

REVIEW

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scientific direction 3.1. Sociology , anthropology and sciences for the culture

of Dissertation: FROM THE RICE OF ASIA TO THE PEPPERS OF AMERICA.
AN INTERWIDE HISTORY OF FOOD AND CUISINE IN OTTOMAN BULGARIA AND
THE SURROUNDING LANDS (FROM THE END OF THE 14TH TO THE BEGINNING
OF THE 19TH CENTURY)

for the acquisition of the scientific degree " **doctor on sciences** " in Ph.D program " Anthropology ", in professional direction 3.1. Sociology , anthropology and sciences for the culture with Candidate Associate Professor Dr. Stefan Dechev

The proposed second (major) doctoral work on food and nutrition in the Bulgarian and neighboring lands under Ottoman rule is a massive work of 547 pages. The work consists of a large theoretical and methodological introduction of about 50 pages, where the goals and tasks of the study are set and it is situated among the previous studies in the field, six substantive chapters and a conclusion in which the main results of the work are formulated. Along with the general conclusion, each chapter ends with summary pages. The 30-page bibliography contains titles on Bulgarian , English , Russian , Spanish , French , Italian , Serbian , Croatian , Macedonian and Greek language , of which only the last one was used indirectly. The size of the undertaking is also evidenced by the footnotes, the number of which reaches 2,720. This answers **positively** the question of **correctness in citing** a representative number of authors.

Chronologically, the work mainly covers the time from the conquest of the Balkans by the Ottoman Turks to the end of the Ottoman rule and the creation of the modern Bulgarian state, i.e. the time before the appearance of ideas about Bulgarian national cuisine, which began in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century and culminated in socialism. The author has dealt with the Bulgarian national cuisine in his other works, and here he is looking for the beginnings of this cuisine and other Balkan cuisines. Although the "Bulgarian lands" under

Ottoman rule are the narrow subject and focus of the work, in fact they are presented as nutritionally inseparable from the Ottoman context and from the immediately adjacent lands in particular: Wallachia and Transylvania, Greece, Serbia and Croatia, and also Hungary . Through them they were also connected to non-Ottoman food regions such as the Mediterranean, the German world in central and northern Europe, apart from this through the centers of the Ottoman Empire to the Middle East and Central Asia. The period of the modernization of the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzima and the formation of "alafranga" cuisine for a thin elite layer as a new period of high Ottoman Turkish cuisine, which goes along with the Bulgarian "fashionable" urban dining after the middle of the 19th century, which continued after liberation and the first two decades of the 20th century. In this way, **the aims and objectives** of the dissertation are clearly formulated and distinguished thematically and chronologically. It is also clearly visible what is the core of the dissertation and what are the important contexts for it.

The work uses rich and diverse **sources** such as travelogues , diaries , memories , cookbooks books , memoirs and lip history , periodical print from the end on the ottoman period and its contents ads , related to food and meals . She is attracted and specialized literature in various spheres on agronomy such as vegetable production, animal husbandry, etc., and also in the field of trade . Information is drawn from the kitchens registers on the ottoman palace , commercial registers , official documents from the locals caddies and from Ottoman central administration with administratively fixed prices . Finally, frescoes and images were used. The collection and analysis of the vast corpus of **empirical data** is of course the author's own contribution.

Prof. Dechev's research is solidly grounded **theoretically** . Its approaches and fields are examined in the introduction, where it is situated among the work of other authors. The main concepts of the work are "food", "kitchen" and "dishes". Dishes and food stand in diverse relationships with history , culture , power , ideology , identity , class , ethnic origin , nation , gender , etc. Their wider contexts are the natural ones conditions ; agricultural and livestock manufacturing practices on food and ; food trade and markets , etc. Narrower core problems of nutrition are development on kitchens and cooking ; religion in view on determined taboos ; the relationship between food and gender roles ; eroticization on food and function her like aphrodisiac etc. Especially interesting a problem represents the function on the food like expressing social status as well as ethnic and national scar , as well as formation and the evolution of the modern one an idea for " national kitchen " .

