

„MAJUNI“ – AN INFREQUENT CULINARY DISH FROM KOBULETI (Historical-ethnological aspects)

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Abstract: „Majuni“ is a festive dessert with sweet and bitter tastes, preserved only by the Kobuleti population. Traditionally, it was a crucial component of a wedding feast. At first, it was served for a groom and bride, and then – other guests. According to some sources, „Majuni“ was prepared on souls' days after a funeral.

The word „Majuni“ has an Arabic origin and is spread in the Persian language – with the meaning of a medical solution for strength and excitation; in the Turkish language – with the meaning of an ointment, all kinds of sweets. This word also appears in the Ottoman sources, and is borrowed from the Arabic language. In the Adjarian dialect, „Majuni“ is a rice dish with honey or sugar. It is supposed that this medical term has entered into the Georgian language since the X-XI centuries.

Among the Georgian historical sources, the word „Majuni“ is mainly fixed in medical books, with the meaning of a medical remedy, complex solution. „Majuni“ also had a meaning of a solution for strength and excitation.

Nowadays, the Kobuleti population has various recipes for „Majuni“. According to the elderly, „Majuni“ was prepared with round-grain rice and sugar syrup or honey.

The main culinary secret of „Majuni“ is its taste, namely, a balance of sweetness and bitterness. Today, all housewives try to keep that balance principle too.

Key words: Georgian culinary, tradition, ritual

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Introduction. The study of folk cuisine has a long history in Georgian historiography. However, this article is the first time that Majuni, as a traditional dish, has become an object of scientific interest. The reason for this may also be that the mentioned dish was preserved only by the traditional way of life of the Kobuleti population and is not found in other Georgian ethnic groups. Important materials about the lexical unit itself – majuni – have been preserved in ancient written sources, mediæval medical handbook, and various lexical publications, which contain interesting materials about the essence, etymology, and origin of the term. It is noteworthy that Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani also provides us with the Georgian equivalent of the word majuni in his dictionary, which indicates that the medicinal recipe referred to as majuni has been known to the Georgian people since ancient times.

The research on the research issue is novel, which significantly increases its relevance. This is also due to the fact that, at the initiative of the Ajara Cultural Heritage Protection Agency, relevant documentation was prepared regarding Majuni and submitted to the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Protection in order to grant it the status of an intangible cultural heritage monument.

The aim of the research is to collect and understand various types of materials related to Majuni in a unified way, to compare and contrast the information preserved in written monuments with field-ethnographic materials. The represented article is a kind of beginning of the research on the issue; by including it in scientific circulation, it is expected that interested parties will respond, which will give us the opportunity to study the issue in a wider spectrum.

Methods. The article analyzes the historical and modern functional aspects of Majuni using the comparative-historical method. An interdisciplinary approach to the problem is used in the development of the issue. Relevant materials are selected from medical, lexicological, literary and historical-ethnological works. The work is based on the existing scientific literature and field-ethnographic materials surrounding the issue.

Discussion. In Georgian folk cuisine, Majuni is a particularly distinctive dessert dish, which until recently was preserved in its original form only among the population of Kobuleti. Judging by field-ethnographic materials, it was traditionally an essential element of the wedding celebration. At the wedding, it was initially served to the bride and bridegroom, and then distributed to the wedding guests. According to some information, Majuni was also prepared on the days of remembrance of the deceased after the funeral.

There are different recipes of majuni are known. However, in any case, Majuni is the mixture of the ingredients having sweet and bitter flavors. Majuni is served cold. In modern times, in addition to plates, special glass-like forms are also used for this purpose.

Georgian lexicological publications, as well as Georgian folk mediæval medical handbooks, contain interesting information about the word „majuni“ and its other equivalents.

According to Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, „Majuni is the language of others, in Georgian it is called Dubeydi“, while the word „Dubeydi“ itself is interpreted as „Majuni“ (Orbeliani, 1966, p. 435). Thus, according to Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani the words „Majuni“ and „Dubeydi“ are the same. The 1841 edition of „The Knight in the Tiger’s Skin“, printed in St. Petersburg by Zakaria Palavandishvili and Davit Chubinashvili, includes a small dictionary. The words „majuni“ and „dubeydi“ do not appear here, although in the above-mentioned dictionary, in the context of the research question, a new word „mufarakhi“ is found. It is explained as follows: „Jagundi majuni, dubeidi“ (Rustaveli, 1841, p. 232).

