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OUR GRANDMAS DIDN´T JUST EAT PORRIDGE![i]

(The research of the eating habits among the inhabitants of the Czech part of Czechoslovakia in 1918 – 1938 according to womens magazines from that time)

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Abstract: **What are your favourite meals? Did you eat them at your grandma's table? The meals we consume in our early childhood form our eating habits for the rest of our lives as well as our attitudes towards our national cuisine. Our grandma´s cuisine is usually seen as traditional, rich in nutrition and tasty. Its roots and recipes can be traced back to past generations. But how can we identify the origins of this food? Contemporary cookbooks and media, both widely read and available during the 1920s – 1930s, provide ideal sources.**

This paper looks at articles dealing with gastronomy topics in Czech lifestyle magazines focused on women from 1918 – 1938. This period was very significant in the history of the Czech Republic, as it relates to an era of independence, democracy and freedom between the wars. Czechoslovakia at that time was the leading democratic republic in Central Europe, especially in politics, the economy and gastronomy. Prague, along with Paris and Vienna, was one of the most interesting and innovative culinary European cities.

Did the media reflect the development and changes in the cuisine of this period? How did they form the nutrition and cooking habits of the postwar generation? This paper answers such questions through an analysis of articles in eight different Czech magazines and provides an outline of the topics, trends and gastronomical landscape of Czech households during this time. The published recipes and food articles found not only give an insight into daily life in the 1920s and 1930s, but also offer tips on how to survive through years of financial crisis, an issue highly relevant to Europeans today.

Key words: **Gastronomy, Czechoslovakia, 1918 – 1938, family food, eating habits, womens magazines**

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, especially since 2008, there has been a growing interest in the Czech Republic concerning traditional Czech dishes. Chefs, professionals and food journalists began to praise the "good old gastronomy" of 1918 – 1938, in the so-called First Republic. It seems, from revisiting cookbooks of that time and within contemporary public opinion, that there has been a resurgence and new-found appreciation for quality Czech cuisine.

As a food journalist and scientist I decided to look closer at the issue, going deeper into the Czech media from that time to search for evidence about past gastronomy in order to determine what it was that Czechs actually ate between the two great wars. The content analysis of 8 Czech women's magazines from this period showed that the reality was quite different from what is currently presented as popular gastronomy from that time.

From our own living histories, the cooking of our grandparents and more specifically, grandmothers, we are able to see examples of typical dishes from the 1920s to the 1950s as they continue to cook their favorite childhood dishes for current and future generations. As grandparents usually look after their grandchildren the same way they took care of their own children, the food culture of the family is continued from one generation to the next. In this way our collective knowledge and attitude toward our national cuisine is formed.

The development of Czech history was unfortunately broken by World War II and the 40-year-long era of communism and collective dining. Today, Czech society must explore its roots in order to follow up on this interrupted history.

II. A Brief History

Gastronomy and eating habits are closely connected to the state of the economy, which are also closely tied to politics. A brief overview of Czechoslovak history is therefore useful.

Czechoslovakia, the state of Czechs and Slovaks, was founded in 1918 after World War I. It was the first Czechoslovakian independent national state and its end came with the Munich Pact (Agreement) of 1938. This period is known as the First Republic, and was an era characterized by the building of the new state, the economy, national culture and public space. Its icon remains the first Czech president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, who invested all of his efforts into creating a united national state.

Czechoslovakia was counted among the leading democracies in Europe, and had the foreign cooperation of Great Britain and France, and economic relations with Germany. It had approximately 14 million inhabitants, mostly Czechs, Slovaks and smaller amounts of Ukrainians and Germans (especially in big cities – the urbanization rate in 1930 was 48.7% [Bartoš, Trapl, 2001: 11]). The years 1925 – 1930 are commonly known as the Golden Era. Industry was flourishing, food shortages were rare and people, especially in big cities, had work, money and free time to spend it in. Weekends (Saturday evenings and Sundays) were spent dancing, going to bars and restaurants, spending time in nature and enjoying life.