Hence, the work is markedly interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary and is an intersection of disciplines such as the historical studies of food and nutrition, especially the French School "Annals" with attention to everyday life and nutrition (under Fernand Braudel, Jean Francois Revel , Stephen Menel and Jean Louie Flandran), the historical sociology and anthropology of nutrition with seminal authors such as Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas, Pierre Bourdieu , Jack Goody , Jean Francaia Bayard et al. In the Bulgarian scientific context, there are fragmentary studies of various problems about food and nutrition in various eras, regions and social strata. Such are the works of agronomists on the history of individual crops, of economists on trade and fairs, and in the historiography, the works of Maria Todorova, Georgi Georgiev, and especially Raina Gavrilova stand out. Separate are the ethnographic and anthropological studies, starting with Dimitar Marinov and Hristo Vakarelski, and in more recent times, Maria Markova and Lilia Radeva, as well as Evgenia Krasteva-Blagoeva, all of them mentioned and examined by the author.

Methodologically , several things make an impression. These are the variation of geographical and spatial extent depending on the particular food or dish considered, the chronology of the long period (*longue durée*), the comparative method and the tracing of the trajectory of transfers of foods and dishes, together with the local adaptations of certain foods (t .e. the methods of transfers and "entwined history"), in which a tension between synchrony and diachrony is manifested , finally the change of scale or scale depending on the specific object. These are all modern methods used with understanding and skill.

I would especially like to emphasize that, unlike many dissertations, the theoretical and methodological requests do not remain in the introduction, but are developed in the substantive research itself and thus gain persuasiveness. I must especially note the successive distinctions made between the capital Istanbul, the big cities such as Izmir, Bursa, Edirne and Plovdiv, the small towns, the rural periphery and the population in the mountains; the consistent differentiation by social sign of elite food (in the palace, of the higher administration, the janissaries and the navy), of wealthy urban strata, and of the common people - mostly rural and poor urban strata. The relationship between diet and religion is explored, with relevant taboos (such as pork in Muslim cuisine). Special attention is given to "hidden" (in the sense of marginalized and appropriated) culinary traditions such as those of transhumance groups of Vlachs, Karakachans, Yuruks, and settled communities such as Jews.

The five substantial chapters examine the food and cuisine in the Bulgarian lands and the surrounding Ottoman regions from the 15th to the 17th century. The diversification of food options is treated here, but still elitistly limited and characteristic mostly of Ottoman and

Muslim food (in the first chapter); milk and milk processing and the role of Yuruks, Vlachs and Karakachans, as well as Jews in this area (second chapter); the development of Ottoman confectionery, but for the elite, the administration and the rich citizens (third chapter); the market, the kitchen, i.e. the cooking and chefs, specific dishes (such as kebab, meatballs, pilaf, soup, stew, sarmi, soutuylash, etc.) and the menu, differentiated by institutions (palace, waqfs, army, janissaries and navy), and also the role of "public" establishments such as imarets, inns and city inns, as well as the convents of Orthodox monasteries (in the fourth chapter).

A separate (fifth) chapter deals with the issues of interactions and influences between the Ottoman Empire and other food regions such as Central Asia and the Arabs, and the Bulgarian and neighboring lands with Istanbul and other parts of the empire. The influence of Italy especially on Hungary, Wallachia and Croatia, more precisely on the Croatian-Hungarian and Wallachian-Greek aristocracy, the influence of the German world on Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia is also considered here, as the nutrition in the Bulgarian lands was influenced indirectly and weakly from these neighboring territories. Finally, the sociological aspect of food as a part of identities in the Ottoman Empire is considered here.

The last chapter is devoted to the changes during the "long" eighteenth century and in particular the social diffusion of Ottoman cuisine among wider and non-Muslim strata and the introduction of new foods (such as peppers, maize, tomatoes, eggplant, turkey and others) as well as the increased consumption of fruits and vegetables in the cities, the spread of pickles among the common population, the "fashion" of fried fish, the preservation of pork, the appearance of Turkish delight, finally the customs and etiquette of eating and the relationship of food to identity during this period.

The thus marked content of the chapters testifies to the wide scope and rich palette of the topics and problems treated in the dissertation work. With everything said so far, an answer is also given to the question of **the significance** of the researched problem and, in general, of the ambition of this truly fundamental work. It was developed independently and not only **does not repeat** the topic and content of the work for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "doctor", but does not advocate with them at all, but is dedicated to a completely different topic and problem. It was developed entirely independently and contains its own contributions in collecting and analyzing the empirical data. The author has **gone deep** into the state of the problem and knows it in detail, as is evident from the literature used.

