

A LIVING HUMAN TREASURE FROM OTTOMAN TIMES TO TODAY: BOYOZ MASTER SABETAY KOHEN

BY

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Abstract

Since the First Age, wars, natural disasters, commercial reasons, compulsory or voluntary human beings have left the places where they lived and established new lives for themselves in the places they went. Human beings have also carried their culture wherever they go. For this reason, cultural interaction has always existed between people. Clothing, traditions, customs, food culture have interacted with different cultures through migrations and have been adopted by becoming a part of the culture in the destination. Food culture, which is one of the most important cultural values, is a value that human beings keep alive in the places they go and teach other cultures.

The aim of this study is to reveal the story of “Sabetay Kohen”, who continues to produce boyoz and pastry in a small shop in Çanakkale today and his arrival in Turkey through documents and interviews. According to the findings obtained as a result of the research; it was concluded that there is no Jewish population left in Çanakkale except for a few families, Sabetay Usta continues to produce alone in the pastry bakery, the locals who know the pastry bakery find Sabetay Usta's pastries delicious and the reason for this flavor is the low use of yeast. It was found that Sabetay Kohen learned how to make boyoz/ börek from his father, and that his father learned from Yako Usta, who went to Izmir from Çanakkale and contributed to the spread of boyoz in Izmir. Since there will be no person or persons to do this job if Master Sabetay, who still continues to produce in the börek bakery today, leaves his job, it is thought that it is important in the context of the protection of the gastronomic heritage integrated with Anatolia to teach the production of boyoz or börek to another person or persons, since this cultural value will disappear.

Keywords: Clothing, traditions, customs, food culture, Heritage preservation,

Introduction

It is certain that mankind has been in a state of migration for reasons such as war, trade and natural disasters since the First Age. Although this movement has lost its speed from time to time, it has never come to an end. Considering this mobility of mankind, it can be said that the dressing, eating and drinking cultures that we think belong to a society are also a synthesis. The presence of different cultures in Anatolia from past to present has contributed to the richness of eating

and drinking habits. There are many different opinions, thoughts and studies about which societies first made some universal dishes. When food culture and traditional ceremonies and rituals are considered together, findings can be reached about which societies or communities some dishes may belong to. The main thing here is to protect the food and beverage values belonging to different cultures and to ensure their sustainability.

One of the flavours known, produced and consumed by different cultures is 'Boyoz'. Boyoz is a street delicacy that the Jewish pastry masters from Çanakkale, which the Sephardim carried from Spain to the Ottoman Empire, contributed to the spread of in İzmir, and today it is overlapped and symbolised with İzmir. It is observed that the food habits of the Jewish community in the Middle Ages were influenced by Roman culture in the north of the Iberian-Andalusian Peninsula and mostly by Islamic culture in the South (www.avlaremaz.com 2017). Cuisine and food cultures interact with many elements, create unique food cultures, or can be assimilated by disappearing or changing form as a result of this interaction (Düzgün and Özkaya 2015). For this reason, there are many common points between Ottoman cuisine and Sephardic cuisine.

Although the first city that comes to mind when it comes to boyoz is İzmir, it should be said that it has a considerable reputation in Çanakkale. The fact that this pastry has taken its final form today is not only a street flavour story, but also a cross-section of the history of the Jewish nation. For this reason, it is necessary to mention a Jewish presence in all geographies in Anatolia where the name boyoz is mentioned. The fact that every corner of the genealogy of this street flavour leads us to a Jewish street has made it necessary to reveal the Jewish identity in Anatolia, especially in Çanakkale, even if briefly.

Literature Review

The Arrival Of The Jews in Çanakkale and Their Current Situation

According to the data provided by the Chief Rabbinate of the Jews of Turkey, the majority of the Jewish communities settled in Turkey are Jews of Seferad

origin, which means "Spain" in Hebrew; (Demirel 2010, 45). however, it is possible to mention the presence of Jews in various cities of Anatolia such as İzmir, Manisa, Eskişehir, Tarsus, Amasya, Tokat, Kayseri, Kayseri, Van, Sinop, Diyarbakır, Adana, Mersin, Urfa, Antakya before and after the establishment of the Ottoman Empire (in 1167) (Galanti 1947, 9-15).

In 1492, Jews who were subjected to deportation by Spain were admitted to the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Beyazid II and settled in various places such as Chios, Istanbul, Edirne, Thessaloniki (Galanti 1947, 17-6-17; Akı 2014, 31). The origin of the Jews of Çanakkale, which constitutes the main channel of our subject, was formed by these Sephardic Jews who came from Spain. Although some of these Sephardim who were settled in various cities of the Empire were later settled in the surrounding districts of Çanakkale such as Ezine, Bayramiç, Gelibolu, Lâpseki, these people later migrated to the center of Çanakkale and started to engage in trade (Akı 2014, 33). The Jewish population in Çanakkale increased from 50 families in the 18th century to 600 families in the 19th century. However, the First World War caused this number of families to decrease considerably (Güler 2007, 77). So much so that the Jewish population in Çanakkale, which was 2.961 in 1914 (Karpas 2003, 224), decreased to 2.584 in 1923, 1.433 in 1945 and 555 in 1960 (Bali 2003, 433; Atabay 2022, 27-35).

