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CITTÀ E CIBO DALL'ANTICHITÀ A OGGI

CITIES AND FOOD FROM PAST TO PRESENT

a cura di

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ON THE ROAD TO CONSTANTINOPLE- FOOD AND MARKETS IN URBAN SETTLEMENTS OF SERBIA FROM 15TH TO 19TH CENTURIES

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Abstract

The paper discusses descriptions of Serbian settlements and fading customs left by various travellers. The analysed records were made between 15th and the end of 19th century. The majority of these travelogues were written by the members of Western diplomatic missions visiting Ottoman Empire. At the time one of the main routes heading to Constantinople was “Carigradski drum”, the most important road in Serbia and in the Balkans. Two main settlements on the Serbian section of the road were Belgrade and Niš. Their food and open markets made one of the most important impressions. On the other hand, provincial inns offered modest accommodation and food.

Keywords

Serbia, travellers, Ottoman Empire.

Introduction

The disappearance of the medieval Balkan states and intrusion of the Ottomans into the Central Europe occurred during the era of great geographical discoveries, which raised interest in travel literature on different cultures and parts of the world. Description of landscapes and cities visited by merchants, pilgrims and adventurers from different Western European countries became available to wide audience of readers due to another discovery from that time-print. Unlike many merchant and pilgrim routes inter-sectioning Western Europe, along the most important transversal of the Balkans – Road to Constantinople (*Constantinople Road*) – diplomatic delegations were heading towards Constantinople, leaving precious information on certain settlements and fading customs. Food and open markets made one of the most important impressions. During the 19th century, visitors from other parts of Europe began to see Serbia as an ethnographically interesting new member of the European community of nations. They are no longer just passers-by on the way to the Capital of the Ottoman Empire, but observers of political and ethnographic circumstances and researchers of cultural heritage.

1. Roads

The Balkan Peninsula represents a geographical and geological link between Europe and Asia. Roads that connect Central Europe and the Pannonian Basin with the Aegean Sea and the Adriatic with the Black Sea interconnect it. On the territory of present-day Serbia, two significant terrestrial communications intersect [Petrović 2013, 235-236]. One of them has kept its importance as a major natural corridor along the valley of the Great Morava River. In the past, it was known as Constantinople Road. The importance it had during Roman times inspired historian Konstantin Jireček to name it *Via Militaris* [Jireček 1959]. From Buda to Belgrade, the gate to the Balkans, the road led via Moháč, Osijek, Vukovar and Zemun [Zirojević 1976, 3-13]. The first section of the Constantinople road on the Balkans, the section from Belgrade to Niš, followed the valley of the Great Morava River. Niš, as one of the most important traffic junctions in the Central Balkans, was the final station of another important road leading from the Adriatic coast. This transversal route crossed the territory of present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Novi Pazar, northern parts of the Kosovo Basin and the valley of the Toplica River. After intersection with the Constantinople Road, the journey could be continued via Sofia all the way to Constantinople [Petrović 2013, 253, 255-257, 270-272].



1: The main roads in the territory of present-day Serbia during Ottoman rule (Gordana Garić Petrović).

From the mid-19th century, the local road network and railway, a new mode of transport, have been gaining importance. It became essential not only for the transport of passengers, but also for large quantities of agricultural products – livestock and cereals – the most important export product of the newly formed state [Garić Petrović 2017, 61-62].

2. Travellers

The accounts on Balkan Peninsula were noted by numerous Western European states' envoys to Constantinople and members of their missions. In addition to these notes and descriptions, confidential reports of Austrian and Russian intelligence, especially from a later period, are preserved as well as impressions of foreign traders attracted by the possibilities of trade in Balkan goods, such as wool, honey, wax and skins. On this occasion, we will point out those travel accounts relating to the production and consumption of food. This paper refers to notes taken by Bertrand de la Broquière, Benedikten Curipeschitz, Charles Rym, David Ugnad, Philippe du Fresne-Canaye, Pierre Lescalopier, anonyme member of mission of baron de Cormenin, Guillaume Grelot, Hans Dernschwam, Stephan Gerlach, Marc Antonio Pigafetta, Christian von Walsdorf, Peter Mundy, Andrew Archibald Paton, Emmanuel d'Ormesson, William Denton, Siegfried Kapper, Herbert Vivian and Felix Kanitz.