On 28th October 1918, the nation was proclaimed as the independent Czechoslovak Republic. People were not only euphoric about their newfound independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire but also about the end of the First World War. The building of the new state, its economy and homes could begin. However, problems began to arise during the next year within the postwar industries and agriculture. "The economic situation stayed very dismal. There was a critical lack of goods, the ration card system couldn´t assure the nutrition of the wider society. There was rise in prices, usury and in the black market. There was not enough food, coal and housing," (Olivová, 2000: 90). Nonetheless, within two years, the situation had stabilized and

the economy started to grow. The year 1924 is known as the beginning of the "Golden Era", due to the flourishing economy and growing lifestyle of the common people. It reached its peak in 1929 when the Great Depression hit the USA and started to move across the world. The Depression came to the young Czechoslovakia in 1931 with widespread bankruptcies and the shutdown of factories, along with a growing unemployment rate which hit two-thirds of the nation. Such conditions provided fertile ground for nationalist tendencies and led directly to the rise of nationalist parties in a number of countries – most notably the German Nazi party. In 1938, with the Nazi party gaining more power and influence over other nations – combined with the democratic and weak Czechoslovakian political situation – the annexation of the Sudetenland was approved in the Munich Agreement on September 29th.

The postwar market after WWI was dominated by a coupon system, state controlled supplies, lack of goods, low wages, high prices and the spread of the grey market and profiteering from elementary, basic necessities. The "Golden twenties" represented a rising standard of living for all classes within Czech society, with the opening of the most famous restaurants and the rising interest of young women in gastronomy, cooking and housekeeping (such subjects began to be taught in schools and in special cooking and housekeeping courses). The food market boomed and a healthy lifestyle and nutrition started to prevail over typical Czech cuisine. However, this period was greatly inhibited by the Great Depression between 1929 and 1933; small farmers verged on starvation once again and their habits changed heavily. The standard of living once again began to rise in the second half of the thirties, but the promise of expansion and the development of society were disrupted by World War II.

III. MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The Czech public sphere evolved with the assistance of the mass media – daily newspapers, magazines and the beginning of radio during this period. After WWI there were about 2,250 newspaper titles in Czechoslovakia, and by 1925 there were already 2,800 (Kubíček, 2004, 2006-2007). Politics and art provided popular topics of discussion in cafés and private salons, mostly among the middle and upper classes. "Newspapers and magazines fulfilled two main goals – information and news; at the same time they work towards opinion, ideas and political influence. The main signature of newspapers is the news or information," (Bůžek et al., 1994: 45).

From the perspective of traditional gender roles, household cooking was the domain of women. Therefore in this paper I focus on the findings from a content analysis of 8 magazines for women from different classes and political views, because this type of press is the ideal source of information for eating habits and daily life from the sample period. These magazines were widely read throughout the entire country. They were published weekly or monthly, had usually 8 – 12 pages (weekly magazine) or 20 pages (monthly magazine). The cover page usually featured the title of the issue, as well as the beginning of the discussion of that edition's chosen news or household issue.

The Social Democratic Party was affiliated with Ženské noviny (Women Newspapers, published 1919 – 1924), Ženské listy (Women Papers, 1873 – 1926) and Ženský list (Woman Paper, 1920 – 1922). The weekly magazine Ženské noviny (Women Newspapers) was supported by the Social Democratic Labour Party. Its aim was to raise and influence a society of Czech female

labourers and responsible mothers. The articles within this outlet focused on politics and social issues. Ženský list (Woman Paper) was established by a group of journalists, and eventually became affiliated with the socialist and (later) communist movement. From part of the journalists the weekly magazine Ženský list (Woman Paper) was grounded, later on it became a socialist and communist paper.

The magazine Ženské listy (Women Papers) was more traditional and practical, publishing not only recipes but also fashion trends, educational and health tips.

The Communist or Labour Party used Rozsévačka (Sower, 1926 – 1938) and Ženské noviny (Women Newspaper, 1925 – 1940, changed from the magazine of Social Democratic Party) as its affiliated news outlet. Rozsévačka (Sower) was affiliated strongly with the Communist party and labour class which primarily sought to educate women in political issues and gave tips on how to take care of a household with a low income. It was published three times in 6 months before being censored for publishing politically inappropriate content (and abandoned in July 1929, March 1931 and November 1933).

