

The Registered Gastronomic Taste: Tokat Kebab

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Abstract

Tokat cuisine, rich in gastronomy with its wide variety and appetizing dishes, offers memorable experiences to the residents, visitors, guests, and tourists in Tokat. The most well-known taste of Tokat cuisine is Tokat kebab. ‘Tokat kebab’, made in the Tokat province, takes its name from the fact that it has been made in Tokat region for years with its unique preparation methods. It can be defined as a kebab prepared by combining its ingredients, shaping them according to its unique preparation methods, and cooking it on a particular Tokat kebab stove. The current study aims to evaluate in a scientific framework the product definition, distinctive features, preparation methods, and registered features of Tokat kebab, one of the local and gastronomic products with geographical indication, by highlighting the significance of geographical indications and their contribution to tourism.

Keywords: *Gastronomy, Geographical indication, Tokat cuisine, Tokat kebab, Tourism.*

Tescilli Gastronomik Lezzet: Tokat Kebabı

Öz

Gastronomi açısından zengin, çok çeşitli ve lezzetli yemekleri ile Tokat mutfağı, burada yaşayanlara, ziyaretçilerine, misafirlerine ve turistlere unutulamayacak deneyimler sunmaktadır. Tokat mutfağının en çok bilinen lezzeti Tokat Kebabıdır. Tokat yöresinde yapılan “Tokat Kebabı”, adını yıllardır Tokat ilinde kendine has üretim yöntemiyle yapılmasından dolayı almaktadır. Tokat Kebabı, malzemelerini oluşturan gıda ürünlerinin kendine has üretim yöntemine göre bir araya getirilip, şekillendirilmesi ve kendine özgü Tokat kebabı ocağında pişirilmesiyle elde edilen kebab olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, coğrafi işaretlerin turizme sağladığı katkının önemine değinilip, Tokat’ın yöresel ürünlerinden coğrafi işaret tesciline sahip gastronomik bir ürün olan Tokat kebabının yapılış sürecinin bilimsel bir çerçevede değerlendirilmesi amaçlanmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Gastronomi, Coğrafi işaret, Tokat mutfağı, Tokat kebabı, Turizm.*

Introduction

Products with exceptional characteristics, especially local gastronomic products, are registered as a geographical indication in the world and Turkey (Kendir & Arslan, 2020). A geographical indication is a quality mark that shows the source of the product. Also, its characteristics and the connection between these characteristics and the geographical area for consumers (Yıkımış & Ünal, 2016). Through a geographical indication registry, the products that have gained a particular reputation (due to their quality, raw material, and traditionality) are protected.

Geographical indications offer protection to consumers and manufacturers, increase marketing opportunities, guarantee the quality of products and increase economic contribution (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1999). In general, geographical indications consist of the name of the geographical origin or the name of the production place such as Champagne, Cuban Cigars, Roquefort Cheese, Turkish Carpet etc. Geographical indications draw attention to product quality, local identity and cultural traditions (Dogan & Gokovali, 2012).

According to Article 34 of the Turkish Industrial Property Act No. 6769, a geographical indication is a sign that demonstrates the product identified with the region, area, locality or country of origin in terms of a distinctive feature, reputation or other characteristics. Geographical indications are registered as a designation of origin or geographic indication. Food, agriculture, mining, handicrafts and industrial products may be subject to a geographical indication registry (Turkish Patent and Trademark Office, 2022).

With its historical past, Tokat has a very rich culinary and dietary culture (Sağır, 2012). There are fifteen geographically marked products in Tokat province, eleven of which are foodstuffs. All these gastronomic products are produced and registered according to their characteristics and preparation methods, which boosts the attractiveness of the region and the sustainability of production. Food products of Tokat province with geographical indication are Erbaa Narince bağ yaprağı (Grape Leaf), Niksar cevizi (walnut), Tokat ekmeği (bread), Tokat bez sucuk (traditional fermented sausage), Tokat Narince salamura asma yaprağı (Pickled Grape Leaf), Tokat yağlısı, Tokat çöreği (Bun), Turh-

al yoğurtmacı, Zile kömesi (Churchkhela), Zile pekmezi (Molasses) and Tokat kebab (Turkish Patent and Trademark Office, 2022).

