



UNIVERSITY OF
HOHENHEIM

Turkish Cuisine

Seminar contribution to the module "Terrestrial Ecosystems" (2101-230)
Institute of Botany (210a) · University of Hohenheim · Stuttgart
presented by Tobias Baumgartner on January 24, 2019

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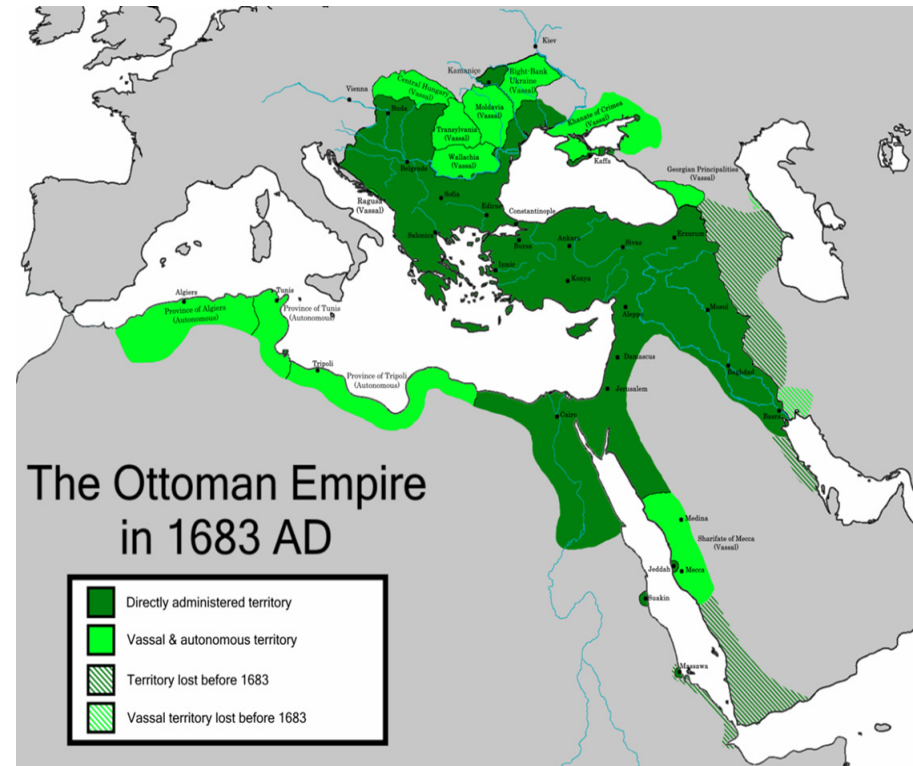
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Introduction and history of Turkish cuisine

Turkey possesses one of the broadest, most outstanding food cultures in the world.

It is influenced by the mainly Arabic and Asian heritage of the Turkish tribes, but also from the Western culture.

The Ottoman Empire played a major role in the great diversity of it's culture.



A depiction of the Ottoman Empire and its dependencies in 1683, with indication of territory held prior to that date [1].

At the beginning, the tribal Turks from Central Asia lived as nomads via animal husbandry, so naturally their food consisted of a variety of milk products, wheat flour baked goods and Kebab (grilled meat).



A Yörük shepherd in Ala Dağlar, Taurus Mountains, Turkey [2].

As time progressed and the tribes grew and interacted more with each other, they settled more and more of Anatolia and big trad lines coming from the West and East were formed, e.g. the famous Silk Road spanning up to East Asia.

From there, the influence of other cultures grew, settlements were created and they began practicing agriculture in a broader way.



Rough outline of a few routes of the Silk Road [3].

With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the influence of Western culture, especially European culture, grew in the now newly formed Republic of Turkey, which was eager to accept this change in order to strengthen the relationship with their new allies.

They began using more Western like tables and dishware, such as forks and vegetables such as potatoes and tomatoes became more common.

In return, Turkish culture swept into Europe as well, for example the "Döner", as we know it in Germany today as fast-food, was an invention in correspondence to our culture, made by the "Gastarbeiters" coming to work in Germany from Turkey in the 1960's.