The first significant migration of the Jewish population, which was known to have numbered approximately 3,000 in Çanakkale in 1914, took place in 1934 during the "Thracian Events". The rise to power of Mussolini in Italy in 1922 (Armaoğlu 2018, 184) and Hitler in Germany in 1933 (Caplan 2012, 48) and the expansionist policies pursued by these

dictators forced the states of the region to reconsider their defense programs. At a time when Europe was rapidly heading towards the Second World War, in order to protect the region against a possible attack and to establish its security, the emigration of minorities in the region (in order to prevent possible espionage) was considered. The anxiety caused by this idea led to the 1934 Events and these events led to Çanakkale's first serious Jewish emigration. (Bali 2008; Aydoğan 2018, 878-894). This migration was followed in the following periods by migrations caused by situations such as the "Precautionary Military Service" (Bali 1998, 261), the "Wealth Tax" (Baratav 2008, 85) and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. So much so that by the 1960s, the Jewish population of Çanakkale had dropped to 555 people (Bali 2003, 433).

The most important migration that caused the Jewish population in Çanakkale to drop to five families was the "Six-Day War" in 1967, one of the Arab-Israeli wars (Armaoğlu 2018, 531-535). During these wars, Israel's persecution of Palestinian Muslims brought the Turkish people and the Jewish people face to face and caused a significant Jewish population living in Çanakkale to migrate to Istanbul and Israel (Demirel 2010, 47-49).

The migrations caused by these reasons led to a noticeable decrease in the Jewish population living in Izmir, Istanbul, Edirne and Çanakkale, and by 2024, only five Jews remained in Çanakkale. Although the current Jewish population in Çanakkale cannot be counted on two hands, it is an undeniable fact that Çanakkale has a long Jewish history. Based on this long association, it is possible to say that Jews have influenced Çanakkale in commercial, social, artistic, religious and cultural fields and left deep traces. The

"Aynalı Bazaar", which was built by "Halvo", a Jew from Çanakkale, and which has become almost synonymous with the city, is the most concrete and vivid witness of the Jewish traces in the city (Demirel 2010, 46). On the other hand, the "Mekor Hayim Synagogue" in the Jewish neighborhood in the center of Çanakkale and the "Sabetay Usta's Bakery" standing close to this synagogue, representing the last Jews of Çanakkale, are like the last survivors of this old identity. The pastries known as borekita or borekas, a traditional Jewish pastry, made in this two-storey, very old, unmarked, unnamed building owned by the Jewish Community and run by a Jewish man from Çanakkale named Sabetay, who adds color to the city's culinary culture (Demirel 2010, 33) are among the first things that come to mind in the list of Çanakkale street delicacies.

Known as a Jewish pastry made by Sabetay Usta in this old bakery and loved by the people of Çanakkale, the pastries arouse one's curiosity involuntarily. The answers to questions such as how long these pastries have been produced, their origin, how they are made, and their prominent quality and difference in the context of street flavors are documented in an interview with Sabetay Usta.

The Story of Boyoz

The word bollos (Şirin 2017, 389, Gönülal 2024, 341), the plural of the word bollo, which means "puffed bread" or "small loaf" (Yentürk 2006, 117). In the Jewish Spanish language called Ladino, or boyoz, means "bread/pastry" (Uhri 2017, 435). Boyoz is an unleavened pastry that was started to be made by the Sephardic Jews who settled in Turkey in 1492 by the Jews who settled in Anatolia and especially in Izmir. Initially a type of katmer made in the homes of

Sephardic Jews in Izmir, Tire and Milas, boyoz (Şirin 2017, 390) was transformed into Izmir Boyoz in the 1950s by immigrant pastry makers from Rumelia, who combined it with a method called “serpme”, a method of rolling out dough by tossing it in the air.

The way to understand Boyozu, a pastry originating from Sephardic Jews, is to understand “Shabbat”, one of the Jewish holidays, and the “Shabbat Table” set on this holiday (Yentürk 2019, 2-3; Yentürk 2019, 103-110).