Exploring the elements representing a province or a region that holds significant potential and presenting them as a concrete resource is vital to contribute to the relevant literature and to leading future research. It has been observed that the existing literature on the preparation process of Tokat Kebab and its distinctive features from other kebabs is limited. For this reason, the present study aimed to evaluate the preparation process of Tokat kebab (Figure 1), a local gastronomic product with a geographical indication registry, by highlighting the significance of geographical indications and their contribution to tourism in a scientific framework.



Figure 1. Tokat kebab's logo (Turkish Patent and Trademark Office, 2022)

Gastronomy and Gastronomic Tourism Concept

Gastronomy covers matters such as the physiology of the sense of taste and the phenomenon of taste, the production of various products, the functions of nutrients, the determination of their qualities in the selection of foodstuffs, and the creation of production processes following hygiene and sanitation rules to prevent physical, chemical and biological deterioration of foods (Shenoy, 2005). The science of gastronomy

aims to protect people's health through adequate and balanced nutrition, to ensure that they enjoy life and eating, to prepare food and beverages in a hygienic environment (Gök, Sezgin & Yıldırım, 2017).

On the other hand, gastronomic tourism can be described as a type of tourism that creates travel motivation to have an unprecedented food and beverage experience and that significantly helps to motivate travel behaviors (Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2010). According to another definition, gastronomic tourism is visiting local or rural areas, food producers, restaurants, food festivals and certain locations to taste a particular dish or see the production stages of a dish as the major motivation (Lee, Packer & Scott, 2015).

However, the industrial food and beverage products are not considered as a gastronomic product. The factors which can inspire someone for a gastronomic trip are the desire to taste a traditional food and beverage from a particular region, consumption a food with special quality, or consumption the food prepared by a famous cook. In this regard, the protection and marketing of local gastronomic products and achieving a commercial dimension by providing their sustainability are of great importance in terms of destination promotion (Güllü & Karagöz, 2019). Mainly, tourists who enjoy local-natural foods are interested in learning about local-national cuisines. Tourists, ready to pay more for the local food products, state that their knowledge of these products influences the amount of money they spend (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). The cuisine and culinary culture are the most tempting factors for tourists when choosing their destination. Authentic foods and tastes of a region or a locality in a country are of paramount importance to gastronomic tourism (Çam & Çılgınoğlu, 2021).

Gastronomic Tourism in Tokat

With the benefit of being founded on the fertile lands of the Yeşilirmak basin, Tokat is a noteworthy Anatolian city that has been a vital trade and culture center and hosted 14 states and many principalities throughout its 6000-years history. Tokat, located in the central part of the Black Sea Region of Turkey, has Samsun and Ordu in the north, Yozgat and Sivas in the south and east, and Amasya in the west. Its surface area is 10,072 km²; its altitude is, on average, 623 meters. The fertile plains of Tokat with 11 districts cover approximately 15.4% of the province's land (Tokat Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2022).

There is a rising trend in gastronomic tourism in Tokat as in Turkey (Arslan, 2020). Tokat cuisine, rich in gastronomy and notable for its wide variety and delicious tastes, offers wonderful experiences to its residents, visitors, guests and tourists (Yaylacı & Mertol, 2021).

In this context, some of the well-known noteworthy local foods are Tokat kebab, Tokat Grape Leaf, Tokat Tomato, Tokat Sarma, Cevizli Bat, Keşkek, Madımak, Dolma with broad bean (*Vicia faba*), Dolma with Meat, Chickpea Leavened Walnut Bun, Tokat Yağlısı, Tokat Bagel, Tokat Bread, Çemen, Zile Pekmez (Molasses), Zile Kömesi (Churchkhela), Pestil (dried fruit rolls) and Zambak Reçeli (Jam with lilies) (Kendir & Arslan, 2020; Yaylacı & Mertol, 2021).