In addition to these authors, Evliya Çelebi, the famous Ottoman geographer left valuable descriptions of Serbian food, markets, crops and arable lands in towns and suburban areas. [Çelebi 2006]

3. Belgrade

Belgrade, positioned at the confluence of the Sava and Danube, was one of the most important strategic points on the northern borders of the Balkan Peninsula. During the 15th century, it was a Hungarian defensive stronghold against invasion by the Ottomans. After its fall and the inclusion in the Ottoman Empire, it became an important administrative and economic, as well as army food-supply centre. According to Evliya Çelebi there was an imperial market with 3.700 stores, one of a kind. The city, as one of the most important ports on the Danube, was well supplied with various products. State warehouses full of butter, rice, wheat, barley and other provisions were located there. The water supplies came from numerous wells and flour from the several hundred horse-mills and watermills on the Danube. The city was well supplied with white, yellow and red wheat, rye, barley, peas, broad beans and millet [Çelebi 2006, 5/114b, 5/115b; Hrabak 1957, 64; Fotić 1991, 57-74].

Some of the local dishes distinguished by the taste like the *đuveč* (a thick rice-stew with vegetables) with the meat of a red-neck turkey, known as "Egyptian Turkey", then *kapama* (ragout) with stuffed chicken, baked carp and sturgeon, white "Latin" bread (*somun*), clotted cream and yogurt [Çelebi 2006, 5/115b]. The Ottomans also used yeast

bread (*fodula*), which was flat, like a bun and could be of different weights, usually around 320g. *Fodulas* were given in soup kitchens and to janissaries together with a salary, so they were also called janissary bread [Zirojević 2005, 235-236]. Travelers could taste the famous *baklava*, which was the size of a carriage wheel. It was made of a thousand sheets of dough and stuffed with almonds and early butter. Another delicious dessert was *zerde* – cooked rice with almonds, cinnamon, cloves and saffron [Çelebi 2006, 5/115b]. *Helva*, which was made from honey, flour and butter and various other ingredients such as rose water, almonds and walnuts, was also a common delicacy. *Helvacts* were registered in Belgrade, Smederevo, Niš [Bojanić 1983, 161; Šabanović 1964, 270, 271; Zirojević 1970, 125]. In warm weather, refreshments were famous cherry juice, *muselez* (boiled sweetened wine) and *hardali* (young wine with mustard). According to Ottoman chroniclers, coffee became popular in Istanbul in the sixth decade of the 16th century. A few decades later, its consumption spread in the cities of Balkans. Beverage called *boza* was made and sold in Belgrade and Niš, in specialized shops [Bojanić 1983, 161; Šabanović 1974, 349]. It was a healthy refreshing drink, similar in taste to beer, because it was made from barley and millet [Petrović 1993-1994, 220]. Mead, an old Slavic drink, invigorating and intoxicating was also used as a beverage for Christians and Muslims [Bojanić 1974, 42]. Muslims also drank a lot of sherbet, water to which sugar or honey was added, as well as rose water [Matković 1890, 101].

The Belgrade markets were cheap and full of wheat bread, lamb and beef, clotted cream, eggs, onions, garlic cucumbers, pumpkins and cabbage, while urban gardens produced apricots, peaches, grapes, plums, pears, cherries, melons and watermelons. *Evliya* came across *kameri* apricot for which he recorded that they were cultivated in the Istanbul neighborhood of Kasımpaşa on the Golden Horn, in Damascus and in Belgrade. For *kameri* apricots from the Belgrade garden of the poet Müniri Efendi *Evliya* says they weighed 40 dirhems each (128 g) [Çelebi 2006, 5/115b; Fotić 2005, 262-264; Zirojević 2009].

