

Reference

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For the dissertation work for the award of a degree "Doctor of Sciences" in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences, in the "Anthropology" Programme, at New Bulgarian University, on the topic: " From the rice of Asia to the peppers of America. An intertwined history of food and cuisine in Ottoman Bulgaria and neighbouring lands (from the end of the 14th to the beginning of the 19th century)", with a candidate Assoc. Prof. PhD.

Stefan Ivanov Dechev

The submitted from Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev set of materials is in accordance with the approved Rules for the acquisition of scientific degrees of New Bulgarian University and includes all the necessary documents. The dissertation has a total volume of 546 pages and is structured in an introduction, six heads, conclusion, applications. The bibliography includes a total of 701 titles of scientific works, of which 320 foreign. 10 publications are attached to the topic of the study.

Stefan Dechev is a master's degree and doctor in history who learns skills and experience in Bulgarian and international trainings, programs and cooperations that allow him to establish himself as one of the leading historians in Bulgaria, with profile and scientific interests that bring him closer to social and cultural Anthropology. A perennial teacher at various universities and scientific circles, Assoc. Prof. Dechev has built a critical look at key elements of culture and history that can be variable or controversial, which affirms his own contribution to important historiographical issues. Its international awards and scholarships are the basis for scientific exchange and expression of current searches and sharing of hypotheses, as well as dimensions of studies that help him conduct some of his studies and to verify others.

The previous scientific pursuits and publications of Assoc. Prof. Dechev in the field of food and nutrition are systematically unfolded in the field of history and anthropology, enriching themselves in a predisposition, complementing themselves, and thus overcome many of the previously established productions. To a large extent, through his work, a scientific problem is emerging, which gradually acquires slender outlines and builds volume as it has not been

considered with a unified methodology. This allows him to say that "the developments and changes described in this work, as well as prolonged sustainable structures in the field of nutrition, demonstrate that a considerable part of the real picture of the past could be lost in the application of an unhistorical approach (p. 506).

Of course, the attempt to create a "real picture" is extremely difficult and delicate, as the author finds the need not only to create this image on the basis of versatile testimonies from foreign sources - to search them, to find the relevance to the case, but also the need for the case, to overcome the ways of thinking about food and kitchen imposed in native historiography by previous generations of researchers. The Bulgarian ethnographers are particularly "unhistorical", creating a reality called by the author "ethnographic time", the parameters of which are unfathomable, since too often this "time" is permanent, invariable. In a similar sphere, the expression "classical folk culture" was used for a long time, which describes an unchanging state of the folklore and the spheres of socioantropological realization. This state and the term describing it largely to build an invariant of this type of premodern culture that is needed for science itself, but in the context of the topic of food and nutrition, such a summary image is more than insolvent, because - from the text makes clear that changes in human history - social, climatic or political, visibly reflect on food. Sooner or later.

The introduction indicates the actuality of the study and the subject of the present work is defined. Objectives and tasks, methodology, and working hypothesis are described in detail. In this way, the main activity, the tools for performing work and the possible results are outlined. Authors and directions on the topic that have already been developed are indicated, and thus showing their detailed knowledge.

Different research methods were used in the course of the study, as well as a combination between them. Complementing quantitatives with quality methods adds depth and breadth of the research process to the vertical (power - subjects) and horizontal (city - village) to achieve answers to the tasks placed before the author related to the place of food and nutrition. The study, as Prof. Dechev notes, "relies on a wide variety of primary springs - archeological material; frescoes and images; Travels, diaries, memories, published documents, cookbooks, memoirs and oral history, periodicals from the end of the Ottoman period, as well as advertisements related to food and dishes. " (p. 51).

In Chapter One - "Ottoman Bulgaria - Diversifying Food Possibilities (XV -XVII)" The author focuses on some major nutritional points - producers and markets, which impress mostly with

a limited variety of food types, focused mainly in the large urban centers of the empire. At the same time, these places are conductors of various foods, reaching the Ottoman Empire from its many provinces, which have specificities in food production. Main producers of grain and (sheep) meat, Bulgarians approach the diverse diet only on some holidays, expressed in larger quantities of food ("abdomen"). Of course, we will recall that about 200 days a year are part of religious fasts, which predetermines the inability to use meat and uniformity in nutrition. "And this uniformity and monotony (says the author) creates problems of the first Balkan writers and folklorists who will try around the mid -19th century.

In connection with the use of salt and vinegar, the possibilities for preserving foods, which in the specified region, also appear massively later in time are also monitored. In turn, the integration into the European diet of the post -Columbian kitchen is traced in detail, with a concentration of expression in the late 18th century. However, it seems to me that it is also possible to separate the individual paths of penetration of various products, such as "Potato", which through its dialect names in our country "Patati", "Baraboy", "Compir", probably shows a connection with different directions - Mediterranean, Central Europe.