A little later, namely in 1846, a Russian-Georgian dictionary compiled by Davit Chubinashvili was printed again in St. Petersburg. Here the words „Majuni“ and „Dubeidi“ are mentioned together with the Russian word „Кашка“ (porridge), where „Кашка лекарственная“ (Medicinal porridge) is explained as follows: „Majuni, Dubeydi, mufarakhi“ (Chubinashvili, 1846: 397).

Among the Georgian written monuments, the word „majuni“ is mainly recorded in books of medical types – so-called karabadini. For example, these are: „Uneven Karabadini“ of the 11th century by Kananeli (Uqsiro Karabadini 1940:501); „Book of Medicine“ of the 13th century (Book of Medicine 1936:316); „Yadigar-Daud“ of the 16th century (Yadigar-Daud 1938:713); „Karabadin the Good and the Healing“ of the 16th-17th centuries (Khelaia, 2009: 23,309-310); In these manuscripts, the term „majuni“ is presented as one of the main forms of pharmacological agents and denotes a complex type of mixture. In almost all recipes of majuni, the medicines are rubbed into honey, presumably in the form of a „gruel“ (liquid „porridge“) so that it can be swallowed, drunk (Khelaia, 2009: 23).

According to „Karabadin the Good and the Healing“ (XVI-XVII c.c.) „majuni“ is presented as one of the main forms of pharmacological agents and denotes a complex type of mixture. There are numerous majunas given in Karabadin, and in almost all of them, medicines are probably in the form of a liquid porridge, rubbed into honey (Khelaia, 2009: 23). Some types of majuni also contain pepper, and honey is mentioned as an essential component in almost all majuni, through which various medicines are rubbed through honey and become one compound – a medicine turned into majuni. We have a description of Majuni, for the preparation of which various elements – medicines – must be added to boiled honey, and Majuni will be created (Khelaia, 2009: 87-89).

Similar information regarding majun is given in „The Karabadini of Abram the Writer.“ Here, too, majuni refers to a mixture that is sometimes prepared by boiling, i.e., it is created as majuni through boiling. There is a special chapter for the Majuni in „Abram the Writer’s Karabadin“. It describes the general nature of the Majuni as well as specific Majuni. Here too, honey is mentioned everywhere, and in some cases, pepper is found. In the mentioned Karabadin, the following majuns are found: carrot

majun, majuni with Solomon's seal, majuni with dill, daisy majuni, bergamot orange majuni, quince majuni, miscible majuni, kamunia, sikangubinisa, and apilonisa (old Georgian terms for healing herbs) majuni, etc. (Khelaia, 2009: 112-174).

At first glance, it seems that majun is a porridge-like (?) mixture. Here it would be interesting to use Davit Chubinashvili's definition of the word „Кашка лекарственная“ which, as mentioned above, is explained as follows “majun, dubeydi, mufarakhi” (Chubinashvili, 1846: 397). In this case, the word „porridge“ still seems doubtful in order to clarify the meaning and nature of the word „majuni“. In our opinion, making majuni should not mean making „porridge“, because in the four Karabadins mentioned above, the word order „porridge“ is mentioned in other cases as well to denote a combination of different ingredients (Khelaia, 2009: 185). That is, the same Karabadini names the processes separately: „creation of majuni“ and „creation of porridge“, which indicates that they may have been used in different meanings and meant different processes.

Thus, according to Georgian Karabadinis (mediæval medical handbook), the participation of honey in the process of „creation of majuni“ is significant. The honey is so noticeable that we can assume that majuni was made only with honey (?), although there are several exceptions when honey is not involved in the recipes of majuni. There are relatively few cases when pepper is also mentioned in the recipes of making majuni.

In addition to the above-mentioned lexical and folk medicinal materials, its etymology is also noteworthy.