What are the academic merits and **contributions** of the present work? I have already begun with the scale and fundamentality of the work, covering food and cuisine over several centuries and placing the Bulgarian lands in the broad context of neighboring lands and the Ottoman Empire as a whole, linking itself nutritionally to other food regions. I must say that this scope respects and exceeds even the highest requirements for a major Ph.D.

The novelty of the proposed work in the Bulgarian scientific community hardly needs justification. This is especially true for historical science, where research on nutrition, and on everyday life in general, still causes a smile as almost "frivolous". Of course, there are exceptions, such as the work of Raina Gavrilova, to which Dechev refers with acknowledgment. The topic of food and nutrition is more prevalent in Bulgarian ethnography since Dimitar Marinov, with Dechev noting the ahistoricity characteristic of "classical" ethnography. However, there is more recent research that avoids this criticism. Some studies of "Bulgarian national cuisine" are strongly ideological. However, the novelty of the work for the Bulgarian humanities and social sciences is not only a matter of problematics, but of its broad deployment in aspects and specifics and deepening in historical terms. Because this is not a standard monograph, but a work of over five hundred pages, the product of in-depth research, resting on a solid theoretical and methodological foundation.

I would also like to note some **conclusions, which are also contributions of the proposed work**, the result of the dissertation's personal participation. The main and noteworthy conclusion is the very uniform, meager and conservative diet in the Bulgarian lands during the considered era in terms of products, dishes and the way they are prepared, with the daily consumption being predominantly of bread, cabbage and onions, and rather pepper, beans, kachamak and soup. During this period they are absent the iconic ones for a later time potatoes, red tomato, minced red pepper, oil dressings, carrot and radish salads, and eggplant and beans emerged more definitely only from the end of the 18th century. The lack of spiciness is also noted - due to the scarcity of spices and especially hot ones in Bulgarian cuisine. Sociologically, this is due to the complete predominance of the rural population and the absence or weakness of more elite strata, also poor literacy (to write down recipes), as well as the distance from the large urban centers of the empire, which were also multi-ethnic and assimilated Bulgarians. Dechev notes as a specific difficulty for the penetration especially of pasta foods and products from Italy or from Asia, the established habits of the local population with the local cereals, wheat and bread. Hence the conclusion of a lack of historical Bulgarian "haute cuisine". In this situation, the predecessor of the

national cuisine is the cooking of thin Bulgarian an elite in the past who borrowed dishes and techniques from Ottoman Turkish and Greek cuisine.

With everything this the author criticizes some imposed clichés about "traditional " Bulgarian products and dishes, showing that in fact they have their own history and are from a rather late time, and are not " timeless " or frozen in time. He is also against the "mythologizing" of the Bulgarian holiday table by classical ethnologists such as Dimitar Marinov. Thus, in the culinary field, the " inventiveness of traditions" according to Eric Hobsbawm , especially the national ones, is confirmed.

Although he does not deal with the idea of a Bulgarian national cuisine, which is a later phenomenon, Dechev puts it in a critical perspective and in two respects. First of all, because for the pre-modern and early modern eras, in the absence of nations and national distinctions, one cannot in principle speak of national cuisines, although there are specific large food regions or "basins" that do not coincide with political units. And secondly, because what will later be called "Bulgarian national cuisine" has as its basis the Ottoman tradition of food and cuisine, and is also in close interaction with the food in neighboring countries (Greece, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary etc.), themselves influenced by Ottoman cuisine (and through it by the Middle Eastern and Central Asian regions) and by Mediterranean (especially Italian) and Central European (especially Austrian -German) cuisine. Thus, Dechev rejects both the faltering towards some specific and unique Bulgarian cuisine, and the ideological separation from the Ottoman context.

Among the important findings of the work is the difference in nutrition between the socially too leveled Bulgarian population and those with aristocratic or plutocratic elites in neighboring lands: Serbia, Vojvodina, Croatia, Transylvania, Wallachia, Hungary. There, culinary novelties penetrate more easily due to the presence of aristocratic courts with great international contacts and economic opportunities, but also due to the greater geographical proximity to neighboring culinary circles, the Mediterranean or Central European.

