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Original Article

Gastronomic ethnobiology of “*terites*”—a traditional Batak Karo medicinal food: A ruminant's stomach content as a human food resource

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ABSTRACT

Background: *Terites* is a traditional food of Batak Karo ethnic group, which is cooked with a juice of partly digested food (chyme) of slaughtered cattle. The stomach juice serves as a soup base, cooked together with certain wild and cultivated vegetables, aromatic herbs and possibly also meat. The objectives of this ethnobiological study were to describe *terites* preparation, document plant species used and to discuss possible implications for the human nutrition.

Methods: The data were gathered through individual interviews and group discussions with informants from 6 villages in Karo regency of North Sumatra. The plant specimens were collected in the field and identified taxonomically.

Results: A total of 29 plant species belonging to 17 families were used to prepare *terites*. The main rationale behind consuming this indigenous food was its perceived medicinal value, particularly for the treatment of digestive disorders. Karo people use several lesser-known wild food plants for preparation of this local specialty. To best of our knowledge, consumption of chyme in tropical Asia is so far unique solely to the Batak Karo people. The present ethnographic record of consuming chyme as a medicinal food is also discussed in the context of paleodietary reconstructions.

Conclusion: This extraordinary food heritage of Karo indigenous gastronomy, based on traditional knowledge, indicates rich foodscapes and bio-cultural diversity of the Batak Karo ethnic group.

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1. Introduction

Most of modern medicines were discovered because it was known that certain plants were very effective to treat for particular ailments. Ethnobotanical study can serve as a platform for studying specific relationships between indigenous cultures and plants, thus identifying new chemical compounds used as drugs [1–4]. The traditional food and consumption of healthy and edible plants play an important role in supporting ethnobotany. Unfortunately, many of the traditional foods are approaching extinction even in developing countries such as Indonesia.

Local knowledge in Indonesia is quite extensive because of the considerable diversity of local cultures. Batak Karo is one of the ethnic groups who inhabit in *Taneh Karo* (Karo Land) in North

Sumatra. According to the study by Harsono and Restuati [5], Batak Karo ethnic group has traditional food, *terites*, which is unique and only can be found in this area. The primary meaning of the word *terites* is the liquid of the partially digested grass from the rumen of ruminants. They add some different plants, spices, and meat into the *terites*. Nowadays, the young generations of Batak Karo prefer not to consume this local cuisine.

The Batak Karo people in North Sumatra are endowed with local knowledge about use of plants. They have many culinary specialties and use lot of plants and spices. Furthermore, they believe that all diseases can be cured with healthy food prepared from natural products that have medicinal properties. Unfortunately, most of them have not been documented very well. To initiate for not losing it, the ethnobotanical study was conducted in the Batak Karo community. The aims of this study were to provide information about the process of *terites* preparation, document the plant species used, and discuss possible implications for the human nutrition and further research.

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2. Materials and methods

2.1. Study area

The study was conducted in Semangat Gunung, Jaranguda, Merdeka, Cinta Rayat, Doulu and Lingga villages of Karo Regency in North Sumatra, Indonesia (Fig. 1). Batak Karo people who live in Semangat Gunung, Jaranguda, Merdeka, Cinta Rayat, and Doulu generally maintain a traditional medicine and have access to forests areas near to Mt. Sibayak. Meanwhile, Lingga is a cultural village that preserves some local knowledge of Batak Karo, e.g., food, medicinal plants, and traditional buildings. Geographically, these villages are situated about 1,162–1,453 m above sea level.

The Karo is one of the six Batak tribes with traditional homelands in the periequatorial highlands of North Sumatra, Indonesia [6] (Fig. 2). The majority of Batak Karo people are farmers, primarily cash crop and subsistence agriculturalists. They use traditional farming implements and water buffalo or cow for traction.

Batak Karo ethnic group is known as the group of people who have local knowledge about the use of plants. They believe that food and medicinal plants are of equal importance to prevent and treat disease. They use plants as pharmaceuticals and food and during ceremonials [6,7]. Various studies have been conducted to

assess local knowledge about the use of plants by those ethnic groups such as the use of medicinal plants in the village Tongkoh, Karo [6] and in Kaban Tua, Karo [8].

