To treat a cold, the bathhouse would offer a formula like the following: "Take 20g of basil leaves and flowers, mix with 20g of thyme leaves, and infuse in 1 liter of hot water for 15 minutes. Add two spoons of honey to the infusion and stir. The diseased person has to take one spoon of this medicine every half hour." [33]

Gasim bey's bathhouse doesn't look like modern bathhouses or saunas because it was based on the Oriental style of architecture, which uses domes and arches. It has several large pools and a number of separate rooms for individual bathing.

§ 8. THE FRAGRANT BATH

According to Azeri folk medicine, after a hot bath or nap, one should apply rose, narcissus or violet essential oils to the face and body. Eastern women especially liked these oils because they made the skin silky and soft.

PINE NEEDLES

Some Azerbaijanis use pine branches to prepare an extraction for bathing, a substance that is supposed to strengthen the nervous system. The essential oil from pine is condensed to a thick syrup, then dried and pressed into tablets.

ROSEMARY

In Azerbaijan, people with low blood pressure are advised to take a bath with rosemary. It is believed that this fragrant plant stimulates the circulation and serves as a tonic. The recipe has even been documented. To prepare the solution, pour 4 cups of boiling water into a pot containing 5 tablespoons of rosemary leaves, cover, and let steep for 30 minutes. Strain the infusion and add to warm bathwater. The optimal duration for such a procedure is half an hour.

LAVENDER

According to Azerbaijani folk medicine, bathing in a laven-der decoction has anti-spasmodic and calming effects and is used for neurasthenia and tachycardia (rapid heartbeat).

MARJORAM

Taking a bath with a marjoram decoction is good for flatulence and nervousness and has a diuretic effect, Azerbaijani folk healers say.

MELISSA

According to Azerbaijan folk medicine, bathing in a melissa (lemon balm) decoction is good for heart disease, relief of tachycardia and lowering of the blood pressure. The bathwater must be warm, but not hot.
§ 9. THE POWER OF SMELL

Medieval Azerbaijani physicians believed that the smells of these aromatic substances could help cure ailments. Scholars proposed a type of therapy that may be called "therapeutic use of flower gardens." Medieval Eastern rulers and nobility were advised to spend their leisure time in flowering gardens, for their own treatment and relaxation. If they inhaled the fragrances of flowers, it was believed that they would relax and be cured.

Considering that medieval Azerbaijani doctors were working without the advances of modern scientific medicine, aromatherapy was a fairly ingenious way to treat patients with natural substances that were readily available. For instance, physicians had figured out how to use frankincense and myrrh as natural antiseptics. Herbs like spearmint and chamomile were also known to have antiseptic and healing properties. Today, scientists know that these fragrant herbs contain essential oils that are able to kill microbes and clean and heal wounds.

CHAPTER 6
MEDICINE AND NUTRITION

§ 1. NUTRITION FOR LONGEVITY

Longevity is the cherished dream of every human being. What, one may ask, is the actual age limitation for human beings? Are there limits? Is it possible to secure an active, creative life for 100 years? Of course. But what about 150 years? Again, the answer is "yes."

Azerbaijan has one of the highest rates of longevity in the world. In the 1981 census, Azerbaijan recorded 14,486 people aged 100 or older. In other words, 48.3 people per 100,000 inhabitants.

Even though longevity is mostly determined by heredity, diet definitely plays a role in achieving this goal. What do centenarians eat in Azerbaijan? Does their diet correlate with what modern science knows about health and longevity?

Contemporary dieticians would cry out: "They eat too much animal fat!" Indeed, many Azerbaijanis are fond of lamb, mutton and sheep fat, but in rural areas where most of these long-lived people reside, meat is eaten no more often than once or twice a week. The main source of animal fat in rural diets is not derived from meat but rather from dairy products.

The typical diet of Azerbaijani villagers consists primarily of eggs, cheese, butter, yogurt, milk, curds (shor), sour cream, bread, various vegetables, fruits and herbs. They are used to eating soup made of
yogurt and greens (dovgha) along with various soups made with beans, peas and grains. In the olden days, people who enjoyed longevity did not eat very much bread or products made of flour.

§ 2. ANIMAL FAT CONSUMPTION

Historically, Azerbaijanis eat fairly large amounts of animal fat, which is considered by modern scientists to be the "No. 1 Killer." Why then has this slayer not visited upon the centenarians from villages of the Lerik district in Azerbaijan, where quite a number of residents live beyond 120 years old?

Animal fat is fairly harmless to Azerbaijanis because they follow nutritional guidelines set forth by the physicians of medieval Azerbaijan who insisted that there is no such thing as completely healthy or unhealthy food-stuffs. Rather, these properties are determined a great deal by the quantity that is consumed and the way food is combined. For example, according to the "Book of Medicine" (Tibbnama, 1712) you can consume animal fat, but you shouldn't overdo it, and you must counter the effects of fat by eating fresh vegetables and greens like spinach, celery, dill, onions, spring onions, coriander, mint, basil, tarragon and parsley. [33]

Modern scientists confirm that the food fibers contained in green vegetables and herbs decrease the assimilation of fats in the stomach. According to modern scientific medicine, animal fat, in fact, must be consumed (though in moderation), as it is necessary for creating hormones and promoting the normal functioning of the liver, heart and brain. If we examine the teeth of a human being, we notice that they contain features typical to both carnivorous and herbivorous beings.

