



*From Kebab to Ćevapĉiĉi. Eating practises in Ottoman Europe.* Arbeitskreis "Das osmanische Europa. Methoden und Perspektiven der Frühneuzeitforschung zu Südosteuropa" und Osteuropäische Geschichte, Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen, 24.09.2015—26.09.2015.

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## **From Kebab to Ćevapĉiĉi. Eating practises in Ottoman Europe**

The history of food and the seemingly banal acts of cooking, eating and drinking and the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of food have gained a respectable amount of attention in the humanities and social sciences in the last decade. This conference, organized by Arkadiusz Blaszczyk and Stefan Rohdewald for the research group "Ottoman Europe," (09.12.2015), addressed questions ranging from the production, exchange, and preparation of food to its consumption in the context of Ottoman and post-Ottoman South-Eastern Europe. One purpose of the meeting was to research concrete practices or descriptions of food (consumption) and the meaning attached to them in an "Ottoman Europe" between capital and periphery, in and between its regions, religions and confessions as well as in contact with the rest of Europe. By this it also aimed to foster the dialogue between Turkish/Ottoman and South-Eastern European Studies on the one hand and European history on the other hand. The conference was divided in three panels:

MARGARETA ASLAN (Cluj-Napoca) started the Panel "Early modern Foodscapes" by focusing on the value of spices in the Romanian Territories, concentrating on Transylvanian-Saxon towns as trading points for spices. Here trading registers of Szekler, Greek and Jewish merchant families, diplomatic correspondence and other sources show, how spices coming from the East in the 16th and 17th century gained importance as trading goods, pharmaceuticals, precious gifts, objects of mystical

value, but also as "hard currency," why for example pepper destruction was also used by Ottoman authorities as a political tool to punish the Transylvanian merchants.

ARKADIUSZ BLASZCZYK (Giessen) compared the perspectives of Ottoman and Polish-Lithuanian sources on Tatars focusing on Tatar food and their foodways. He stressed the similarities of both perceptions, ranging from ambiguity to invariably pejorativity caused by the fact that Tatar foodways and habits were alien to the sedentary Polish-Lithuanian society - and became increasingly unfamiliar to Ottoman society after its abandonment of nomadism. Blaszczyk concluded that the similar ways of imagining the Tatars as an uncontrollable bunch of wind-like half demonic "swawolniks" (from the Polish "swawola" = lawlessness) eating horse meat and drinking boza contributed to the persistence of a market of violence in the border-region. This allowed both parties to conceal the economic reasons for their inaction against the mutual cross-border raids.

In the center of CASTILIA MANEA-GRGIN (Zagreb) presentation lay two Italian-inspired cookbooks and their use by the Romanian and Croatian aristocracy. Referring to dating, authorship and ownership of both manuscripts, one written in Hungarian, the other in Romanian, she underlined that those cookbooks are the first preserved of their kind in the Romanian and Croatian context. Manea-Grgin assumes that the choice of the recipes, which included many from the "European West"

as well as the presence of many high priced imported ingredients demonstrate that the Romanian and Croatian aristocracy showed interest, not only in foreign and luxury food-stuffs, but also in the preparation of elaborate and fashionable dishes made according to costly European cookbooks.

How foreigners from Central-Europe documented and assessed Ottoman Food and its consumption in religious contexts in the 15th and 16th century was elaborated by ÁGNES DROSZTMÁR (Budapest). Drawing on manuscripts of captives and diplomats who resided in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th century, Drosztmár tried to identify Western discourses on religious practices of the Ottomans, contrasting narratives of Islam and religious customs with observations on food and food consumption. The accounts considered demonstrate that there existed a high curiosity about Ottoman eating habits, revealing however, two different intentions: First, a general ethnographically inspired interest in culinary arts and eating practices shaped and filtered by the experiences of every-day practices and one's own cultural and social viewpoint, and a second concentrating on religious practices which used Ottoman food and eating habits to point out the "false" nature of Islam.