The Significance of Geographical Indications on Gastronomic Tourism

A geographical indication is the only type of industrial property right tied to a particular place and represents a relationship between a product and its geographical origin. Therefore, a product

with high quality and a good reputation among consumers, is defined by a region or geography and some or all of its features originate from this region (Çekal & Aslan, 2017). In general, geographical indication consists of the name of the place where the product is cultivated and/or produced such as olive oil produced in the Tuscany region of Italy and Roquefort Cheese produced in France (Gökovalı, 2007). For this reason, it is viewed as an element supporting tourism in the regional/local area and, thus, providing economic advantages (Tanrikulu & Doğandor, 2021). Jay and Taylor (2013) reported that tourists visit the Champagne region of France to taste the sparkling wine of Champagne which is produced in that region and has a geographical indication, and thanks to the wine, tourism activities in the region revived. Likewise, Italian pizza and pasta are known worldwide, and tourists travel to Italy to taste these products (Kan, Gülçubuk, Küçükçongar, 2012).

A geographical indication ensures that the gastronomic elements are lawfully protected from being imitated and that the products' unique preparation methods and origins are recorded. For this reason, geographical indication is a practice that gastronomy tourists really care about (Canbolat & Çakıroğlu, 2020). Owing to the strong relationship between the origins of a product, geographical indications contribute revival of tourism by enticing consumers to the region where the product originated. Accordingly, tourism, regarded as an essential element for understanding regional development, is acknowledged as a significant sector enabling local and regional products to come to prominence (Çekal & Aslan, 2017). Geographical indications provide crucial opportunities for rural development. They could help to sustain economic activities and settlement in rural areas and improve the living standards of the residents. The rural population is the prime benefi-

ciary of these products in terms of income and employment generation. Moreover, through an effective protection and marketing process, the economic activities in rural areas can increase further not only by the growth of geographical indications production but also by developments in the other sector (Kan, Gülçubuk, Küçükçongar, 2012). Geographical indication, an influential tool in raising awareness about local products and thus increasing the contribution of these products to the rural economy, is a very vital concept for preventing migration from rural areas to urban areas, providing permanent income and employment, going into production more regularly and advancing the quality of the product. Likewise, geographical indications aid not only to boost the recognition of the production place but also create some external benefits such as the increase in economic activity of other sectors that have a close relationship with the geographical indication products. For example, an increase in tourism activity due to recognized geographical indication not only provides advantages to the producer but also creates income and employment opportunities in other sectors such as hotel services for accommodation, gift shops and restaurants (Dogan & Gokovali, 2012).

However, for the sustainability of the indication, a product with a geographical indication has to reach the standards specified within the scope of the indication, carry certain features of the product and meet the required quality standards, which are the most critical factors. For sustainable gastronomic tourism, both protecting the local gastronomic heritage and providing local economic development by supporting the local people is of great importance (Şimşek & Güleç, 2020).

Description of Tokat Kebab

‘Tokat kebab’, made in Tokat province, takes its name from the fact that it has been made in Tokat region for years with its unique preparation methods. Before it became a commercial product in Tokat and its surrounding areas, it was cooked in village houses on special days. The Turkish Patent and Trademark Office registered Tokat kebab as of 26.08.2013 in accordance with the 12th article of the Decree-Law on the Protection of Geographical Indications No. 555 with the designation of origin number 188 (Turkish Patent and Trademark Office, 2022). It can be defined as a kebab prepared by combining its ingredients, shaping them according to its unique preparation methods and cooking it on a particular Tokat kebab stove.