This fact proves that our early ancestors ate meat, and that the human organism is historically adapted to the consumption of animal fat. However, along with meat, early humans ate large amounts of vegetables and fruits. Medieval Azerbaijani physicians proposed the same approach: Don't eat just meat. Don't eat just vegetables. Eat both and combine them correctly! As opposed to one-sided theories of the modern day, such as vegetarianism, the medieval approach is based on their observation of the biological nature of the human being.

Parcha Doshama Plov (rice with roasted meat) is served with onion, mint and other greens.
A high level of animal fat consumption is not just limited to longevity in Azerbaijan. Fifteen years ago, correspondents from the Russian magazine "Vokrug Sveta" (Around the World) interviewed elderly people in Abkhazia and questioned them about their diet. It turned out that most of the centenarians enjoyed fatty meat, preferably lamb. As distinct from Azerbaijanis, Georgians drank wine every day even at the age of 100. However, most people who enjoy longevity in the Caucasus don't eat very much meat in the first place, and they habitually consume large amounts of yogurt as well as vegetables and fruits to neutralize the negative effects of animal fat.

In addition to yogurt and garlic, it is also possible to counter the negative effect of fats with liberal amounts of raw onion, lemon juice, pomegranate juice and with the traditional burgundy colored, sour spice known as sumag. These all work to promote digestion and break up the fat.

§ 3. HONEY OR SUGAR?

Even though Azerbaijani cuisine is rich in sweets, traditionally, Azerbaijanis didn't overuse them. When preparing national sweets like pakhlava, shakarbura and halva, they preferred honey over sugar. For example, the Azerbaijani scientist Yusif Khoyi in his "Baghdad's Collection" (1311) recommends preparing jams and sweets with honey. Modern science has established that honey contains vitamins, ferment and is considerably healthier than sugar. According to Professor M. Sultanov, the regular use of honey and the avoidance of sugar contribute to health and long life.

Professor John Yudkin of London University points out: "Not fat, but sugar leads to coronary heart disease - the sugar that you pour in coffee or tea, or eat with cakes, sweets or chocolate." [35]

Sugar, if used excessively, turns to fat and cholesterol in the organism. Previously, poor people in the rural areas of Azerbaijan considered sugar as a delicacy and used it only on rare occasions. The standard fare for peasants included dairy products and herbs, not sweets. As for rich people, they preferred honey.
substitute sugar that is much cheaper?"

Unfortunately, most of the national desserts in modern Azerbaijan are based on sugar now. But in the long run, such economics are injurious to human health. Muhammad Husein-Khan (18th century) also points out that the regular consumption of honey diluted with water prolongs human life. Nevertheless, even though honey is better than sugar, it should not be overused.

§ 4. YOGURT AND LONGEVITY

According to recipes from the "Tibnama", all kinds of Azerbaijani halva should be prepared on the basis of honey. Therefore, the harmful influence of "the white killer" that we struggle against in modern society was avoided.

Modern man might think: "Why buy expensive honey, when it's possible to

pakhhlava A-la Shaki (Shaki pakhhlavasi) is prepared in Shaki city (Azerbaijan Republic) on the basis of honey. Then it is sprinkled with the saffron water.

A black slave roasts game for his master. Medieval Azerbaijani miniature (Tabriz school).

§ 5. GARLIC - ELIXIR OF YOUTH

The medical effect of yogurt is explained by the fact that it contains useful microorganisms such as lactobacteria. Since the accumulation of waste substances in the inflammation of the bowels is harmful to all organs of an organism, normal digestion of food contributes to a healthy and long life. Modern scientists in Japan have also established that regular consumption of yogurt protects the organism from the injurious influence of radioactive rays and prevents the development of cancer.

sprinkled with mint. If you eat yogurt on its own, add chopped garlic. In Azerbaijan, a popular drink (ayran) is made by diluting salted yogurt with water. This drink is known to lower blood pressure and treat diarrhea. The word "yogurt" itself is of Turkic (Azerbaijani and Turkish) origin and derived from the verb "yogurmak" - "to knead."
According to the "Tibbnama", regular consumption of garlic prevents gray hair, strengthens memory and eyesight and is good for the heart. In Tibet, an herbal potion of garlic and spirits was known as an "elixir of youth." In Azerbaijan, physicians used infusions of garlic and saffron in their spirits.

Modern scientists confirm that the regular consumption of garlic lowers the level of cholesterol in the organism and improves the circulation of blood. As a result, all organs are well supplied with blood. For example, a proper supply of blood to the head prevents hair from graying, refreshes the face and improves memory. When blood is able to circulate well in the heart vessels, it prevents myocardial infarction.