VJERAN KURSAR (Zagreb) focused on Bosnian Franciscans and their alcohol consumption in Ottoman Bosnia from the 16th to 18th century. Although instructions of Islam as well as legal Ottoman restrictions clearly prohibited the consumption and production of alcohol, Kursar made clear that the prospect of economic profit allowed the Bosnian Franciscans to gain permission to produce alcohol such as rakia, wine, and other spirits. Eventually, the Bosnian Ottoman administration was compelled to take action and enforced anti-alcohol legislation when the excessive consumption of alcohol threatened the public order, but was not only motivated by sharia considerations.

Ottoman Food Culture in the Balkan Peninsula, seen through the lenses of foreign traveler accounts of the 19th century was the topic addressed by ÁZGE SAMANCI (Istanbul). Samanci expounded the problems of defining "Ottoman cuisine," because research has either focused only on the Ottoman Court kitchen or has represented the traditional Turkish kitchen. Both definitions neglect the vast geographical dimensions of the Empire as well its religious and ethno-cultural composition. According to Samanci the traveler accounts reveal the many similarities between the Istanbul kitchen and the Balkan culinary foodscape. They also show that both, Is-

tanbul kitchen and the various national Balkan cuisines, adopted European table manners and culinary tendencies, something which was not only seen as a means of modernization, but also to construct new culinary identities.

UROÁ UROÁ EVIÁ (Istanbul/ Belgrade) presented the cookbook "Uroá Uroá Eviá" of Mahmud Nedim bin Tosun and tried to identify the main influences on Ottoman culinary traditions contained in this cookbook by dividing them into five regional groups. He concluded that although Mahmud Nedim bin Tosun "in the same way as the Ottoman Empire in general" oriented himself towards Western culture and its cooking traditions, he did not break with the culinary Ottoman past.

Was there a digesting change in food tradition of the Ottoman Sephardic Community in the 19th and 20th century, a time when those communities were challenged both by westernization and Aliyah? This was the question raised by AYLIN ÁNEY TAN (Istanbul), a food journalist and columnist from Turkey. In her view Sephardic Jews were already familiar with Ottoman food culture from Arabic cookbooks when they emigrated from Spain to the Ottoman Lands. Basing her study on memoirs and autobiographies of Sephardic Jews of Istanbul, Bursa, and other towns, she stated that aspects of westernization and Aliyah in Sephardic culture were differently accepted and experienced. Western novelties reached Sephardic cuisine only after the establishment of the French Alliance Israélite Universelle in the 1860s. Consequently, Turkish Jews, who emigrated to Israel after 1950 felt alienated by facing the dominating Ashkenazi eating culture. (09.12.2015).

TAMARA SCHEER (Vienna) talked about the presence of Austrian-Hungarian troops in the Sancak of Novi Pazar. Scheer analyzed the political dimension of food consumption and evening events in looking at the various spaces of food consumption, which also figured as places of culinary and cultural encounters. She stated that Austrian-Hungarian troops did not so much behave as occupational troops, but rather acted as "guests," this too because Ottoman troops and Ottoman military officials had not left the region.

BURAK ONARAN (Istanbul) discussed the "most strict dietary taboo of Islam," the "pork issue" in the Early Republican Period in Turkey from 1920 to the 1950. Analyzing the public discourse on the prohibition of pork and to a smaller degree state policies of farming in this period, he showed that this taboo has to be seen in direct relation to processes of westernization, the secularist

policies of the state, and to processes of Islamic reform. He concluded that although the supporters of the *halalization* remained a marginal group, the debate around this issue shows clearly that the Turkish national kitchen represented a major arena of conflict between political, economic and religious priorities in the Early Republican period.

