

Zahradníček's blog for English speaking students

Part twenty eight: *Slivovice*, or *švestka*?

In one of the first blogs I mentioned beer and wine with the notice that beer is typical for Bohemia and western part of Moravia, while wine is typical beverage in southern Moravia.

Well, besides beer and wine, people also drink “hard” spirits. This habit is most common in northern part of Moravia, Silesia, but of course, people drinking spirits are everywhere, especially in winter. In summer, people drink beer or wine combined with water, but in winter they usually prefer something “for heating-up”. In advent markets on city squares it is sometimes combined with real heating as the spirits are mixed with hot tea, wine, mead or anything else; these markets are full of various mixed drinks, sometimes also containing hot chilli pepper to enable another type of “heating”.

As to spirits, today's Czechs drink nearly everything, and even in Brno we can find whisky bars (for example the one on Gorkého), a gin bar (on Jakubská), some bars serve tens of rums or several tequilas. Nevertheless, there exist also more traditional spirits. For example, Moravian Wallachia (the eastern Moravia with Beskydy mountains) is famous for its *slivovice*, a distillate made of plums, sometimes home-made (with help of still-rooms that exist in many villages), sometimes commercial. Famous *slivovice* is that by Rudolf Jelínek company in Vizovice, a small town to the east of Zlín. Similar, but less famous, drinks are also made of pears, apricots and many other fruits.

The problem is that only some drinks that seem to be *slivovice* are real plum distillates. Some drinks that may even taste quite similarly are made differently: very clean alcohol is diluted with water and mixed with plum aroma, either natural or synthetic. Many people would call this also *slivovice*, but officially it cannot have this name, as it is not a product of distillation of fermented fruits. It is categorized as “ostatní lihovina” what means “another spirit” (= not a distillate). And so many companies, including Rudolf Jelínek, offer genuine “*slivovice*”, that is quite expensive, but also products called for example “*moravská švestka*” (Moravian plum) that are not distillates. In fact, everything that ends with “-ice” should be made by distillation of the given fruit: *hruškovice* is made of pears, *meruňkovice* is made of apricots, *třešňovice* is made of cherries and so on.

Of course, not all drink-makers use this correctly. For example, the drink made in Hustopeče that has an almond taste is not made by distillation of almonds; in fact, it is a very pure alcohol (distilled of wine) mixed with almond aroma. It is a quality spirit, nevertheless, it should not be called *mandlovice*, as it is not distilled of almonds. That is why also the producer was asked to change the name. Unfortunately the producer, instead of trying to understand, where the problem was, started to argue and to inform journalists that “European Union wants to damage her business”. In fact, similar situations already happened in history: what is today called *Tradiční pomazánkové* (a typical Czech product, similar to cottage cheese) was originally called *pomazánkové máslo*. Of course, that was confusing, as it did not contain enough fat to be *máslo* (butter). In the first months people disagreed, but finally they got used to the new name and hopefully some of them even started to understand why it should not be “butter”.

Back to spirits: people in Czechia also started to be used that *Tuzemský rum* is now *Tuzemák*. Of course, rum (both in English and in Czech) should be something distilled from cane sugar. Today's Czech Tuzemák is usually even not made of sugar-beet (as the one made in 19th century), but just by mixing alcohol, water and aroma. Well, Czechs are not the only nation with that problem – this “tea-rum” existed in the whole Central Europe, so Austrian now call it Inländer Spirituose instead of original Inländer Rum, Hungarians call it Hajós (hajós = sailor) and so on.

Anyway, it is not important how it is called. What is important is that drinking any of the spirits should be moderate, as some of them can make somebody drunk sooner than you mention in. Even more than for pure spirits this is valid for mixed drinks, now in advent available in Brno squares. So – be careful!