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Historical Flows as the Most Significant Influence of Evolution of Serbian Gastronomy

Bela Muhi, Dusan V. Jovanovic, Goran Ostojic
duda.jovanovic@gmail.com
(Novi Sad, Serbia)

Introduction

Serbia, one of the oldest European countries, is located in southeast Europe, mostly on the Balkan Peninsula. It also covers part of the rich, fertile Pannonian Plain drained by the Danube River in the north-east of the country. Serbia covers an area of 88.361 km². Official data shows that the population of Serbia is 7.186.862 people, excluding Kosovo and Metohija, a Serbian province which has been under temporary UN administration since 1999. Largest city and capital of Serbia is Belgrade, with 1.659.440 inhabitants (urban area). Major ethnic group are the Serbs (83.32%), followed by Hungarians (3.53%), Gypsies/Roma (2.05%), Bosniaks (2.02%) and 17 more ethnic minorities which consist of more than 2000 members each. Major religions are Christian Orthodox (84.59%), Roman Catholic (4.97%) and Islam (3.1%) (Statistics Republic Comitee of Serbia, 2013).

Discussion

Serbian history is one of the richest in Europe, starting more than one and a half thousand years ago. First Serbian states, created in sixth and seventh centuries, were united under Nemanjic dynasty in 12th century and flourished to become one of the leading European powers under the Emperor Stefan Dusan the Mighty, between 1331. and 1555. A.D. However, Ottoman expansion into Europe caught Serbia divided after Emperor Dusan's death, which allowed the Ottomans to finally take control of Serbia in 1459. Next three centuries saw Ottoman domination in Balkans. The 17th and 18th centuries saw several major Austro-Ottoman wars. During that time parts of Serbia were temporarily liberated from the Ottomans, but final liberation process started in 1804, when the First Serbian Uprising began. At the end of 19th century Serbia was a young, prosperous, sovereign kingdom, a Piedmont for other South Slavs. Eventually, after winning both First and Second Balkan wars and First World War, it formed the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, soon renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. After the Second World War, a new Yugoslavia (Democratic Federal Yugoslavia) was formed by communist government and in 1945 fully succeeded the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. It was renamed two more times before it's breakup in 1992, and finally in 2006, after secession of Montenegro, the Republic of Serbia once again became a sovereign country (Demirovic et al, 2013).

Serbian cuisine is largely heterogeneous with heavy Mediterranean (Byzantine/Greek), Oriental (Turkish), and Hungarian influences. A number of foods, notably pickled fruits and jams, are made at home in Serbia. Accompaniments such as rakija (fruit brandy), slatko (fruit or rose petal preserves), jams, jellies, various pickled foods (notably, kiseli kupus, or sauerkraut), ajvar (eggplant and pepper relish), and even sausages are all homemade. Serbian cuisine is based on Slavic traditions with strong influences during centuries of domination by Rome, Byzantium, and Turkey. Neighbouring Balkan countries have also influenced food here. The many Christians frequently eat pork. Muslims do not consume pork. Usual foods are kajmak (clotted cream), sir and kačkavalj (sheep's milk cheeses), yogurts (from cow's milk and luxury kiselo mleko from sheep's milk), and slatko (syrupy fruit conserve), offered with water and Serbian (Turkish) coffee to the afternoon visitor (Brittin, 2011).

Vojvodina, Historical Province of Serbia, shares a border with Hungary and Romania and supplies most of Serbia's grain, sugar, beef, pork, and fresh-water fish. There, Austrian, Hungarian, German and Slovak influences in gastronomy are omnipresent.

After the Second World War in Yugoslavia industrialization of the state has been a priority, in order to raise the standard of living. Large investments were put in the food industry, and therefore in agriculture as a primary sector that is supposed to produce raw materials for further processing. This process significantly influenced the Serbian gastronomy, mostly by changing the population's needs for food. The largest part of population belonged to the working class with average incomes, living mostly in densely populated urban areas. As a result the consumption of finished food products and semi-finished agricultural products was constantly increasing. Also, due to the political trends of the time, there was mixing of five nations in one - Yugoslav, which looked up to the modern Western culture, trying to create its own. Under this influence, usually for purely commercial reasons, the Yugoslav gastronomy was created, which remains dominant in Serbia until the present day. It is characterized by large and energy-rich breakfast, consisting mostly of cured meat products, ready-made meals for lunch, and often dairy dinner. Brands of Yugoslavia's food industries managed to outlive the state itself, so that they remain popular in Serbia in twenty-first century (Kovacevic, Nikolic, 1999).

Conclusion

Serbian gastronomy is varied because of the turbulent historical events influencing the food and people, with each region having its own subtle peculiarities and differences in traditional dishes. In this paper an overview of the most significant historical periods in Serbia was given, which shows a close relation to changes that occurred in the development of Serbian gastronomy and which influenced its evolution in what it is today.

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