Although Belgrade had an abundance of all kinds of foods, it was particularly rich in river fish sold on the great Fish market [Hrabak 1960, 59; Todorova 1987, 76; Kostić 2003, 19; Levental 1989 80]. Fish was cheap, large and greasy. There were four to five feet long carps, six feet long pikes and ten feet long *manić* (lat. *Lota lota*) [Samardžić 1961, 164-165]. The city was supplied with beluga, fished in Danube whirls. In the 18th century, some of these whirls were the property of nearby Orthodox monasteries [Grujić 1914, 167]. Vast amounts of diverse fish, weighing up to 140 kilograms, were transported to city ports by a special kind of boats called *barkai* [Çelebi 2006, 5/116a]. Settlements along the Danube were also famous for their fish. Smederevo had a fish market that gave the name to one of the town quarters (Balık Bâzârı) [Katić and Popović 2013, 92]. From the short period of Austrian rule over Belgrade in the first half of 18th century, data on products that could be bought on Belgrade markets and their prices have been preserved. Accounting books of the court of the Orthodox Metropolitan, record purchases of pork, mutton and poultry meat, various types of fish, vegetables (lettuce, cabbage, onions, peas, cauliflower, kale, beets, asparagus, spinach) and fruits (apples, lemons, grapes, raisins, almonds), dairy products (cream, butter, milk, soft cheese,

parmesan), eggs, spices (parsley, pepper, saffron, rosemary, cinnamon, capers), flour, sugar, wine and beer [Popović and Bogdanović 1958, 78-85].

More descriptions of the Belgrade market and street sellers date back to the 19th century. It was held daily in the very centre of the civilian settlement, on a large plateau that separated the Serbian from the Turkish part of the town. It was well supplied with goods. Customers could buy wheat, oats, millet, maize, gooseberries, cherries, potatoes, onions, haricot beans, garlic, dried herbs, rock-salad, milk, cream, flour, butter, eggs, cheese, as well as horses, sheep, goats, and cows. Wine was sold in long wooden tubes or animal skins [Denton 1862, 60]. Different types of refreshing drinks and fruits were sold in the streets displayed on wooden benches and stalls. This type of occupation was reserved for the lower strata of society [Kostić 2007, 53].

4. Niš

Niš was an important transit point on Constantinople Road and a remarkably busy settlement in the Ottoman era. Various kinds of food could be purchased at the groceries, shops of the Dubrovnik merchants, but mostly at the markets [Petrović 1993-1994, 221]. The grocers sold rice, all kinds of oil, honey, cheese, trout, almonds, chickpeas, walnuts, fresh and dried fruits, dried raisins, figs, apricots and other similar goods in their stores. There is no data on mobile traders in Niš, because, as a rule, they were poor newcomers to town. They offered smaller quantities of goods taken from manufacturers and wholesalers, loaded into baskets or on trays. Their prices were lower than in stores and markets. Mobile traders sold various types of fruits, vegetables, yogurt, sweets for children, shouting the name of their goods and their characteristics in the streets [Bojanić 1983, 157, 160].

Butchers are mentioned in Niš at the end of the 15th century. They made sure that there was always enough good meat, which had to be prepared according to certain rules. Their duty was to provide cattle, which was slaughtered and prepared for sale at a fixed price. The butchers were sworn to these obligations in front of the *kadi* court. Sheep, goat and beef were sold separately. Due to different eating habits and mutual religious exclusivity, Christians had their own butchers [Bojanić 1983, 156, 160; Zirojević 2005, 243-244].

At the beginning of the 16th century, the first professional chefs (*tabbahs* and *aşçis*) appeared in Niš [Bojanić 1983, 160]. Lambs were roasted in *aşhanes* and sold in shops and in the bazaar. Various cooked dishes were also prepared there. Derschwan states that everyday Ottoman dishes were wheat soup, peas, lentils, beans with pieces of mutton, and the best was rice soup with yellow saffron and sugar [Vlajinac 1927, 73]. In the middle of the 17th century homemade bread was kneaded in the households and the bakers sold *çarsı* bread made of white flour and black caraway. The dough was kneaded with a special yeast from the beaten chickpeas. *Çörek* was a luxury pastry, half size of a regular bread. At that time Niš was known for its honey and early butter as well [Çelebi 2006, 5/110a; Bojanić 1983, 157-160].