CHRISTOPH NEUMANN (Munich) gave a speech on raki consumption and production in Istanbul in the 19th and 21st centuries. Neumann approached this topic by comparing raki consumption in the 19th and the 21st century and underlining the different social and population groups now and then. This led him to question, if and to what extent the appearance of raki as a national drink and its consumption should be analyzed within the multi-religious and multi-ethnic past than within the strictly Muslim dominated context of today.

The panel's closure was marked by an evening keynote speech from SURAIYA FAROQUI (Istanbul). She addressed the issue of the existence of fast food and ready-made foods in early modern Istanbul using Ottoman sources of the 15th, 16th and 17th century. Drawing on examples from Bursa she proffered the opinion that the main customers of ready-made foods were boys studying in the medrese as well as merchants and migrant dervishes, underlining that cooking possibilities found at hans and kervansarays were very limited. She concluded that low priced animal based food was perfectly accessible to ordinary people in Ottoman cities in early modern times.

The presentation of MAYA PETROVICH (Oxford) focused on the Ottoman clay pot dish *göğüs* and its global versions and tried to reconstitute the emergence of this dish through looking at the use and distribution of spices and vegetables. Analyzing various *göğüs* recipes ranging from the Balkans, Ottoman Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan to India she dismantled the claim that the tomato was a key ingredient, because it conquered Ottoman cuisine relatively late. She concluded that probably the dish must be located in the Indo-Muslim tradition from whence it travelled through the Indian Ocean to the Ottoman lands.

STEFAN DETCHEV (Sofia) used the example of the *Bulgarian Salad* and especially the *opska salata* to elucidate the development of a European innovation into a national culinary symbol. He showed that at the end of the 19th century new salads and vegetables had a rather negative image and were not mentioned in Bulgarian cookbooks. However, the salad, basically consisting

of tomatoes and peppers, achieved more and more acceptance in the 20th century and was changed in the nineteen sixties into a national symbol due to the impact of a growing acceptance of vegetables through a new nutrition culture among the urban populations and the need of national symbols in global tourism. cf. reflections of Aylin Aney Tan about the conference: Ottomans in Europe, in: *Hürriyet Daily News*, October 5th 2015, (09.12.2015).

[3] cf. Adelheid Wölfel about this lecture in Giessen: Adelheid Wölfel, *Äopska-Salat, Vom Ausländer zum Nationalsalat*, in: *Standard*, October 10th 2015, <http://derstandard.at/2000023502773/Sopska-Salat-Vom-Auslaender-zum-Nationalsalat> (09.12.2015).

STEFAN ROHDEWALD (Giessen) discussed *Neo-Ottoman Cooking* as a means to imagine a common past and future with the example of Turkish cookery books. Seeing cookbooks as speech-acts (re)producing *Neo-Ottomanism* Rohdewald demonstrated that most of the books analyzed invoked a homogenous Turkish and Muslim past which was labeled just as *Ottoman* without pointing to the common shared habits and traditions between Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities in Ottoman cuisine. Including such cooking performances in the wider scope of a *Neo-Ottoman narrative*, his findings make clear that such a microanalysis of cooking performance could help to understand the logics of Neo-Ottomanism.

The political aspects of Turkish coffee and cafes from the early modern period until today was the topic of ALI AKSU (Sarajevo). Because coffee drinking and coffee houses since early modern times were often accompanied by political talk, as shown by *devlet sohbeti*, i.e. the State talks, Aksu followed the political role of coffee houses since the beginning of the 17th century. He tried to show that the Janissary Coffeehouses must be seen not only as center of rebellion and *sedition*, but also as a center of Bektashism, as business office, and *Mafia Club*.