Shabbat is one of the Jewish holy holidays. In the Tanakh, the Jewish holy scriptures, it is mentioned that God rested on the seventh day after the completion of heaven and earth, and therefore blessed this day. God also blessed this day to empower the Jews to come out of Egypt and therefore commanded them not to forget this day. This holy day, which begins on Friday evening and lasts until Saturday evening, is the “Sabbath”, which signifies the creation of the world and the deliverance of the Children of Israel from Pharaoh (Ünal 2008, 159; Ağkuş and Altuncu 2017, 2276). Since cooking is forbidden during the Jewish holiday, the food to be eaten that day is prepared the day before. Two pieces of bread are placed on the table, representing the food called “Manna”, which the Jews believe was given to them twice as much by God when they were in the desert while fleeing Egypt (İpkoparan 2020, 23). On Shabbat, after going to the synagogue, they eat pastries such as boyoz, borekas, bulemas and desayuno for breakfast (Marks 1999, 29). This pastry, which was developed in connection with a religious ritual, has over time crossed many geographies and cultures, breathed in Anatolia and integrated into its culinary culture.

“Passover”, also called ‘Passover’, which falls on the 15th day of April according to the Hebrew Calendar

(Basalel 2001a), is a holiday celebrated by the Jews to commemorate their exodus from Egypt under the leadership of the Prophet Moses and their eating unleavened bread during their journey in the desert to be freed from their captivity there (Özcan 2018, 1206-1207). During this migration from captivity to freedom, the Jews baked and ate unleavened bread because they did not have time, and therefore it was forbidden to consume or keep fermented foods at home during Pesach. For this reason, on the first two nights of Pesach, unleavened bread made from wheat flour called “Matza” (matzah bread) is eaten (Basalel 2001b, 198; Bora 2021, 275).

Metodology

Qualitative research method, one of the research methods, was used in the study. Qualitative research is a form of knowledge production developed to explore the depths of social structures and systems in order to reach one's own potential and unravel their secrets (Morgan 1996,7). In addition, qualitative research has a holistic perspective that combines different disciplines in qualitative research (Hatch 2002, 22; Grenier 2019, 19) where it is possible to examine human perceptions and events in social reality and natural environment in depth (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2013, 78; Morgan 1996, 25).

On the other hand, the interview method was used in the study to obtain data. Interview is a data collection technique in which the person or persons involved in the research actively explain their knowledge, feelings and thoughts about the research subject and tell their life story (Bengtsson 2016, 8-14).

The purpose of the interview is to access the inner world of the participant or participants and to determine their feelings and thoughts. A semi-

structured interview form was used as a data collection tool in the interview. The semi-structured interview technique used in the research provides more flexibility to the researcher, allowing the same type of information to be obtained from different individuals (Karagöz 2019, 946).

The data obtained from the research were analyzed by content analysis. Content analysis, as a selective, classifying and quantifying method, is not a mere description and depiction tool or technique, but rather a method that explores certain dimensions of social reality through inference. The aim of content analysis is to reach concepts and relationships that can explain the data (Gökçe 2006, 19). The process to achieve this aim is to bring together similar data within the framework of certain concepts and themes and to interpret them by organizing them in a way that the reader can understand (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2013, 227).

The research was conducted between 01.03.2024-30.05.2024. The semi-structured interview prepared to obtain data for the research was conducted face to face with Sabetah Kohen. In order not to make any mistakes in the findings obtained from the interview with Sabetay Kohen, the text prepared after the research was completed was dictated to Sabetay Kohen. In addition, Selim Varol, the President of the Çanakkale Jewish Community, was also interviewed to confirm the findings once again. The interview was recorded on a tape recorder and the data was analyzed through content analysis.

Findings

The findings of the two interviews conducted with Sabetay Kohen between March and May 2024 are as follows.

Sabetay Kohen is a 72-year-old primary school graduate who has been making pies, pastries and bagels in his bakery in Çanakkale Fevzi Paşa Neighborhood for 60 years.

Question 1: In what year was the bakery opened?

"This bakery was built in the late nineteenth century by the Jewish Community Foundation for the purpose of making matzo bread and later rented by my father."

Question 2: From whom did you learn the profession and how many years have you been working?

"I learned the profession from my father. My father opened the pastry bakery 75 years ago in 1949. After my father's death, I took over the business. I have been doing this job for as long as I can remember".

Question 3: From whom did your father learn the profession and do you plan to teach it to anyone else?

"My father Semoil learned how to make boyoz and börek from "Yako Usta". Later, Yako Usta went to Izmir from Çanakkale and opened a bakery in İkiçeşmelik. I don't plan to teach anyone else."

Question 4: How many boyuz, pastries and bagels do you make per day? Who is your customer base? What is the reason why the pastries are popular?

"I have always had a certain customer base. I sell 300-400 pastries, boyoz and bagels a day. I attribute the fact that they are so popular with the public to the quality of the ingredients used and the fact that yeast is used sparingly."

During the interview with Sabetay Usta, a guest who came to the bakery to buy bagels was asked why do you prefer this bakery: *"I come here after passing many bakeries. Because the dough is different and extremely delicious..."* His answer confirms Sabetay Usta's claim that *"I produce little, concise and high quality"*.