Chapter Two - "Milk and Milk Processing" reveals the specialization in dairying that occurred through the mediation of various intermediaries, among them Vlachs, Yuruks, Jews. Naturally, the use of milk and cheese was known before the Ottomans, but the varieties of processed dairy products appeared precisely in this period, as they were tied to both technology and the need for a larger quantity of milk. Thus, butter and yellow cheese were used by the urban centers and the troops, and the production of cheese required the knowledge of the Sephardic Jews who organized it. Elements of social stratification, some of the dairy products, especially those created as delicacies, were integrated into the cuisine of the rulers and for a long time were only part of it.

When summarizing the topic, the author conditionally assumes that dairy products "seem to be associated rather with newly arrived ethnic and religious groups", entering into a clear contradiction with the categoricalness of his statement from the following sentence - that "this finding must certainly be attributed to yogurt' (p. 195). In the preceding text, however, the author does not provide examples or evidence of the absence of yogurt in the "culture of the found local population", thereby predetermining cultural preferences. Despite the lack of specific written sources for the presence of yogurt among the "old local population", the author himself points to researchers who assume the presence of this food product a millennium earlier -Fragner, B. - "...yoghurt... is a legacy of horsemen from the Central Asian steppes dating back

at least to early antiquity"; as well as Davidson, Oxford Companion of Food - "...Yoghurt was brought by early Turkic nomads" (p.185).

Chapter three - "Ottoman-Turkish confectionery - the "trademark" unfolds largely unknown pages of the history of food in our country. In this theme, not only social stratification, but also religious difference presupposes differences in individual types of food. Naturally, as with other areas of culinary, here too the example of the capital and the elite are tempting and predetermining the mass appearance of individual products or works. However, this chapter also poses the broader question of diversifying and cultivating multiple fruits - from fruit trees, from shrubs. The cultivation of vines is also widespread, where the grapes become food (for Muslims) and are not used mainly for wine (as it is for Christians).

I will note, however, that sometimes the author overtrusts travelers and other outside observers, in which case he forms cardinal conclusions about the "Christian population of the empire" - for example, during his journey, Dernshwam writes - "There are fields, vineyards, but they are desolate and overgrown" (page 199). It is surprising that this finding, which is essentially a "snapshot", is accepted as evidence without being interpreted, without being questioned and seen in an extended context - whether it is a specificity of tillage marked by a low level of development, whether as a result of military conflict, disease or other disaster. Such an attitude towards sources sometimes forms a one-sided image of the inclusion of individual foods in everyday culture.

Chapter four - "The market, cuisine, dishes and menus in the Ottoman period (XV-XVII centuries)" dwells on the "contact zones" in the culinary sphere, thanks to which diffusion takes place from the center to the periphery and from the elite to the social lowlands, with which daily food consumption is enriched, the way of eating is diversified, new cultures are assimilated, as well as specific products, the result of migrations, trade, globalization of tastes and skills. The author describes two divergent culinary worlds created in different time zones and social spaces, between which there is sometimes an influence aptly described as "culinary information seepage". This type of contact between high Ottoman Turkish cooking and the social lowlands "usually and to the extent that it occurs, takes place through such environments as the city markets, the various inns and bozajiniks, the imarets, the overall charity work on religious holidays" (p. 234). By tracing the possible forms of public sharing of food, the author sees in them places where to a certain extent there is diversity, which appeared due to the lack of direct connection with own food production, due to certain normativity imposed by the authorities or due to developed food preferences among the urban population. Assoc. Prof. Dechev also

focuses on the figure of the cook, who over time specialized more and more, as well as on the sarmi, kebabs, and pilaf, which became established as elements of the general Ottoman menu. Still, it is surprising to insist on linking the food product "chorba" entirely with the dominant culture, where the well-known ubiquitous name of the product should not mislead us that the cooked semi-liquid food is not known and used.

In Chapter Five - "Food, Culinary Contacts and Ethnocultural Identity 15th - 17th Centuries (Ottoman Empire and Europe)", the author further expands the context of food and nutrition, looking into the problematic fields of realized and unrealized contacts and interactions that prove to be important in the development of culinary culture in the Bulgarian lands. On the basis of the product "pasta" traces the unrealized influence from the Italian cities, which is tied to the interrupted exchange between the Christian peoples and their elite, which we do not have, and the examples from the Ottoman Empire itself are again tied to the elite and the urban population, not to the village. The author presents research among the surrounding regions - Wallachia, Transylvania, Western Balkans - to demonstrate the diffusion of food, which places it in the course of desired preferences and constructed identities. Insofar as "own" and "foreign" food in fact constitute oppositions that precede the processes of nation-building, this part of the author's text becomes a valuable testimony to important self-definitions that also underlie some contemporary visions.

Chapter Six, "The Changes of the 'Long' Eighteenth Century," traces the Industrial Revolution's world changes that affected trade routes, the variety of goods, and ways of thinking. They expand the possibilities of reaching out with various forms of culinary provocations, which are gradually penetrating our country as well. Assoc. Prof. Dechev rightly assumes a strong external influence around the developed skills for canning pork, which in the past did not have to be done. Emphasized adherence to strict fasting for Bulgarians is an important point that limits the use of pork in other periods of time than between Christmas and Sirni Zagovezni (The beginning of Lent). For these two months or so, the household eats its pig, after which the fasts begin. In this way, cyclical and seasonality in the kitchen presupposes the missing skills, which in the period up to the 18th century they clearly did not need yet.