The Catholic wing published Žena (Women, 1919 – 1925) which focused on all encompassing issues within women's lives, firstly about social and political events, then later in regards to more specifically Christianity-oriented issues.

There were also a number of apolitical magazines like Ženský svět (Woman´s World, 1896 – 1930), Česká Žena (Czech Woman, 1908 – 1927), and later Naše domácnost (Our Household, 1927 – 1932), and Kalendář paní a dívek Československá žena (Calender of Women and Ladies - Czechoslovak Women, 1923 – 1936). The magazine Ženský svět (Women World) is the oldest Czech women's magazine (published from 1896) and was issued twice a month. It focused on daily life and the interests of Czech women from the educated middle class. The articles were quite long and covered current issues in society. The magazine Česká Žena (Czech Woman), later on Naše domácnost (Our Household), gave news and tips on how to cook and take care of a middle class household along with reports about food production and political influence. The Calender published more detailed philosophical articles and also popular wisdom.

IV. Methodology

To realize what people used to eat and what formed their knowledge about nutrition and food I used quantitative content analysis from these eight widely read Czech magazines for women from 1919 – 1938. The unit in content analysis is one article. In total the sampled magazines contained 636 articles about gastronomy, food and eating across the period from 1918 – 1938 in recipe sections or elsewhere. The analysis focuses on the topics, length, position, section and genre of these articles. Not all magazines were published throughout the whole period. The collected data was coded and evaluated by SPSS.

The content analysis was designed to answer the following three questions:

1. On which topics was journalism about these issues focused? How often was the material published and in what form?

2. Was gastronomy afforded its own sections and genre?

3. Was there any development in this theme during the period 1918 – 1938?

The following hypotheses arose from these research questions:

H1: The main issues of gastronomical journalism in women's magazines would be concerned with food, nutrition, daily eating habits and recipes.

H2: There would not be much discussion of restaurant-based dining, as restaurants were visited primarily by higher income families and single adults.

V. GASTRONOMY IN MAGAZINES

The most articles (239 out of 636) of this issue were published in Ženský svět (Women´s World), which also popularized new recipes, such as one containing spaghetti with nuts. The weekly magazine Ženské noviny (Women Newspapers) published 156 such articles. The regular section 'What to cook?' supplied (and displayed in detail) menus for the whole week. Although many women worked in factories, they were still recommended to cook warm meals every day, typically including a sweet dish on Fridays and a Sunday meal with meat and dumplings. Cooking was the primary theme in the apolitical magazines, although this was also the case with the Communist paper Rozsévačka (Sower), in which readers could find tips on how to live on a low income along with daily recipes.

In all, articles consisted mainly of recipes on how to There was ostensibly a shift from recipes with fewer ingredients in the postwar period along with recipes for children and people of ill-health to articles about vitamins, recipes with more fruit, vegetables and meat in the 1920s to issues of health and fitness in the 1930s.

Each magazine had its own particular audience, attracting people with particular interests and shaping those interests in turn. The magazines aimed at the