5. Arable land and crops

Travel writers describe Serbia as a very fertile land where farmers are not aware of any shortages. They saw, along roads, especially around towns, large areas under various crops. A significant number of Ottoman land surveys confirm these accounts. As early as the mid-15th century, Bertrandon de la Broquière, a diplomat of Philip the Good, mentioned a multitude of Serbian villages with good food and wine in particular [Broquière 1950, 109]. Larger settlements were usually enlivened with gardens and vineyards. Different types of fruits were grown in the spacious courtyards around town houses, as was the case in Grocka, Hasan-Paša Palanka, Jagodina, Kruševac, Pirot, Novi Pazar, Vučitrn, Priština, Čačak, Požega [Čelebi 2006, 5/109b, 5/110b, 5/111a, 5/167a, 5/167b, 5/168a, 5/168b, 5/169a, 5/182a, 6/137a; 6/137b; Kuripešić 2001, 43].

The bulk of urban food supplies originated from neighbouring arable areas. Some regions and settlements were known for certain products. For example, Niš was known for its spacious vineyards [Ionov 1986, 64]. The 1716 grape harvest was so great that the wine storage was provided by digging pits in the ground since the city had shortage of barrels [Levental 1989, 192]. Novi Pazar, Prokuplje, Smederevo and Negotin, were also famous for their grapes and Sremski Karlovci for its bread and plums. The towns of Priština, Vučitrn and Kosovska Mitrovica produced quality fruit [Čelebi 2006, 5/167a, 5/167b, 5/168a, 5/168b; Samardžić 1961, 129, 161-162; Vuksanović-Anić 1980, 80; Pejton 1996, 183]. In Pirot, travellers could eat honey of exceptional quality. One of them, who visited the town in 1665, was impressed by a salad made of carrots and onions dressed with honey and vinegar or clotted cream [Ionov 1986, 98]. Water-rich land enabled the production of rice. Rice fields could be seen in the vicinity of Niš and Jagodina and in the Toplica Valley. [Matković 1892, 23; Ionov 1986, 64; Amedoski 2007; Amedoski 2017] The Great Morava River was so abundant with fish and crabs that Stefan Gerlach and his companions fished with their bare hands in Batočina. [Matković 1894, 52; Gerlach 1976, 34].

Urban residents or farmers from nearby villages farmed arable lands around towns. More data on this subject are available for the area around Belgrade. In the immediate vicinity of the town there were fields of wheat, barley, oats, rye, buckwheat and millet [Šabanović 1964]. The vineyards along the southern outskirts of the city are mentioned in the medieval sources. Large areas of vineyards on the ligneous plateau of gentle slopes and shallow and wide valleys spread all the way to the mount Avala. This arable zone was depicted on the 18th-century maps. It included the Topčider River Valley, one of the favourite resorts of Belgrade residents [Garić Petrović 2011, 231-233]. At the time of the Austrian rule over the central parts of Serbia (17818-1739), representatives of the Austrian Government, headed by Prince Charles Alexander of Württemberg, had their estates there. For instance, Prince's hunting lodge, as well as farm-estates of some other dignitaries, was situated in one of the present-day Belgrade quarters. The water mill and estates of the Orthodox Belgrade Archdiocese were in the immediate vicinity [Škalamera 1970, 53]. Members of the Orthodox Archbishopric Court consumed onions, green peas, lentils, horsebeans, kohlrabies, beets, turnips, artichokes, borecoles

cabbage and herbs produced on these farm-estates [Popović and Bogdanović 1958, 34, 90, 112-113; Zirojević 2007, 17]. The Archbishopric vineyards produced several types of wines sufficient to meet the basic needs of the Court [Garić Petrović 2011, 241-242].

