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Original Article

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OSSETIANS IN TURKEY: TRADITIONAL FOOD AS A MARKER OF IDENTITY

For more than a century and a half of the history of diaspora life, the Ossetians in Turkey have developed a complex identity. The components of this identity (civil, pan-Caucasian/Circassian, ethnic, and sub-ethnic) determine the nature of ethnic and cultural processes, and the mechanisms by which they adapt to foreign cultural environments while preserving and developing their ethnicity. The study of the existing system is relevant because it helps us understand the history of the gradual incorporation of Ossetians into the host society and the construction of their current identity. The study aims to determine the prospects for their national and cultural development and to identify the potential of the diaspora in the consolidation processes. The ethnological study of the Ossetians in Turkey will contribute to the rethinking of some established yet not totally correct notions about the modern diaspora. This article focuses on traditional food as a primary marker of the identity of the Ossetians living in Turkey because it is one of the most stable cultural elements. The study is based on field materials collected by the author during a comprehensive folklore and ethnographic expedition to Ossetian settlements in Turkey in 2015. Through participant observation, the traditional Ossetian repertoire of dishes and products brought by the first settlers was identified, as well as the influence of the Circassian cultural sphere on Ossetian cuisine and its preparation methods. This influence was first observed among the privileged classes in the historical homeland, and then continued in the new conditions of the diaspora. Turkish inclusions in traditional food, including ceremonial dishes, were revealed. Current processes of “renewal” of ethnicity, experienced by all Caucasian diasporas in Turkey, the growing interest in ethnic and cultural values, and the intensification of contacts with compatriots, have given rise to revival initiatives and practices. An analysis of these processes allows us to consider traditional food an innovative resource actively used in ethnocultural projects.

Keywords: *Ossetians, Turkey, identity, traditional food, revival practices*

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