Question 5: Between which hours do you work?

"I open the bakery at 02:00 and 02:30 every night. The buns I prepare for the morning are finished around 12:00 and I close the oven around 14:00 after cleaning."

The summary of the information obtained from the interview with Sabetay Kohen can be summarized as follows: The bakery in the center of Çanakkale operated by Sabetay Usta was built by the Jewish Community Foundation in the late nineteenth century and rented to the operators. Yako Abrovaya, who made boyoz and pastries in this bakery in Çanakkale, transferred the bakery in Çanakkale to Izmir in 1949 and opened a bakery there (Ünal, 2016). After Master Yako's departure to Izmir, Semoil (Sabetay Koheh's father) took over the operation of the bakery. Sabetay Koheh started working for his father from the age of

two, coming to the bakery every night to prepare his buns and finishing his products at 12:00 in the morning and closing the bakery at 14:00. The bakery, which used to be run by five or six people, downsized due to economic difficulties and is now run solely by Sabetay Usta. The bakery, which was established to produce "Passover bread", which is baked every year in April, now serves the public with different types of buns.

In addition, Sabetay Usta's principle of not opening his shop on Yom Kippur (Alalu, Arditi and Asasay 2001, 46; Yılmaz 2019, 77), when Jews fast for 25 hours from the first day of Rosh Hashanah to the end of the ten-day repentance period, and during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month, is a precedent for the ethnic harmony of the past, as he respects his Muslim neighbors as he respects his own religious traditions.



Photo 1 and 2: Sabetay Kohen and pastry oven

Photo 3: Boyoz and Börek

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this study, which is based on the story of 'Sabetay Kohen', a member of the Jewish Community, who is the last representative of the pastry tradition from the Ottoman Empire in Çanakkale, the following important conclusions have been reached in the name of intercultural common heritage.

Sabetay, who traces the origins of Çanakkale Jews to the Sephardim, has a mother from Umur Bey and a father from Ezine. Baba Semoil migrated from Ezine to the center of Çanakkale in 1948 and started to make a living selling bagels. Baba Semoil later started working in Yako Usta's bakery. In later years, Master Yako migrated to the İkiçeşmelik neighborhood of Izmir. According to Sabetay Usta, it was Yako Usta,

his father's master, who took the famous boyoz of Izmir to Izmir and introduced it. However, according to researcher Nejat Yentürk: "A group of Jewish craftsmen started to produce boyoz for the first time in the 1930s in a bakery in Mezarlıkbaşı, near Agora." This statement refutes Sabetay Usta's claim. On the other hand, in another study by Yentürk and in Ahmet Uhri's article, the name "Yako Abravaya" is mentioned among the famous masters who made boyoz, which were first produced in bakeries located in İkiçeşmelik, Mezarlıkbaşı, Agora and Kemeraltı in İzmir, and Selim Varon, the President of the Çanakkale Jewish Community, and Sabetay Usta's statement that Yako Usta, who traveled from Çanakkale, was the first master to make boyoz, The fact that he stated that he was related to the Abravayas suggests that Yako Usta had a possible contribution to the shaping of the Izmir boyoz, rather than bringing and promoting it (Yentürk 2006, 116-123; Uhri 2017, 436).

As can be seen, a street flavor is not just an ordinary food and drink requirement. It is also a historical oven that blends the religious, social, financial and political past of a society and takes shape in its fire. These historical bakeries that we encounter in all cities of Anatolia are the result of a cumulative effort, labor and a common heritage created by that society. According to the findings of the research, it is understood that Sabetay Usta is not very enthusiastic about teaching this profession because he thinks that young people are not very eager to learn pastry. For this reason, Sabetay Usta states that he works alone, but that this situation makes him very tired, and that what makes this tiredness bearable is that he always has a certain customer base.

The fact that the bakery in Çanakkale, which was built in the XIXth century and continues to produce pastries

today only thanks to Sebahat Usta, will be closed in the coming years is a very sad situation as it means that a cultural heritage that belongs to a community will disappear. For this reason, it can be stated that especially Sabetay Usta teaching others how to make boyoz or pastry would be valuable for the transfer of boyoz or pastry, which is a flavor of Jewish food culture, to future generations. Similarly, Yıldız (2021) concluded in his study that Levantine food culture is an important part of Izmir cuisine, but this rich food culture is not recognised and no effort is made to protect it (Yıldız 2021, 2439).

One of the most important outcomes of this study is that food, which is a reflection of cultural richness, should not be forgotten and that necessary measures should be taken to protect it. In addition, according to the information given by Sabetay Usta and confirmed by the President of the Jewish Community, Yako, who was the master of his father, was the person who caused the spread of boyoz in Izmir.

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