Generally, other kebab types in Turkish cuisine are meat-heavily. The most preferred meat dishes by foreign tourists are respectively Iskender kebab (94.5%), Adana kebab (92.4%) and Döner kebab (90.0%) (Mankan and Özçelik 2016). Also, Cağ Kebab (Kara, 2017; Polat Üzümcü and Denk 2019), Sırık kebab (Akyol 2018), Furun kebab (Algan Özkök and Aydınli, 2022) and Ortaklar Shish kebab (Gün and Bucak, 2022) are examples of other meat-heavily kebab types.

Unlike other kebab types in Turkish cuisine, Tokat kebab has distinctive qualities such as consisting high proportion of vegetables besides meat and being cooked on a particular stove. Yaylacı and Mertol (2021), Kızılaslan and Tayfur (2014), Erdem (2015), and Sağır (2012) stated that Tokat kebab has a substantial place in Tokat culinary culture. Arslan, Kendir & Bozkurt (2021) in their study reported that Tokat kebab has gained prominence as the most preferred local food of the visitors that came to Tokat. Arslan (2020) in his study found that the

most prominent words in the word cloud obtained from the positive comments about Tokat kebab were “delicious, recommend, satisfying, meat, vegetables and good”. Thus, tourists reported that they were satisfied with their Tokat kebab experience and that its flavour and satiety were at the forefront. Besides, it was truly significant for tourists to note that they will recommend it to other people. Kendir and Arslan (2020) in their study remarked that Tokat kebab, one of the gastronomic delicacies of Tokat province, is preferred more and it is essential to bring it to the forefront concerning gastronomic tourism. Sadaklıoğlu and Aşık (2019) in their study expressed that Tokat kebab is the most desired feature expected to be advertised in Tokat. Topbaş (2019) in the study of questioned whether producers and consumers knew the geographically marked products of Tokat province found that 68.75% of the former participants knew about Tokat kebab whereas 69.26% of the latter indicated that Tokat kebab is a well-known product.

What makes Tokat kebab peculiar to the Tokat region is the preparation method and the qualities of the foodstuffs utilized in production. As stated by the Turkish Patent and Trademark Office in the geographical indication registry document of Tokat kebab, the distinctive qualities of the foodstuffs in the kebab composition and the final product are as in the following;

1. Meat and tail fat used in Tokat kebab must be from 6-9 months old male lambs of Karayaka sheep raised in natural environment or on highlands,
2. Pepper, one of the vegetables used in Tokat kebab, must be Tokat pepper,
3. Tokat kebab is distinguished from other kebabs with its unusual cooking technique,

4. Tokat kebab is cooked on a stove peculiarly designed for it,

5. The serving of Tokat kebab is unique (Turkish Patent and Trademark Office, 2022).

Features of the Tokat Kebab Stove

The Tokat kebab stove consists of 6 parts. These are the firebox, chimney, metal shaft for hanging skewers, pan, oil collection pan and skewer for taking out the kebab. Tokat kebab stove is entirely dissimilar from other known kebab stoves. Examining the kebab stove from the front, it is noticed that it consists of three different parts. The first of these is the oil collection pan part, the second is the entry part where the kebab skewers are positioned within the stove, and the third part at the top is the chimney. When the interior part is examined, at the center of it, there is a horizontal metal shaft extending along with the stove, on which kebab skewers hung. On both sides of this horizontal metal shaft, adjacent to the side walls (fire bricks), there are sections where the fire is lit, extending along with the stove. These parts are located at a lower level of the metal shaft for hanging skewers. At the bottom, there is a long, rectangular, curved-forward pan again extending along with it. Just below the front part of the pan, there is an oil collection pan where melted meat fat and tail fat on skewers are collected and drained through the pan (Turkish Patent and Trademark Office, 2022).

Preparation of Tokat Kebab

The process of Tokat kebab basically consists of three steps. These steps are placing the ingredients on skewers, cooking and serving.

