

HARTS

& Minds

Tito's Cookbook

ANJA DRULOVIC



BOOK REVIEW: *Tito's Cookbook*

Review by Ania K. England

HARTS & Minds: The Journal of
Humanities and Arts

Vol.2, No.1 (Autumn 2014)

Article © HARTS & Minds

BOOK REVIEW: Anja Drulovic, *Tito's Cookbook*, trans. by Zermen Filipovic, (Belgrade 2006) pp.253

Ania K. England

The personality of the former leader of Yugoslavia was so overwhelming that even if one writes a book about the exceptional dishes which he ate with celebrities, kings, sheikhs and so on, as Anja Drulovic has attempted, the book becomes an examination of Josip Broz Tito himself. However, Drulovic's book does not aim to be another biography with special emphasis on his time as a partisan or analyses of his political career, but rather focuses on his love of a luxurious lifestyle. The results of that uncontrolled passion for food can be easily observed through the rich documentation, illustrating that Tito, "a communist with style", usually sits at the table with his VIP guests. Unfortunately those pictures, in which he appears at the end of his life, are a bitter reminder that every pleasure has its price.

This elegantly published hardcover book, with over 70 black and white photographs and colourful illustrations of prepared meals, is divided into four sections: the largest is called *Tito Visiting* (137 pages), then *With Celebrities* (39 pages), *From Vardar to Triglav* (31 pages) and the last *Tito Entertaining* (25 pages), which brings the total to 253 pages. Every feast is supported by a short description of his guests, the location, and the date, and provides of an overall picture of the occasion. However, one of the book's downsides is the occasional lack of information about who was preparing the feasts and for whom. The title *Tito's Cookbook* suggests that it was Tito himself, but this was not always the case, and it would be good to know who was behind those recipes and menus. Additionally, the missing bibliography undermines the credibility of provided information and leaves the reader wondering about the authenticity of the unsupported claims.

Josip Broz Tito's feasts started in 1944 with Joseph Stalin and Russian-style grilled broilers, Red Russian caviar, Marinated sturgeon and beluga, Sourish new cucumbers, Georgian wine goulash with dumplings, Marinated mushrooms, doughnuts, berries, vodka and Georgian wine as beverages. Caviar became the hallmark for many of his feasts. Tito's high-class lifestyle really developed after the split with Stalin in 1948 and thanks to aid from Western countries, mainly the United States. What happened after Tito's death is again a very bitter reminder that every pleasure has its price, and that sometimes someone else must pay the bill.

In 1961 Tito started his famous African tour on his ship the *Galeb* (Seagull), which was often used as a mobile restaurant. He hosted there, among many others, the President of Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba, and the President of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser. Although the feasts sound refined, Tito preferred simple food - the fatter the better, and salads were only for decoration. One of the best bonding gifts, which Willy Brandt once gave him, was black sausage with sauerkraut served with potatoes: that seems to be what really cemented their friendship.

The second part of the book concentrates on picnics for writers and artist which Tito gave on the Brioni Islands in Croatia, where his private residency was located and where Sophia Loren occasionally prepared homemade pasta. In one of the menus prepared at this location, dessert is comprised of wild strawberries from Sutjeska, which is a good example of Tito's flamboyant gesture. The strawberries, which were picked somewhere near the river (now in Bosnia and Herzegovina), maybe even from the site where the famous battle in 1943 was held, were brought especially for Richard Burton, who played Tito in the partisan movie *The Battle of Sutjeska* in 1973.

The third part, which describes Tito touring Yugoslavia, disappointed me on the food front, with its dishes based mostly around sauerkraut and sausages. Fortunately, the final feast, in which Tito played the perfect host aboard his ship, is more extravagant. One of his guests there was Winston Churchill with whom Tito shared a passion for cigars.

At the end of the book the Author divides the recipes into main courses, soups, warm starters, fish, desserts and cocktails, additionally providing a short biography of the people with whom Tito ate. The most interesting, however, is a part called *A Witness from the Kitchen*. The titled “witness” was Tito’s chemist and personal food taster - Branko Trbovic, who accompanied him on all his travels. According to him every meal was prepared under the supervision of a laboratory technician or a doctor from the Department of Chemistry and Toxicology of Special Purposes Laboratory, which worked exclusively for the leader. Only the best ingredients were allowed for food preparation and every single one of them was examined and checked.

Everything about Tito was exceptional, luxurious and of a high standard, so the book seems like a cook’s report from some bizarre, fairy tale-like spectacle. It is hard to believe that once upon a time there was a man, who had risen from rags to riches, who managed to balance carefully between the East and West during the Cold War, and acted like an absolute monarch in his socialist country. He was so politically cunning and diplomatically skilled, that at his table gathered the highest statesmen, regardless of their political view and position, together with the most popular celebrities of his period.

The goal of the book is to charm and entertain the reader in a gossipy way, but for me it sounded rather like a culinary report from some big, theatrical show. One day the spectacle ended and the public faced life outside, which became so unreal that it looked like some reversed version of the same illusion. The book therefore left me with a feeling of powerlessness towards the history repeating itself over and over again and even fantasies about Iranian or Russian caviar could not cheer me up.

Finally the publication date could also be very significant for Tito, if he had lived. In 2006 Montenegro declared its independence and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (from 2003 called Serbia and Montenegro) disappeared for good. It was probably one of the last times that the country’s Internet domain “.yu” on the publisher’s webpage (www.laguna.co.yu) was used.

Biography

Ania K. England received her doctorate degree from the University of Wrocław in Poland. Her research interests include camp and kitsch in culture, especially in Eastern Europe.