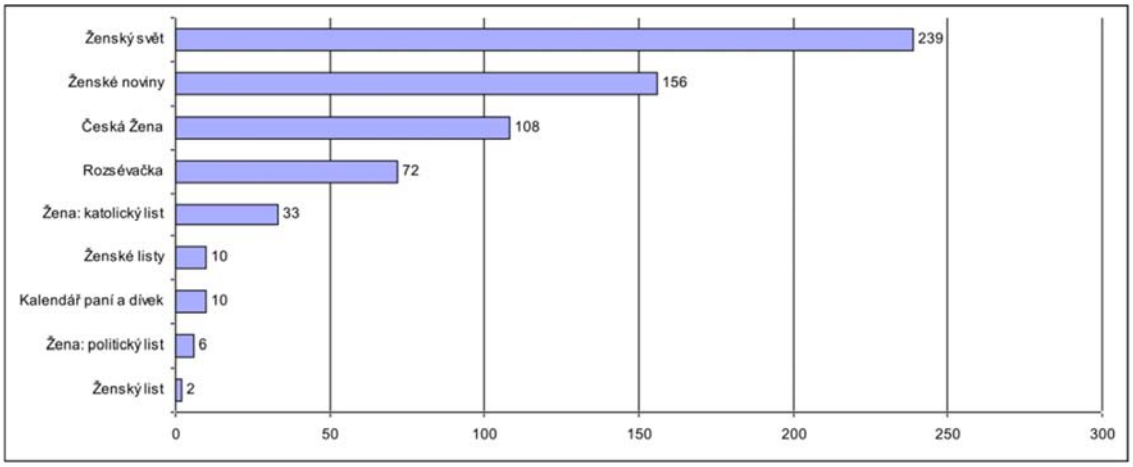

Figure 1. Published articles in the Czech women magazines, 1918 - 1938

middle and upper classes discussed health issues, containing recipes and tips for family well-being. Those aimed primarily at the working class were focused mainly on the high prices of food, political issues and detailed tips on preparing cheap food. In most cases, the articles were published into their own sections, named differently in each magazine depending on the themes and the style of the title. In some these articles were published under sections titled Recipes, while in others, such sections were named ‚Cooking tips', ‚Kitchen', ‚Household advice', and so on.

The hypotheses H1: The main issues of gastronomical journalism in women's magazines would be concerned with food, nutrition, daily eating habits and recipes and H2: There would not be much discussion of restaurant-based dining, as restaurants were visited primarily by higher income families and single adults were proven. In women's magazines there was no discussion about restaurants and bars. This could have been because readers of these magazines were not regular visitors to such places or that this simply was not a topic the journal was interested in writing about.

The content analysis of eight women's magazines revealed the main topics within these articles. These results were compared with statistics relating to consumption in order to draw inferences about what people actually consumed (and if the advice and articles in the magazines are based on the real market). A problem in achieving this lies in a lack of statistical evidence for consumption of various foods for every year

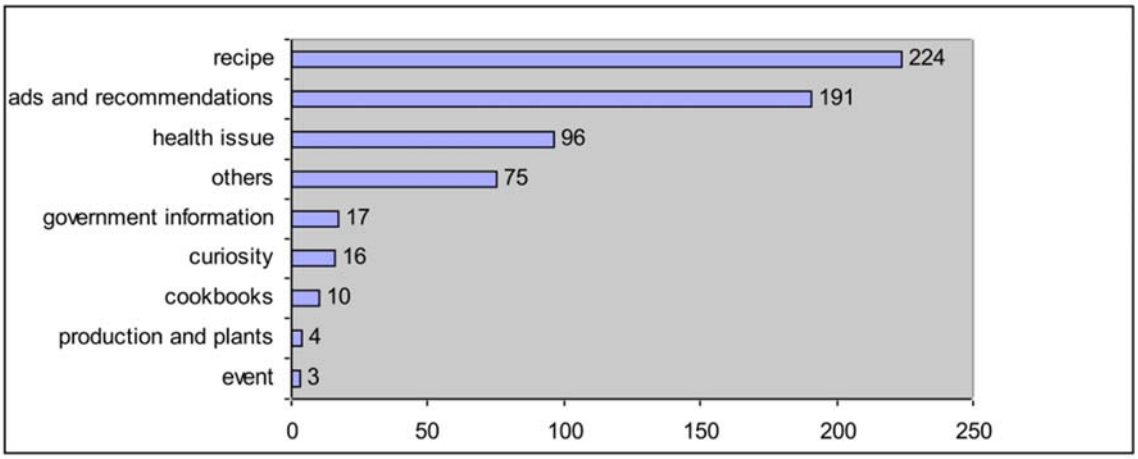

Figure 2. Published topics in the Czech women magazines, 1918 – 1938

in the sample period. The statisticians of the Czech statistical bureau (Český statistický úřad) have made attempts to calculate consumption figures according to those relating to industrial and agricultural production, supplies, imports and exports from 1920 to 1992, but many figures remain unavailable. There are no detailed statistics about food consumption before the year 1938 and it is also not clear to what extent people were self-sustainable in their sourcing of food provisions. Nonetheless, it is known that in 1936 the average food consumption reached barely 2500 kcals per person a day, less than 85% of the medically-recommended daily amount (Bartoš and Trapl, 2001: 69).

