

Mgr Anna Chmiel, *Edukacyjny wymiar kultury stołu w rodzinach górnośląskich w perspektywie historycznej i współczesnej*. Rozprawa doktorska. Uniwersytet Wrocławski, Szkoła Doktorska, Kolegium Pedagogiki, Wrocław 2023, 391 s.

Review

Food, diet, culinary and dining culture as a system of cultural-historical, cultural-anthropological, nutritional but also sociological, psychological and health aspects have been an integral part of usual as well as festive everydayness of human entities since ancient times, regardless of time or place of their activities. It is not only about the consumption of food in a kitchen-processed form, simply saying about food and drinks, its raw ingredient base and technology of preparation, as these thematic segments are every now and then – and still, despite the increased attention paid to it by contemporary scientific disciplines – interpreted. On the contrary, culinary culture, or the culture of dining, consists not only of the above mentioned food ingredient components, but also a wide range of moments, rules and principles corresponding to the fact that dining is also a platform for private as well as public social contact, communication, negotiation and concluding agreements, even at the highest level, and that it is also a platform for refining mutual relationships, specific education, and influencing individuals in their attitudes towards material as well as spiritual dimensions of life.

The culture of dining and eating is also a reflection of the prevailing social hierarchy, material possibilities of individuals, families and social groups. It is conditioned by a number of determinants: geographical and climatic conditions, social affiliation of diners, their professional orientation, education as well as their role in public life. It also inherently reflects the period aspects, historical and political events influencing everyday life, economic conditions and provisions, and in modern times also nutritional trends and changing views on lifestyle. On the other hand, the quality of diet and the character of culinary and dining culture point to the overall cultural and material level of entities and, at least indirectly, retrospectively influence perhaps all components of human activities, thinking and decision making.

It is most gratifying that it can be stated at the very beginning of the review that Mgr Anna Chmiel respected the multi-layered and complex topic of dining and culinary culture in her doctoral discourse and paid appropriate attention to all its constitutive segments.

She focused her work specifically on the educational dimension of dining culture, which, as the author herself states in the introduction, combines the biological and cultural aspects of eating, and she was not afraid to point out the sociological and psychological contexts

that meetings “at the table” can have for the participants. She considers the key aspects of dining culture to be the way of obtaining ingredients, the preparation of meals and the human factor involved in these activities, the manner and place of serving meals, the etiquette of dining in various situations of everyday and festive life, the content and method of communication during dining and many others.

As far as the chronological scope is concerned, the emphasis of Mgr Chmiel’s research and subsequent written discourse was on the description and evaluation of the dining culture of the 19th and 20th centuries with the overlap of research activities in cooperation with narrators to the present, i.e. to the first quarter of the 21st century. Regarding the space, the author focused on the area of Upper Silesia that developed in a very diverse way both culturally and historically, a territory that is considered to be the intersection of three cultures: Polish, German and, in the border areas, also Czech (esp. the Těšín region). Although it is not stated *expressis verbis* in setting the objectives, all indicates that the focus of the research was territorially on the Upper Silesian regions that now belong to Poland, and observed was the population both then and now primarily Polish.

The text of the doctoral thesis is imaginary divided into two parts. The first, theoretical, can be considered to some extent as introductory and contextual. Individual chapters are devoted to individual thematic segments, the focus of which seemed to the author – and justifiably so – to be crucial for grasping the issue of dining culture and its manifestations. The first chapter describes the *history of Silesia and its inhabitants*, first outlining the development of Silesia in its historical borders, then the development of Upper Silesia and finally, in a separate subchapter, the national, linguistic and religious changes of Upper Silesia. The question remains whether it was necessary to exhaust herself by describing the rather complex history of this central European region since its medieval constitution, when the pre-modern historical development and character of culinary culture and dining in Silesia until the 18th century did not basically play role in grasping the main topic of the discourse accentuating the 19th and 20th centuries.