6. Caravansaries, khans and inns

Along the Ottoman roads, there were horse stations as well as caravansaries, khans and inns, built for the accommodation of travellers. Along the part of Constantinople Road between Belgrade and Sofia, the Caravansary in Niš was the most beautiful one. Caravansaries were also established in Grocka, Hasan-Pasha Palanka, Batočina, Jagodina, Paraćin, Ražanj, Aleksinac, Musa-Pasha Palanka and Pirot [Zirojević 1970, 50-54]. Travelers purchased food in nearby villages and town markets. Grain depots were situated in *palankas* along the road. Such warehouses were located in Grocka and Hasan-Paşa Palanka [Çelebi 2006, 5/111a]. Caravansaries were usually large buildings covered with lead, with an inner courtyard for horses and camels, whose smell was often unbearable. Around the courtyard there was elevated floor level, two to three feet high and wide six to seven, built in order to separate people from animals. There, they slept and cooked. If there was no settlement in the vicinity, they could buy food and wood from Caravansary-keepers [Samardžić 1961, 133-134, 170].

7. Zaviyes and imarets

Waqf facilities such as *zaviyes* and *imarets*, as well as the other types of institutions with similar purpose, have always been a strong competition to the aforementioned commercial facilities, because intentional travellers could get free food or prepare it themselves [Bojanić 1983, 160-161]. As a charitable institution, *zaviyes* offered shelter to travellers and distributed food to a wide clientele as specified by the endower [Boykov 2016, 35]. Ottoman *imarets* (soup kitchens) also handed out food, free of charge, to specific groups of individuals. In the 16th century three *imarets* served food in Belgrade. One of the soup kitchens was in the Lower *çarşı* of Belgrade which was the endowment of Mehmed-paşa Yahyapaşa-oğlu. In addition to his *imaret*, in the 16th century there were also *imaret* of Piri Mehmed-paşa and *imaret* of Bayram-bey [Šabanović 1970, 18]. At the time when Evliya Çelebi passed through Belgrade, only the *imaret* of Mehmed-paşa Yahyapaşa-oğlu was in function. He had a certain group of citizens to whom the *fodulas* were distributed on daily basis. Most of them were waqf employees, families of deceased employees, as well as *fukara* i.e., poor people in the city [Fotić 1991, 65-66]. Besides the bread, meals in every *imaret*, probably in this one too, included rice or *bulgur* (crushed wheat) soup. On special days, such as Friday nights, nights of Ramazan, the nights of Aşure, Mevlud, Regaib and Berat, Kurban Bayramı, Şeker Bayramı and other celebrations *imarets* served richer dishes [Singer 2005, 486].

8. Dining at home

Since the Muslim population prevailed in Serbian towns during the Ottoman rule, travellers who were welcomed into homes of city residents had the opportunity to try Ottoman cuisine. Dishes were quite spicy and served with strong sauces and various ragouts [Levental 1989, 195]. Pilaf was one of the most favoured dishes served on every feast. It was made from rice grains cooked in a meat soup or with water and butter. Yogurt, saffron, honey or jam of boiled wine were often added. Roast, which they called kebab, was rarely eaten. Ottoman passengers usually carried only rice, ghee and some dried or minced meat. Rice, ghee and dry fruit were main food supplies stored in almost every household [Samardžić 1961, 332-333].

During the 19th century, travellers who visited autonomous Principality of Serbia left descriptions of dining customs and dishes prepared in Serbian homes. At the door of the dining room usually stood two servants with a washbowl, ewer with water and napkin. Guests and everyone who would be dining washed hands prior to sitting at the table. After the prayer food was served. Usually, the first course was cheese, onions or garlic and plum or grape brandy. Then they ate pickled soup, beef or chicken meat with cabbage, peppers, carrots or other vegetables, roasted meat, often lamb. Wine was served during all courses. Desserts, such as pudding made of almonds, grapes, cream, or pancakes were served at the end of the meal. Immediately after, everyone would stand up from a table and wash their hands. Then it was the time for coffee and after that, everyone went on with their business [Petrović 1934, 30-31; Momčilović 1993, 107-108; Kostić 2011, 63-65]. At the time of fasting, dishes were prepared without meat, dairy products and eggs. Then the festive meal consisted of vegetable soup, fish, boiled beans, other vegetables, and fruits [Petrović 1934, 40].