According to the available statistics, the most consumed commodities were grain, wheat flour and rye flour and of course bread, meat (mostly pork and beef), potatoes and sugar. These were also the most used ingredients in recipes. It is interesting that coffee was drank almost 10 times more often than tea, although in most cases this was substitute coffee (from chicory, rye, etc). Bread was made traditionally from rye flour; wheat flour came later und was used mostly for baking pastries and yeast dough.

Source: Český statistický úřad, Demografická příručka - dle bilanční metody na 1 obyvatele ČSR 1936, Bartoš and Trapl, 2001: 68, ročenka Československo 1918 – 1937, ročenka Spotřeba potravin 1920 – 2010

The chart shows that in the 'Golden years' (1924 – 1930) the most popular basic ingredients were wheat flour, potatoes and sugar, and the most popular expensive foods were meat and fish. Meat, sugar and cereal dishes formed the most substantial part of daily food intake. People weren´t used to eating vegetables and fruits and these were also quite expensive. From the second-half of the twenties, food magazines (mostly Ženský svět – Women´s World) began printing articles about healthy nutrition and the need for a shift from the typical Czech combination – meat, dumplings or potatoes and sauce – to lighter, more expensive and time-consuming meals, often boasting that such meals were easier to prepare.

Chart 1. Food consumption in 1920 – 1937 in Czechoslovakia (kg / person / year)

Commodity / Year	1920	1921	1924	1928	1929	1933	1935	1936	1937
Grains (in cost of flour)	-	-	110,4	-	111,2	107,8	111,1	121,1	-
Wheat flour	-	-	60,1	62,3	62,9	57,1	56,1	62,6	-
Rye flour	-	-	41,7	-	41	43,8	48,6	53	-
Bread	-	-	72,8	77,3	77,9	78,5	80,9	84,7	-
Wheat pastry	-	-	-	8,3	9,2	11	11,2	11,7	-
Rice	1,8	3,8	3,6	3,6	3,3	3,9	4,4	3,6	4
Meat	-	-	25	30,4	29,7	26,3	28,4	34	-
Fish	1,1	0,8	1,5	1,6	2	1,4	1,7	2,1	2,2
Potatoes	66	57	83	106	131	98	87	118,9	123,5
Sugar	21,5	20,8	25,5	25,9	25,6	24,7	25,1	23,2	26

VI. Look in the Kitchen

The post-war society was even more structured by social class and according to nationality. From the second half of the 19th century two different communities were developing – Czech and German. Both ethnic groups lived alongside each other in cities and villages, with some degree of inter-marriage, but in the political and cultural realms these groups had been constantly receding from the other, leading to increased competition, especially after World War I (Fialová et al., 1996: 267). A third influential group was the Jewish community.

These groups were spread more or less evenly throughout the country, but in the northern and western regions 90% of inhabitants were German (see Fialová et al., 1996: 316).

The census collected records relating to the national, religious and occupational structure of Czech society. There were two censuses in the First Republic – in February 1921 and 1930. In 1921 there were 13,612,424 inhabitants, while nine years later there were 14,009,614 inhabitants (Československá statistika, 1935: 10, Kučera and Srb, 1962: 31 and Srb, 2004: 28). In this paper I focus only on the eating habits of the Czech inhabitants in urban areas, as these people were the main readers of the magazines at that time.

In the Austro-Hungarian Empire Czechoslovakia served as the heart of industry, and after World War I most of the industry stayed in the country. The employment rate was almost 50%: one-third of women and two-thirds of men were employed. Half of the working population made their living as labourers, while a quarter made their living in the agricultural sector, 12-13% ran their own small businesses, and about 4-5% were owners of large businesses.

Chart 2. Nationality in Czechoslovakia in 1921 and 1930 (in %)

Nationality / Year	1921	1930
Czech	68	69
German	30,8	29,6
Jewish	0,2	1,3
Russian and Ukrainians	unknown	3,8
Polish	1	0,86
Slovak	unknown	2,49
Hungarian	unknown	4,8

Source: Český statistický úřad; Československá statistika, 1935: 10; Kárník, 2000; Fialová et. al, 1996: 314; Kučera and Srb, 1962: 31; Srb, 2004: 131.