The second chapter that can be briefly titled *Dining Culture* is a retrospective treatise presenting the essential elements of this cultural and social phenomenon in a broad sense, confirming the interest of the author Mgr Chmiel in a comprehensive grasp of the chosen topic. This is also indicated by the titles of the subchapters: *Livelihood as a Philosophical Process*, *History of jezení Eating and Dining Culture*, *Educational, Psychosocial and Customary Aspects of Dining Culture*, including excursions into nutritional and health or medical consequences of eating disorders, insight into modern diet, etc.

The third and fourth chapters open, at least in our opinion, in this theoretical section the real topic of culinary culture and dining in the family environment in Upper Silesia, although they are still conceived in a broad scope using knowledge of interdisciplinary, in the area of interest intersecting, sciences (psychology, pedagogy, demography, history of culture and everydayness, etc.). First, in the third chapter, attention is paid to the *Family in its historical and contemporary conclusions*. Here not only the development and typology of the family in the central European (and therefore Silesian) area is interesting for the study of culinary culture and dining, but also the emphasis on the role of family in education and communication. The role of parents and especially grandparents is mentioned. For the maintenance of dietary traditions – for the real culinary heritage passed down from generation to generation – the bond between these people and their descendants is probably the most important. We consider the third subchapter devoted to *the Upper Silesian family and its specifics* to be essential. Not only the household environment as a material framework, but mainly family relationships, the role of individual members changing depending on the social and period context, the maintenance of traditions, customs and models of behaviour and their passing on are crucial for understanding and maintaining culinary culture and dining.

In the fourth chapter, the author Mgr Chmiel continuously moves on to a related topic, but in terms of content, more inward and individual, namely *Experiencing the Everydayness and Non-Everydayness (Festivity) in the Context of the Culture of Dining*. In this way – not for the first time in the presented work – she demonstrates her ability to perceive, interpret and compare the segments of culinary culture and dining in a modern way, the segments that are like any other element of human culture inherently linked to personal, sometimes incommunicable experience. After presentation of some of the basic scientific works on history, cultural history and sociology of everydayness, consideration of the role of experience, emotions and their adequate reflection, i.e. highly theoretical passages, the author gets back to the core of her interest in the last subchapter titled *Upper Silesian Dining Culture as a Historical and Contemporary Element of Everydayness and Non-Everydayness* and via enumeration of traditions and customs of the civil, agricultural and religious year opens the way to the follow-up description and evaluation of eating and dining as a broad complex of material and spiritual culture of the monitored region.

The second part of the doctoral thesis must be considered the focus of the discourse since it contains the real research contribution (Rozdział VI *Górnośląska kultura stołu w badanych źródłach*, pp. 234-292; Rozdział VII *Kultura stołu we współczesnych rodzinach górnośląskich w świetle badań własnych*, pp. 293-368). Similarly as in the first part, the author

Mgr Chmiel based her work on already published and critically verified works – source literature, especially on printed cookery books published from the end of the 18th century to the end of the 20th century, relevant scientific works created in the context of research in the area of food history and regional (Silesian) culinary culture and combined publications linking research reports with recipes, descriptions of customs in the field of culinary and dining culture, etc.

With the help of the above-mentioned and other information sources as well as precisely chosen and described procedures and methods in the field of history, oral history, study of material culture etc., she managed to fulfill and evaluate in a very satisfactory way two selected research areas that she determined in the chapter *Rozdział V Metodologia i organizacja badań własnych*, namely: What educational aspects of the dining culture of Upper Silesian families are presented in the source literature of the 19th and early 20th, respectively 1980s, and further What the attitude of the young generation of Upper Silesians is towards the culture of dining in the families they come from. She precisely formulated partial questions for each of the areas and using them she came to quite clear and comprehensible answers that she tried to summarise in the end.