The comments following the three separate panels, made by DANIEL URSPRUNG (Zurich), KONRAD PETROVSKY (Vienna) and NICOLE IMMIG (Jena) identified various fields of importance, within which the topic of eating practices should be framed: the social and economic dimension, which also relates to the question of value in economic, social and cultural contexts. In the same way, knowledge and the organization of knowledge, as well as the issue of space, seem to be important

issues. Daniel Ursprung posed the question, if there are alternative frames of space other than "Ottoman Europe" as the Mediterranean or a global frame. Konrad Petrovsky addressed the issue of modernity and asked if and how terms like westernization or modernization can be looked at through the prism of food consumption. Nicole Immig commented on the role of the public sphere as an important factor for the politicization of products as national symbols. Here she pointed to the role of the press and mass media and the tools of technology related to it, but also to the public sphere and the places of sociability.

The general comments by ALBRECHT FUESS (Marburg) and BERT FRAGNER (Vienna) addressed the field of social practices related to Ottoman food and consumption: What about eating habits, food styles, food fashions? Who eats with whom? How does this influence food? What are the roles of hunger and fasting? What can be eaten when? Both pointed to the careful use of terminologies and the significance of the sources and their historical contextualization.

In conclusion, the conference showed that focusing on food can uncover new layers of meaning in sources and historical contexts which remained unseen before. Thus it opened new perspectives for studying the history of "Ottoman Europe."

#### **Conference Overview:**

Introduction Arkadiusz Blaszczyk / Stefan Rohdewald

##### *Panel I: Early Modern Foodscapes*

Margareta Aslan (Cluj-Napoca): The Value of Spices in the Romanian Territories

Arkadiusz Blaszczyk (Giessen): The Food Factor in the Tatar Raids and their Perception

Castilia Manea-Grgin (Zagreb): Italian-Inspired Cookbooks for Romanian and Croatian Aristocracy: A Reality of the 17th Century?

Ágnes Drosztné (Budapest): From Fast to Feast: Ottoman Food and Consumption in Religious Contexts according to Central European Sources (Fifteenth - Sixteenth Centuries)

Vjeran Kursar (Zagreb): "Their God is Their Belly, Their Mother is Their Drunkenness." Bosnian Franciscans on Alcohol Consumption in Ottoman Bosnia

Discussion and Commentary Daniel Ursprung

(Zurich)

##### *Panel II: Orientalisms and the Local*

Ázge Samancı (Istanbul): Ottoman Food Culture in the Balkan Peninsula through the Exotic Views of the 19th Century Travelers' Accounts

Uroš Urošević (Istanbul): Cooking in the Times of Change: Mahmud Nedim bin Tosun's "Asya ve Avrupa'da Osmanlı Mutfakları" and the Ottoman Cuisine between Asia and Europe in the 19th Century

Aylin Aney Tan (Istanbul): Digesting Change? Challenges of Westernisation and Aliyah over the food tradition of Ottoman-Turkish Sephardic Community in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Tamara Scheer (Vienna): The Austro-Hungarian Presence in Sanjak Novi Pazar (1879-1908) and the Political Dimension of Food Consumption and Evening Events

Burak Onaran (Istanbul): Questioning the Most Strict Dietary Taboo of Islam: The Pork Issue during the Early Republican Period in Turkey (1920-1950)

Christoph Neumann (Munich): Rakı-Production and Consumption in Istanbul (19. and 21. Centuries)

Discussion and Commentary Konrad Petrovsky (Vienna)

##### *Keynote*

Suraiya Faroqhi (Istanbul/Munich): Fast Food in Early Modern Istanbul? Buying Soup, Kebab and Halva ready-made in the Marketplace

##### *Panel III: Orientalisms and the Authentic*

Maya Petrovich (Oxford): Ottoman Spices since the 18th Century until Today: Dreams and Realities

Stefan Detchev (Sofia): "The Bulgarian Salads": The Road from an European Innovation to the National Culinary Symbol

Ali Aksoy (Sarajevo): "Turkish Coffee" as a Political Drink from the Early Modern Period to Today

Stefan Rohdewald (Giessen): Neo-Ottoman Cooking in Turkey after 2000

Commentary and Discussion: Nicole Immig (Jena)

Commentaries Bert Fragner (Vienna), Albrecht Fuess (Marburg)

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