Labourers lived mostly in cities, depending on market conditions. Such people were quite poor, and as a result their menu was at the mercy of food prices, something which was reflected in the content of the magazines Rozsévačka (Sower) and Ženské noviny (Women Newspapers). The ingredients in many classic dishes were slightly changed for cheaper ones, for example butter for margarine and dumplings for potatoes or rice. Fresh vegetables and fruits were rare, except for cucumber salad. For breakfast, they mostly drank black coffee substitutes with bread and jam or butter. Women tended to prepare lunch at home, which mostly consisted of soup, cooked potatoes, noodles, rice, sometimes cooked or fried cabbage and mushrooms. Fried (wheat) foods or sweet meals like filled fruit dumplings, cakes or omelets were very common as well. Dinner was smaller, consisting simply of soup and bread or the leftovers from lunch. Meat was quite expensive and scarce, especially beef, pork or horse, which were eaten perhaps once or twice a week. How the average labourer ate on a daily basis can be inferred by the contents

of Rozsévačka magazine. From there the working women could write correspondence outlining her own weekly menu. As an example, one reader from Prague claimed that she would cook potato soup on Sunday, pork ribs, cabbage and dumplings. On Monday, because she would do the laundry, she wouldn't cook – so the family would eat leftovers from the weekend with bread. On Tuesday, she might prepare soup and pasta with poppy seeds or cheese. On Wednesday, she could cook soup, pasta, potatoes and cucumber salad. On Thursday, she might serve horse goulash and potatoes, and on Friday mushroom soup and yeast pancakes. The reader in question complained that the price of living had become more expensive, even while household income stayed the same. This woman would spend ¼ of her income on food alone, and in her view a change in this situation had to come soon (Rozsévačka, 1935).

The middle class – consisting of craftsmen, clerks and the self-employed – enjoyed more food and more variety. Their higher income allowed them to afford more products and to go out more often to restaurants and bars (perhaps for weekend lunch or on Christmas Eve). The middle class consisted mainly of single men or families with a double income – the women often working in the men´s family business. Especially in big cities, various household employees assisted with the cleaning and cooking. A three-course menu for lunch and dinner was quite normal, with middle class men usually going home for lunch and having a small rest before afternoon hours in the office. The meals were similar to those of the working class but with a wider variety and higher quality. They used butter instead of margarine and ate vegetables and fruits, although these were often boiled or baked. Czech and Austrian wine was common. Women's magazines for these more affluent audiences offered various tips to some degree but these mostly related to festive dinners or dining.

High society ate almost identically but went out to restaurants or bars and organized house parties with dinners more often.

VII. CONCLUSION

The analysis has demonstrated that Czech women's media addressed and were interested in the gastronomy of the nation. These media, according to their ideological positions and audience share, reflected the contemporary situation – for example, the labour press emphasized poverty-related news, overpriced food and the malnutrition of the labour class. Women's journals were filled with plenty of recipes, tips and hints on housekeeping and eating and were often also devoted to dining and innovations in cooking and gastronomy.

It has been shown that typical Czech cuisine, as we now know it, can be traced back to the 1920s. At that time most of the ingredients currently used in contemporary cooking were well-known; chefs and women at home used ginger, capers, asparagus, black root and others that have seen a resurgence in recent years as tasty and popular ingredients. At that time, too, tomatoes and noodles became widely used. Technical innovations like milk pasteurization, conservation and gas cookers made food preparation easier.

Reading these old magazines and cookbooks helps us to understand the past and national cuisine, which thereby allows us to rediscover and contextualise current trends in food preparation.

Endnotes

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Magazines

Česká Žena (1909 – 1927), later Naše domácnost (1927 – 1932)

Kalendář paní a dívek. Československá žena (1923 - 1936)

Rozsévačka (1926 – 1938)

Žena (1919 - 1925)

Ženské noviny (1922, 1930, 1931 a 1935)

Ženský list (1920 - 1922)

Ženský svět (1918 – 1930)

Ženské listy (1918 - 1926)