Main ingredients of Turkish cuisine

There are a great variety of ingredients common in Turkish cuisine. Meat from different animals like sheep (especially lamb), goats, cattle and poultry play a major role in the kitchen, often in the form of grilled meat (Kebab) or minced meat. Fish is also eaten quite frequently in the coastal regions.



Flock of Karayaka sheep, a breed native to the Black Sea Region of Turkey [4].

Vegetables are also found quite commonly in Turkish dishes. Some examples of this are, first of all the eggplant, then garlic, zucchini, lentils, beans, kale, olives, cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers.

Fruits are also omnipresent in form of pomegranate, plums, apricots, figs, dates, apples, a variety of citrus fruits and many more.



Multiple, still ripening eggplants on their motherplant [5].

A big part in Turkish cuisine are unquestionably the innumerable spices, going from simple caraway, mint, pepper, paprika, sumac and allspice, up to cinnamon (cassia) and saffron.

They can be bought at big spice bazaars all over Turkey, e.g. the Spice Bazaar in Istanbul.



Spice Bazaar (Misir Çarşısı) in Istanbul [6].

Coming from their tribal heritage, a variety of dairy products are still widely used in Turkish cuisine, for example yogurts, cheese and butter.

Coming from there they also use many different kind of oils like olive oil, walnut oil, sunflower oil, etc.

Last but not least, the different grains and nuts shouldn't be ignored, because they play an important role in desserts, sweets and even in main dishes.

As grains, rice and different varieties of wheat (e.g. Bulgur) dominate the kitchen as side dishes and in pastries. For the nuts, they mainly use hazelnuts, almonds, walnuts and pistachios, often found in sweets or as a filling.

A special mention goes to sugar and honey, because Turkey is known for their incredibly sweet pastries and candies.

Also lemons are used in almost anything from garnish, up to major ingredients in soups.

Regional distinctions

Aegean Region

In the Aegean Region the cuisine is primarily dominated by a great use of olive oil, wild herbs and a variety of different greens like nettle, artichokes, fennel, chicory. Also fish and other seafoods are not far behind, as the fishing culture is naturally quite strong in this region.

Black Sea Region

The Black Sea Region on the other hand also extensively uses fish (especially anchovies called 'hamsi'), but the usage of corn, barley and lots of different fungi is likewise as popular.

Anatolian Region

Anatolia is the core of Turkey and it's specialities are pastries in different varieties (e.g. gözleme) and a great usage of grain, meats and beans (e.g. green beans).

Southeast

The cuisine of the Southeast consists mainly of different meats, like kebabs and the use of spices is much higher as in other regions. Also they rather use bulgur instead of rice and butter instead of other oils.

Northern Cyprus

Northern Cyprus doesn't really have its own style, rather it is a mix of Turkish and Greece cultures and cuisines. Fish and other seafood is more popular than meat and olive oil is omnipresent.

Typical dishes and beverages

Turkish beverages are quite unique amongst the drinks of the Western world and it would be almost impossible to list every single one of them.

First of all, you can't talk about Turkish beverages without mentioning Turkish coffee. It's brewed uniquely, with the sugar already added to the coffee powder, no filtering and it is poured multiple times before serving it in a cup with a bit of the used coffee ground.

A cup of Turkish coffee poured from a copper cezve [7].



Beverages

Next in line you've got the Turkish tea (çay), which normally is a black tea, is brewed uniquely with two teapots. In the upper pot, the black tea is brewed to a strong and bitter taste and is then diluted down with boiled water from the lower pot. So one can individually determine the taste they want.

It's drunk normally hot from glasses with or without sugar cubes made from beets.



A Turkish tea-kettle (Çaydanlık) [8].

Beverages

Ayran is one of the most commonly consumed cold beverage in Turkey and is usually served to many meals.

It's a simple drink made from yogurt which gets diluted with cold water and then salted.

It's origin dates back over a thousand years, when the Göktürks tried diluting bitter yogurt for better taste.



A glass of fresh ayran with a head of foam [9].

Beverages

Another popular drink is called salep and is usually served hot in the winter months.

Salep is a flour made from the roots of some orchids of the *Orchis* genus. The flour is brewed with either water or milk and gets flavoured with cinnamon before serving.