2.2. Interviews and data collection

Information for this study was collected during April–June 2014 and August 2016 through questionnaires and semistructured and general conversations from the herbalists, village elders, and farmers. The interview was carried out with the help of 29 informants; Semangat Gunung (7), Jaranguda (3), Merdeka (2), Cinta Rayat (4), Doulu (4), and Lingga (9). The head of the village was used as a key informant who could provide information on how many people know about *terites*. The informants were chosen based on traditional ecological knowledge, professional activity, and age. Each informant was interviewed individually in Batak Karo language.

Informants were asked to provide a list of ingredients used to prepare *terites*. The local names of all the plants used, use of plants, plant parts used, and mode of preparation of *terites* were then collected under the guidance of whoever gave the information about the preparation of *terites*. The plants used included not only wild species but also cultivated plants that had been taken from the

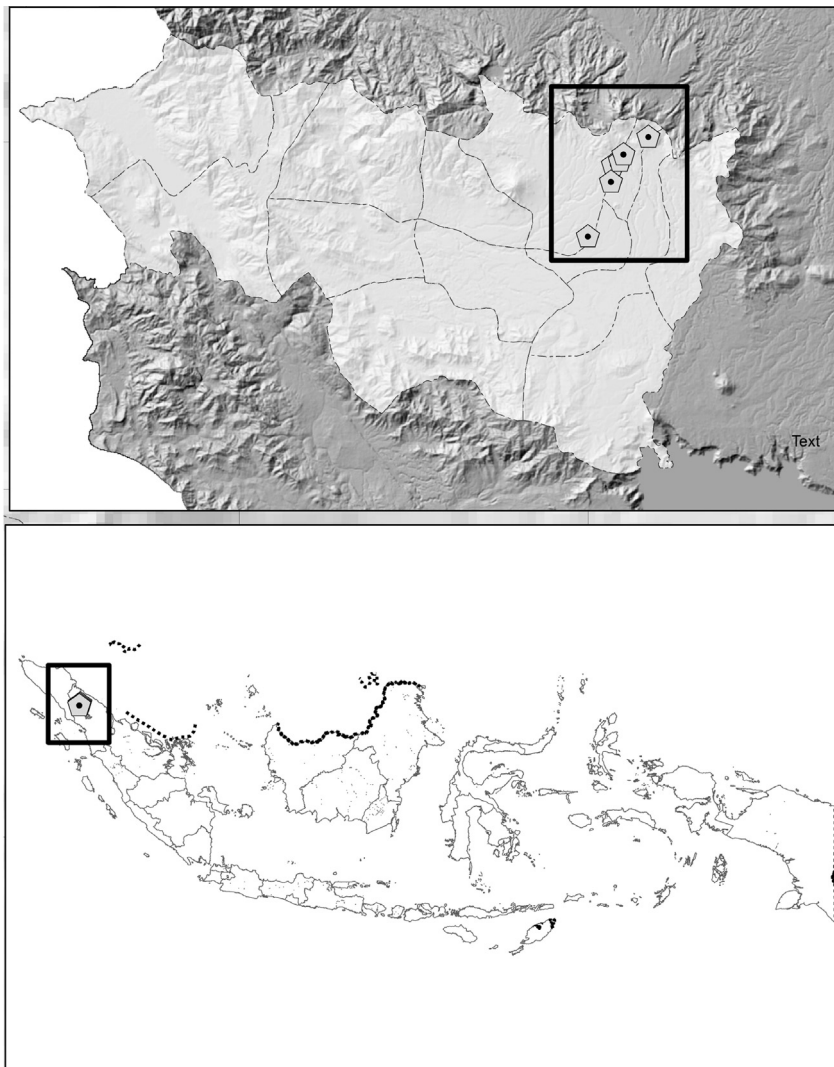


Fig. 1. The location of Karo Regency in North Sumatra, Indonesia. Karo's geography with mountainous area provides cool weather.

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