In general, the text also demonstrates the interdependence of the past of the population living on today's Bulgarian lands with events such as the Great Geographical Discoveries, the circumnavigation of the world, the Ottoman conquest, the wars of the Habsburgs against the Ottomans and "although not always at their base is a quest for new sources of food and spices (as in the case of black pepper and the voyage of Columbus), they also bring into perspective

fateful changes in cuisines and dishes" (p. 515). The chronological boundaries set by the author fit with observations of climate change. Based on the registered "climate change" observed in the 15th century, the later "little ice age", as well as the warming from the beginning of the 18th or the middle of the 19th century, Assoc. Prof. Dechev explains the practical impossibility of some of the plant foods not only to spread but to exist, which is why their appearance turns out to be surprisingly late.

This presented history of food and nutrition is situated in a broad interdisciplinary context that draws on historical anthropology, economic history, sociology, cultural studies, and everyday life. In his studies, the author relies on multiple predecessors from different scientific fields, and Assoc. Prof. Dechev approaches them all critically, and also builds on some fruitful theses, as he manages to form a broader view of the stated topic.

In this regard, the present dissertation has a contribution character, it fills a significant gap in the scientific literature and provides a solid basis for understanding the changes in the field of food and nutrition, as well as the impacts on the cuisine of "Ottoman Bulgaria", which also changes in separate periods conditioned by trends that had already begun elsewhere, and these changes took place surprisingly late in time, but for which the necessary explanation has been offered. This work does not contradict the contemporary manifestations of gastronomy or gastropolitics, on the contrary, it explains to a large extent the origin of individual food groups, drawing a picture that is probably much more objective than the others existing at the moment, thereby providing grounds for the future to look at the subject as a creative field and not necessarily as a place of opposition. I agree with the author that, along with this, some of the conclusions go beyond the topic and touch on problems such as the existence of Bulgaria and the surrounding lands in the space between the Ottoman and Habsburg culinary circles, the positioning of Bulgaria in view of the global culinary regions, eating in the Ottoman centuries and today's "national cuisines".

In the creation of the present work, the personal qualities of Stefan Dechev are undisputedly visible, who, thanks to the methodology used and the studies carried out by him, formed results that are his indisputable contribution. The dissertation under review has its important contributions regarding the history of food and nutrition as related to cultural and social anthropology. The topic of the research is subordinated to the reflection on today's Bulgarian borders, and a broad perspective of the impacts resulting from the discovery of America, changes in Europe and the contact zones of the Ottoman Empire was created. Undisputed novelty is the placement of historical processes in the course of climate changes, which cause

changes in food, as well as economic development. From one moment on, the changes in the urban lifestyle and the appearances of the bourgeoisie, which manifests itself also through food or taste preferences, have an important place, because through it the city, although in opposition to the village, carries out provocations and influences that penetrate the inherited forms of food and ways of eating. The broad geographic context of interactions in the realm of food preferences forms a compelling case for the author's theses. Many individual foods have been traced chronologically in their emergence and the processes of their adoption in different social groups have been traced. In this regard, a special emphasis is placed on confectionery, as an emblematic element of Ottoman society, as well as on the development of milk processing, which is also distinguished by the diversity achieved. In general, food and nutrition and their diversity are placed in the context of power and its structures, of social circles, which through various places form access to some of her other than inherited natures.

The abstract adequately reflects both the structure of the dissertation and the main results. Goals, tasks, theses, the development of the individual topics of the study and a database have been tracked, which gives me reason to confirm its quality. The research carried out by Assoc. Prof. Dechev uses an interdisciplinary approach to achieve the set goals, and the result is a view of the food and nutrition of Ottoman Bulgaria. In this way, this seemingly familiar topic - the food of the Bulgarians - is condensed with new meanings, as through the comparison, detailed analysis and real data from the studies, supplemented by numerous other studies, both problematic fields and fundamental benchmarks are outlined, appeared as a result of the national imagination.

The dissertation contains real scientific results, which represent an original contribution by Prof. Stefan Dechev and meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law and the Regulations of the New Bulgarian University.

Dissertation work on "From the rice of Asia to the peppers of America. An intertwined history of food and cuisine in Ottoman Bulgaria and neighbouring lands (from the end of the 14th to the beginning of the 19th century)", testifies that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stefan Dechev possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professionalism, showing qualities and skills for scientific research. Therefore, I confidently give my positive assessment of the dissertation work and the achieved results and propose to the honorable scientific jury to award the scientific degree

"Doctor of Sciences" to Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev, in professional direction 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural sciences, in the doctoral program "Anthropology", at the New Bulgarian University.

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Reviewer:

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