the set of traditional meat and dairy dishes, the organization of the internal space of the home, the rules for meeting, receiving, seating and refreshing guests, the symbolic meanings of certain foods, etc.;

- in the rules of conduct at the table, the characteristics of the food distribution reflect the gender, age and social differentiation of society;

- the study of etiquette (including the table) of any nation helps to more fully disclose its national spirit, understand the origins of the moral and ethical ideology, etc.

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