Azerbaijanis have combined these two foods - garlic and yogurt - which are typical to diets of people who enjoy the benefits of long life. They chop garlic and add it to yogurt in a dish called "sarimsagli gatig" (yogurt with garlic). The "Tibbnama" also suggests mixing garlic with yogurt. This combination is used as a condiment with dishes made of flour or meat, such as dolma of grape leaves (stuffed grape leaves), khash, khingal and others.

§ 6. LIMIT BREAD

The excessive use of bread so typical to modern Azerbaijan cuisine can be traced to the influence of Russian cuisine. In the past Azerbaijani didn't overuse bread and flour products. They never had what might be called a cult of bread. Pilaf was never eaten along with bread because rice was considered to be a substitute for wheat. But these days, many people eat pilaf with bread, and also with national dishes made with dough, such as khingal, guza, arishta, dushbara, umaj and others.

Physicians of medieval Azerbaijan didn't recommend eating much bread, especially on hot summer days. Modern investigations prove that overuse of bread, desserts and carbohydrates promotes the creation of cholesterol in the organism and leads to coronary disease and obesity. They concluded that overuse of bread is more dangerous than the regular consumption of animal fat.

Note that the national Azerbaijani bread (chorak) does not resemble Russian bread: it is a thin, flat bread, not a round loaf. Another national substitution for bread is lavash, a paperthin bread - neither of these two types is very heavy to digest when eaten in moderation.

§ 7. USE OF HERBS

Since antiquity, Azerbaijanis have been convinced that saffron and licorice prolong life, refresh the skin and face, and promote health for the liver, heart and kidneys. In addition, persons of longevity traditionally consume large amounts of vegetables and fruits, including apples.

The Azerbaijani physician Yusif Ibn Ismayil Khoyi (1311) wrote that if eaten
regularly, apples rejuvenate the organism, strengthening the heart, stomach, liver, intestine and stimulating the appetite. Regular use of apples prevents heavy breathing and excessive heart-beat in elderly persons. Apples refresh the brain and strengthen its efficiency.

Fruits, vegetables, various wild medicinal plants and products prepared from them - jams, juices, sharbats, wines, dried fruits and spices - all play an important role in Azerbaijan's national cuisine. In particular, hot dishes are combined with various vegetables, fruits, greens and spices.

Modern investigations show that vegetables and fruits contain many microelements, vitamins and fibers that neutralize cholesterol. Of course, scientists in the Middle Ages had no knowledge about these substances, but based on close observation, they drew similar conclusions that are being confirmed by modern scientific research.

§ 8. TEA, NOT COFFEE

Regular consumption of tea is another main characteristic of people who enjoy long life in Azerbaijan. According to Muhammad Husein-khan (18th century), tea is a healthier beverage than coffee. He points out that: "Tea is a diuretic. It alleviates headaches caused by spasms and cold. In addition, tea cleanses the blood, stomach and brain and refreshes the face. If used moderately, it can treat rapid heartbeat, facilitate regular breathing and is good for the heart. This drink eases melancholy, sorrow and bad spirits." [26]

Modern investigations prove that tea promotes longevity. It contains caffeine, which stimulates the nervous system, and theophylline, which enlarges blood vessels, eliminates spasms and improves the function of the heart. It also contains tannins, which strengthen blood vessels and prevent bleeding. As distinct from coffee, tea not only does not increase the risk of the myocardial infarction but even lowers it, because theophylline enlarges the blood vessels of the heart.

However, one should avoid drinking tea on an empty stomach and should not drink it very hot. Milk neutralizes the negative effects of caffeine. Even though tea mixed with milk is considered to be healthier, it is not popular in Azerbaijan. Tea is historically cultivated in the Lankaran district of Azerbaijan, which curiously enough, is a region known for its longevity.
§9. CHEAP, HEALTHY FOOD

Although the famous Azerbaijani Oil Baron Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev (1823-1924) enjoyed a very long life span, most elderly people in Azerbaijan are not so well off. When analyzing their diet, we see that they eat relatively cheap foods: eggs, yogurt, vegetables, fruits and beans. In addition, most of them don't overeat. Nor are they overweight because they are involved with hard physical labor.

In the past, those who enjoyed long life in our country rarely consumed the expensive dishes of our national cuisine, except on special occasions. Baked goods, kababs, pilaf seasoned with meat and dried fruits were usually reserved for the New Year celebration (Novruz), Muslim religious festivals (such as Gurban Bayram) and wedding celebrations. During the 19th century, even wealthy landowners didn't eat sweets and meat every day because it was considered to be harmful.

Most people in Azerbaijan who enjoy the benefits of longevity actually know nothing about cholesterol, carbohydrates or vegetarianism. They simply maintain the nutritional practices of their fathers and grandfathers, who lived to be more than 100 years old. This reality would seem to prove that Azerbaijan's traditional diet, which has been tried and tested over centuries and millennia, is at least equal to modern theories of healthy nutrition, and may even be superior.

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