From an etymological point of view, according to special scientific literature, the word „Majuni“ is of Arabic origin. The Georgian word majuni comes from the Arabic word (عجّانة /- ağana), which has the following meanings: 1. ointment, cream; 2. medicinal compound, a mixture of medicinal herbs containing narcotics. The word „majuni“ is recorded in a number of ancient Georgian literary monuments – original or translated. For example, in „*Kilila and Damana*“ the word is used in the meaning of tincture that gives pleasure and excites. In relation to modern Majuni, the materials preserved in „*Rusudanian*“ are interesting, where sweets are added to the above-mentioned meanings of Majuni. Dubeydi, a medicine that gives a feeling of well-being made like jam, is also mentioned in the dictionary of D. Chubinashvili and I. Grishashvili (City Dictionary, 1997: 151). The word Majuni is considered of Arabic origin in Persian and Turkish dictionaries. In Persian, the emphasis is mainly on the medicinal compound that gives strength, energy and excitement, the elixir, while the Turkish „**macun**“[**majun**] refers to all kinds of confectionery. This word is also confirmed in Ottoman sources, where it comes from Arabic. In the Adjarian dialect, majuni means rice with honey or sugar (Glonti, 1984: 354). According to researcher Sophio Imedadze, this medical term was probably introduced into Georgian around the 10th-11th centuries (Imedadze, 2014: 89-90).

Thus, according to ancient Georgian medicinal recipes, majuni is a compound medicine, a combination of various ingredients, where sweetness or bitterness is not its unconditional determinant, although in the majuni given in the same medicinal books, sweetening with honey, creating majuni with honey, is more prevalent.

In the traditional cuisine of the indigenous population of Kobuleti, Majuni is a festive dish. It is a kind of dessert, the main characteristic of which is expressed in its simultaneously sweet and bitter taste. Traditionally, it was an integral part of the wedding table, although field-ethnographic materials, in small cases, reveal a different purpose for majuni. In particular, it was also prepared after the funeral of the deceased, on the days of remembrance of the deceased's soul. These days are: the fortieth day after death, so-called „forty“, after a year from the death or at the birthday of the deceased (Tunadze, 2024: 15)

According to field-ethnographic materials, various recipes for majuni are confirmed among the Kobuleti population. According to information preserved in the memory of elders, majuni is always made with round-grain rice, using sugar syrup, although we have variants where majuni was sweetened not with sugar syrup, but with honey.

The book „Culinary Journey to Adjara“ (Noghaideli, 2024: 48-49), prepared by the Tourism Products Development Agency of the Adjara Tourism Department, contains the following recipe for majuni:

The following ingredients were needed to prepare Majuni: 1 kg of rice or 150 g of white radish; 1 kg of sugar; 3 tablespoons of honey and 3 teaspoons of pepper. To prepare majuni, rice was poured boiling water and cooked until it became a porridge-like mass. Then, sugar, honey, and black pepper were added and simmered for 10 minutes over low heat. They were then placed in a covered container and pounded with a wooden spoon. Instead of rice, white radish could be used. In this case, the white radish was grated and boiled in its own juice over low heat until it collapsed and turned into a mushy mass. Then sugar, honey, and black pepper were added. Burnt sugar was added for color.

The main secret of the art of cooking majuni is its taste, namely the equal taste sensation of sweetness and bitterness. Even in modern times, every housewife tries to adhere to this principle, although there are cases when a little sweetness or bitterness in majun is preferable, which is the result of an individual culinary approach. In ethnographic life, some people prepare a sweeter-tasting majun, while others, on the contrary, may like a more bitter-tasting majun. Traditionally, as mentioned, sweetness and bitterness should be felt equally in majun. The majority of the Kobuleti population agrees with and adheres to this approach.

In the past, majuni was always prepared the night before the wedding – the „party night“. On the wedding day, the bride and bridegroom were the first to be served with majuni, and then it was distributed to the wedding guests. According to tradition, they would put it in the palm of their hand with a spoon. Some women, if they were pregnant, would even joke: „I have two „khisa““ meaning that two shares should be given to her. In modern times, the above-mentioned tradition related to Majun has been forgotten.

Majuni has been given new life and popularization by the Kobuleti Historical and Ethnographic Museum, where guests are offered small glasses of majuni at various events, while being told about the history of this dish and the traditions associated with it.

Conclusions. Thus, Majuni, known as Dubeydi in Georgian, was historically a medicinal herb, and many versions of it have been preserved in ancient Georgian medical manuscripts. Many versions of it have been preserved. Later, its purpose changed and has survived to our time as a ritual dish and part of the festive table. In modern times, the traditional culture associated with majun is being forgotten, and it retains only the function of a dessert dish.

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