A cup of brewed salep with cinnamon [10].

Beverages

Şalgam is a beverage made by fermenting purple carrots and/or beets, filtering it and adding turnip, spices and sometimes salt to the drink.

It is served cold and either spicy or mild together with food.

It is considered to be one of the most popular beverages during the winter months.



A glass of Şalgam [11].

Beverages

At last but not least one of the more popular alcoholic drinks in Turkey is rakı, a anise-flavoured alcoholic drink, distilled from grapes, sugar-beets or other bases.

It's comparable to the Greek ouzo.



Bottles of Yeni Rakı [12].

Breakfast (kahvaltı)

Normally Turks prefer a rather rich breakfast, consisting of a variety of bread like simit, a round bread made of wheat and formed like an O, cheese (e.g. Beyaz peynir a brine cheese), butter, cucumbers, jam, sucuk (spicy Turkish sausage with garlic), etc. Not to forget Turkish tea.

It can even include salads, soups and other picante dishes like börek. A speciality for the breakfast is called menemen and is cooked with eggs, tomatos, green peppers and is seasoned with spices. Other things such as sucuk can be added.



A typical Turkish breakfast, menemen on the left [13].

Bread

Turkish cuisine knows a great variety of different breads which are eaten at breakfast and as side dishes.

Some examples include simit, pide, bazlama, gözleme and yufka.



A typical simit with sesame seeds [14].



Pide/Pita made in a bakery in Nablus [15].

Soup (çorba)



Ezogelin soup served at a truck stop near Gaziantep [16].

Usually a Turkish meal starts with a thin soup, which base normally consists either of lentils, wheat (bulgur) or yogurt.

A popular example of this is Ezogelin soup made with bulgur, red lentils and a variety of other ingredients like onions, garlic and olive oil.

There are also more rich soups which are served as main dishes especially in the winter months.

Main dishes

First of all kebab or simply grilled meat, which is normally grilled as minced and skewered meat, but can also be roasted on a barbecue or even cooked into a stew.

It is seasoned with all manners of spices, e.g. garlic, pepper, paprika and salt.

It can be served with a variety of sauces, garnishes and rice, pide or other breads as a side dishes.



Adana kebabı, comprising only male lamb meat, red bell peppers and tail fat hand minced together. Served with charred peppers and tomatoes, an onion-sumac-parsley salad, and lavas [17].

Main dishes

Then you have mantı, which are a kind of dumpling filled with some kind of seasoned minced meat.

They are normally served together with garlic yogurt which can be seasoned additionally with spices like sumac, mint, oregano and many more.

They are similar to baozi from China, but not identical.



Kayseri mantısı served at a Kayseri restaurant in Ankara [18].

Main dishes

Dolma and sarma have a special place in Turkish cuisine because they can either be eaten as a main dish or as a meze.

Usually they are vine leaves stuffed with a mix of rice or bulgur with nuts, raisins or just plainly vegetables.

But there can also be other things being stuffed besides leaves, for example melons.



Yaprak sarma served on a plate with lemon [19].

Meze

Meze is simply a selection of food on a big plate, served usually as an appetizer or together with alcoholic beverages.

Normally you can find olives, pickled vegetables (turşu), kashar cheese, börek, cacık (seasoned yogurt with cucumbers, köfte and many more things) in a meze.

It can be eaten before a main dish, or simply while sitting and enjoying a drink together.



A large plate of Mezes in Petra, Jordan [20].

Desserts and sweets

Turkish cuisine possesses a giant variety of different kind of sweet pastries and candies. This includes popular dishes such as baklava, lokum and sütlaç which are ususally known over the whole world.

But most desserts feature an extremely sweet taste, because of the enourmos amounts of sugar and/or honey.

A great variety of nuts and raisins are also used as fillings for many pastries and candies.



Turkish delight (lokum) on display at Koska Helvacısı [21].

Special mention: Şekerpare

A very popular kind of pastry made with almonds. They can usually be found everywhere and are often given out in hotels as sweets. Normally they are covered in a sugary syrup mixed with lemon juice (optional).



Şekerpare fresh from the oven [22].

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