The Bulgarian lands fall between two large "culinary basins" - on the one hand the Ottoman with its marked consumption of mutton, rice, bread, oriental Ottoman-Turkish confectionery and late vegetable production, and on the other the Central European culinary circle with its typical preference for pork consumption meat, bread and Viennese pastries. "Balkan cuisines" are generally formed on the basis of the Ottoman heritage and bring together dishes from a common "culinary pool" that borrowed many of the cooking cultures of the Arab Middle East and Iran. But they definitely contain quite a few Central European elements, which marked both the pasta products and the consumption of pork and

confectionery culture. The influence and contribution of the European Mediterranean here is also a fact, but it is felt more (at least as far as pasta is concerned) in the culinary cultures of Croatia and Hungary than in those of Romania, Serbia or Bulgaria. From all that has been said, as a great merit of the work, the overcoming of the narrowly national approach and the interest mainly in the Bulgarians and the deployment of the analyzes in **a comparative plan** in the direction of the large centers in the Ottoman Empire, neighboring the Bulgarian lands (but also Croatia, Transylvania and Hungary), as well as attention to other food regions that influenced them.

The merit of the work is also its clearly expressed **interdisciplinary** character. The issue of nutrition itself is interdisciplinary, involving a number of areas of expertise in food itself and the preparation of meals, through sociological and anthropological aspects of nutrition to issues of social and cultural identity. Dechev deepens the historical perspective to nutrition, which allows him to make some criticisms of the unclear and downright wrong positioning in time of certain ethnographic analyses. In doing so, he examines foods and nutrition in their appropriate long-term perspective – Braudel's "long period" inasmuch as this is one of the slowest-changing and "conservative" areas of life. At the same time, the author widely uses sociological and anthropological approaches and terms, for example, tracing the diet of different social strata: the Ottoman court and provincial courts, the administration, the janissaries and the navy, wealthy citizens, peasants. He does not miss the peculiarities of eating and the contributions to it of ethnic and occupational groups such as the semi-nomadic Yuruts, Vlachs and Karakachans, Jews, etc. Finally, it raises questions about the relationship between food and identity, in particular about emphasizing an elitist identity through food, also about setting religious and religious-ethnic boundaries, all this before modern national identities.

Last but not least, the work, for all its volume and despite its specialization, is written in a nice and readable language and is of interest to a wide range of readers, not only to specialists. It also contains a series of colorful descriptions of food and eating habits by contemporaries, also foreign travelers, which diversifies and refreshes the exposition, and this is done by the author and with his own stylistic means, if I quote him, "for dessert". Everyone will find something interesting for themselves in the work. Personally, for example, I became very interested in the preparation of sherbet, which I knew by name and that it is a sweet drink, but not what it is made of and how it is consumed. I also became interested in mutton precisely because I don't like it and I wondered if they also consumed lard, and the late Vera Mutafchieva had told me that they scooped it out of the cauldrons of the Janissaries during

the cooking of the meat. Another will find something else, and everyone will find something. This leads me to recommend the work for publication with the confidence that it will be enjoyed by a wide audience.

The abstract corresponds to the main points of the proposed work and gives a clear idea of its contributions.

The author has given a list of 34 **publications** after his dissertation work, of which 12 refer to the topic of the dissertation - food and nutrition, and half of them (6) are in English. They have been published in authoritative publications, among which we see De Gruyter , Brill and journals such as the landmark European Journal of Nutrition.

Dechev's works have a wide resonance in the external environment. They are reflected in numerous **citations** by Bulgarian and foreign authors, among them by authors in the authoritative magazines European Journal of Nutrition, South-East European Journal , etc., by the prominent anthropologist of the Balkans, Mary Neuburger , etc. As the citations are many and cannot be reproduced, I will only confirm that they are well attested in the relevant document.

I have known my younger colleague Stefan Dechev **personally** for many years. Along with his exceptional work capacity, which is expressed in enviable productivity, I would like to note his activity in various historical debates, as well as his public appearance at various forums in various media, apart from social media, also for Svoboda Europe and for Bulgarian televisions. In this regard, I must note his critical nature and his civic courage to stand up for unpopular views in the public sphere.

Having rambled on for a bit, let me wrap things up. The work has all the qualities of a great doctorate, and with full confidence in the qualities of both the work and the doctoral student, I recommend to the esteemed committee to award Stefan Dechev the degree of Doctor of Sciences in the indicated field.

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Sincerely,

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