Placing the ingredients on skewers: During that step, a walnut-sized tail fat is placed on the

top of the skewer. The eggplant is positioned under the tail fat right after the potato slice. Yet, eggplant needs to go through various pre-treatments. The eggplants, separated from the stem and sliced in half lengthwise from the middle, are divided into 2 or 3 parts. The inner surfaces of the eggplants are pressed with the ground rock salt and then the surfaces of the two slices are rubbed together. The inner surface of the

eggplant slice facing upwards is placed on the skewer at an angle of 70-80°. Potatoes are again put under the eggplant while the meat is placed under the potatoes. This process is duplicated four or five times. If the lamb meat is not very fatty, small tail fat can be placed with the meat. Tomatoes, peppers and garlic are positioned on separate skewers as a whole (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Preparation and skewer arrangement of Tokat Kebab (Turkish Patent and Trademark Office, 2022)

Cooking: One of the most important features of Tokat kebab is that the prepared skewers are attached vertically to the metal shaft in the middle of the kebab stove and cooked with the fire and embers burning on both sides. The cooking time of the kebab is about 20-25 min. Kebab skewers are first put in front of the kebab stove. Kebab

is kept in this section for almost 10-12 min as it is expected to turn brown with an oak wood fire burning in the front part. After the kebab turned brown, the skewers are moved to the back of the stove utilizing the skewer for taking out the kebab (Figure 3). The embers in the back part of the kebab stove are ensured to fry the ke-

bab. Here the cooking time lasts nearly 10-12 min, too. If the potatoes are fried until golden brown, it is decided to take out the kebab from the stove.



Figure 3. Cooking Kebab in Tokat Kebab Oven (Turkish Patent and Trademark Office, 2022)

Serving: Tokat kebab is usually pulled in trays. If the kebab is prepared for one person, it can also be pulled on the serving plates. The word pull means removing the kebab from the skewer. Three thin lavash slices of bread are laid on the bottom of the tray in which the kebab will be served. First, the skewer on which the tomatoes were placed is removed in the middle of the tray. They are quickly peeled and chopped with a knife. Later, the kebab on the skewers is removed around the tomatoes pulled in the middle, without spoiling the ingredient order described above (tail fat-potato-eggplant-potato-meat). After that, the peppers are positioned on the kebab. Next, the garlic is placed as a whole in different parts of the tray according to the number of people. Finally, the melted tail fat collected in the oil collection pan in the lower part of the stove is poured over the kebab tray and the kebab is ready to serve (Figure 4) (Turkish Patent and Trademark Office, 2022).



Figure 4. Tokat Kebab Serving (Turkish Patent and Trademark Office, 2022)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Rapid urbanization, population growth and globalization in the world have a great impact on the field of culture as well as in many other fields, and they threaten local cultural assets and values. Gastronomic values, important components of cultural heritage, are also negatively affected by this process and many local gastronomic products are in danger of extinction. In this context, it is believed that studies aimed at introducing our traditional foods and dishes to the younger generations at home and abroad should become widespread.

In gastronomic tourism, the local tastes of the region are as significant as other cultural values. Therefore, ensuring the same quality of the product and having geographical indication is really crucial. Geographical indications establish a connection between the product and the name of the geographical region where the product originated. Hence, these indicators are an effective marketing tool for attracting consumers' attention to the regions. Certifying foods, beverages or other goods specific to a particular region with geographical indication is essential for their standardization and recognition of them.

In the current study, the product definition, distinctive features, preparation methods, registered features and distinguishing features of Tokat kebab, which has a high gastronomic value among other geographically marked products, were highlighted in line with the Geographical Indication Registry Document. Unlike other kebab types in Turkish cuisine, Tokat kebab is distinguished from many others with its high proportion of vegetables besides meat, being cooked on a stove peculiarly designed for it and its special serving procedures.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the present study that chefs should be trained to preserve the local foods and beverages, particularly Tokat kebab, which are our gastronomic values; if possible, gastronomy and culinary arts departments ought to be founded in every province so that future generations are informed about local cuisines; various events like festivals and carnivals should be organized for the promotion of geographical indication products by means of that more tourists may visit the region and thus local products may be demanded more, and scientific studies ought to be supported and their numbers should be increased to protect cultural values.

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