It would certainly be possible to discuss the methods and procedures at length and additionally consider whether all the selected titles of source literature are really adequate to the Upper Silesian environment and probably to the most important research element, i.e. the findings of the opinion of the current generations of inhabitants on the traditional culture of dining and eating. With many years of experience in researching recipe books and cookery books, their analysis and criticism as well as with the knowledge of the development of food and dishes in Silesia, there is a question regarding older sources. These include, for example, the work of Wojciech Wielądek *Kucharz Doskonały* from the end of the 18th, respectively the beginning of the 19th century from the environment of the Warsaw burgher society as well as the subsequently cited books by Zofia Wilhelmina of Koblanów Szczybierowa. The primary use of the German cookery book by Henrietta Pelz *Neues allgemeines schlesische Kochbuch, etc.*, respectively *Scheisches Kochbuch* published in Wrocław from 1835 to the present day could undoubtedly be considered more justified since it contains recipes for partial dishes preserved in Silesian (as well as Upper Silesian) cuisine to these days, that are mentioned only as if marginal (p. 218). But this is certainly a matter of opinion.

Much more important than the above-mentioned reproach are the results achieved by the author during her research, especially in the area of collecting statements of the members of contemporary young generation of Upper Silesian residents. Everything that is published in

the doctoral discourse about dishes, drinks, cooking and dining methods, habits and customs has the value of a primary source, all the more so if some of the texts are supplemented by photographic material. In addition, it is necessary to consider positive the finding mentioned in the conclusion that contemporary generation of Upper Silesians in active age is familiar with the issue of traditional eating and dining, that despite the understandable use of modern cooking technologies, appliances and tools, many of the dishes that could be considered culinary heritage are prepared and consumed at least occasionally (on holidays as well as weekdays). Of course, some of the customs or dishes are considered outdated and especially young people are critical of them, but these opinions do not generally decrease the importance of traditions and role of dining culture for family life.

If, for the sake of order, we were to point out some ambiguities in the conception of the research or the formulation of the doctoral discourse, then we would state – in addition to the already mentioned note on used cookery books from the 19th century – that we consider minimal and thematically inconsistent reference to foreign literature to be a certain limit for the international acceptance of otherwise very valuable and interesting research results presented in the submitted doctoral discourse. For example, we miss the mention of works devoted to the cultural anthropology of food that currently enjoy great attention, especially in Western countries (Paul Freedman, Robert Dirks, Sydney Mintz, etc.). Culturally close to the Polish or Silesian area and its culinary culture are also publications by Slovak and Czech authors (Rastislava Stoličná-Mikolajová, Martin Franc, Irena Korbelářová and others). Older German works of ethnographic nature dealing with food and its cultural context (Joseph Klapper) should not be left out either. Similarly, a bibliography of works on the history of Silesia or Upper Silesia deserves more attention, all the more so because the author (perhaps somewhat unnecessarily) decided to present the history of this territory from the beginnings to the present. We have in mind in particular the synthetic German and Czech works (Ludwig Petry, Norbert Conrads, Zdeněk Jirásek et al., Dan Gawrecki et al.). In the case of considering publishing the doctoral discourse on the level of scientific work, we strongly recommend that fact to be corrected.

In defending the doctoral discourse, it would perhaps be useful to clarify more precisely whether and to what extent the opinions and attitudes towards the culture of dining and eating in Upper Silesia have changed in relation to social strata, especially urban (formerly burgher) vs. rural classes, workers (industrial areas / *zagłębie*) in the past and also among the current generation.

The given suggestions for possible additions to the text or oral discussion do not in any way degrade the high quality of Mgr Anna Chmiel's doctoral discussion. It is necessary to highlight the thematic scope of the treatise on the culture of dining and eating (culinary culture), the knowledge of literature and information sources, and especially the conduct of current research with narrators.

In conclusion, in accordance with the Higher Education and Science Act of 20 July 2018 (Ustawa z dn. 20 lipca 2018 r. Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce), it can be stated that the doctoral discourse presents the author's general theoretical knowledge in the relevant field, as well as her ability to independently carry out the thesis. At the same time, the subject of the doctoral discourse is an original solution in terms of applying the results of her own scientific research in the field of social sciences.

We highly recommend the submitted doctoral thesis for its defence and further procedure for the award of the doctoral degree.

Ostrava, 30 September 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Irena Korbelařová', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Prof. PhDr. Irena Korbelařová, Dr.