Cookware was simple and consisted of homemade wooden vessels, ceramic jars and plates, goblets and knives, as well as jugs that women made from pumpkins. Wine and spirits were held in wooden carved containers, while the bread was baked in terracotta dishes (*crepuljas*) [Kostić 2011, 66].

Khans and taverns served stews (*paprikaš*), cooked lamb meat, roasted chicken meat and soups. Their wines were of poor quality, usually sour. Meals provided along roads, outside populated areas, usually consisted of brandy, eggs, clotted cream, cheese, butter, fish, honey, and fruits [Pejton 1996, 64-65; Vuksanović-Anić 1980, 41; Kostić 2011, 61-62].

9. Serbian Cuisine Between the East and the West

Gaining autonomy and independence in the 19th century marked the beginning of a new period in the Serbian history. The influence of Western Europe became more and more present. All segments of everyday life were impacted. This change was most visible in Belgrade, which was experiencing a boom in urbanization according to Western models. Since then, the city has become a tourist-destination [Kostić 2003, 27].

From decade to decade, the appearance of the city and its inhabitants had been changing. These changes were recorded by the foreigners visiting Serbia. The first noticed improvement was the improvement in accommodation. At the end of the 19th century, there were already seventeen hotels in Belgrade. Foreign visitors could dine in a large number of taverns and inns. [Šubert 2003, 243] In the everyday life of the city inhabitants, a special place was occupied by cafes where a rich social life took place. There, beside eating and drinking, deals were made, and news were exchanged [Kostić 2003, 26-27].

The spread of Western influences also affected Serbian cuisine. By the middle of the 19th century, the Serbian cuisine was influenced to a great extent by the Middle-Europe cuisine. In the mid-century, Andrew Archibald Peyton could taste only dishes cooked in the German way. [Momčilović 1993, 107-108] Foreign influences on the cuisine have penetrated Serbian homes as well. Every well-to-do home in Belgrade had a German cook [Ehaliotis 2003, 207].

The imitation of Western dishes that were on the menu of Belgrade restaurants and taverns, did not leave a positive impression on foreign visitors. In his travelogue, Herbert Vivian speaks of Belgraders who prefer worthless foreign imitations than their traditional delicious dishes [Kostić 2007, 49].

The Serbian cuisine was still preserved in small towns and countryside. Travelogues from the beginning of the 20th century speak of national cuisine and dishes to which a passenger should pay attention: for breakfast they recommend *ćevapčići* (mincemeat kebabs), *ražnjići* (shish kebabs), sausages, *ćulbastije* (grilled cutlets); for lunch *sarme* (stuffed grape or cabbage leaves), *paprikaš* and *đuveč*. They also mention *zeljanice* and *pite* (vegetable and meat pies) and the Negotinac wine [Kostić 2006, 150-151].

Conclusions

Travelogues are one of the most important historical sources for understanding everyday life and habits in the territory of present-day Serbia during the Ottoman rule. Travellers have left descriptions of dishes, dining customs, tableware. Also, they were impressed by the markets rich in various goods and their liveliness. Analysing this type of source from different periods of Ottoman rule, one gets the impression that urban settlements in Serbia resembled other oriental towns in the Ottoman Empire. The shift of the Austro-Turkish border in the 18th century brought a big change. Serbia became a border area, and its settlements were destroyed in constant wars. Visitors could no longer see picturesque and rich settlements but neglected border towns that left bad impression. With the creation of an independent Serbian state in the 19th century, the first travelogues completely dedicated to this new member of the European community of nations were created. Reading them, one can follow the changes that the Serbian society went through, especially those that referred to the appearance of the settlements, accommodation, meals and the offer on the markets and in the shops. With the departure of the Muslim population from Serbian towns, oriental dishes and groceries slowly disappeared. Their place was taken by traditional Serbian dishes. Although oriental

influences were noticeable in Serbian cuisine, it was much more modest. At the end of the 19th century, the influence of Central European cuisine became noticeable, especially in Belgrade, from where it eventually spread to other Serbian areas.

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