CHAPTER 2

History of eating habits in the Balkans

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2.1 Historical perspectives forming the Balkan countries eating habits

The Balkans are a region of powerful diversity, a civilizations melting point, mosaic of rich history, and cultural crossroads. The Balkans eating habits and identity are often described as conflicting between East and West. These need to be viewed as a revealing expression of a regional culture conditioned by its central mediating place between the Aegean Sea on one side and Central Europe and the Eurasian steppe regions on the other side. It is a region experiencing thousands of years of migratory invasions of military, administrative, commercial, and cultural trafficking (Eminov, 1997) that has constantly been confronted with foreign knowledge, food production practices and consumption traditions exchange.

The region itself is difficult to define geographically and culturally. As stated by Tomka (2014), "From ancient civilizations to this day, the Balkans have been a region of dynamic developments, diversity of lifestyles, replete with conflicts, disputes and reconciliations." Nedelcheva (2013, p. 79) describes the Balkans as "a historical crossroads of the ancient cultures of Europe and Asia and a territory in which a multitude of ethnic and religious communities live." The map of the Balkans has always been colorful. The relatively small peninsula is a territory where many people and countries, small and large, make their history (Jelavich & Jelavich, 1963). Antiquity endows the European South East with Ancient Greece and a number of perpetual state entities. After that, the people of this region were repeatedly united within large empires—that of Alexander of Macedon, Roman, and Byzantium. The Middle Ages diversified the Balkan political map with the emergence of several Slavic countries—first Bulgaria, then Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia. Countries were constantly at war with Byzantium, Venice, Hungary, or each other for their place in the Balkans. In the 14th century from the east, a new state, the Ottoman Empire became an empire and settled permanently in the lands of the Balkan people. At the same time, another empire was growing in Central Europe, the Austrian Empire, which was blocking the Ottomans' path to the west. In the Adriatic and the Mediterranean, for several centuries, the maritime

Nutritional and Health Aspects of Food in the Balkans
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-820782-6.00012-8

colonial empire of Venice dominated. After the Turks followed Austrians, Russian, British, and in more recent times Germans, Italian, French, and finally Americans (Jelavich & Jelavich, 1963). In this meeting of the East, West, Europe, and the Orient, the Balkans have their special place until today.

"The size, shape, stages of growth, even the very existence of the different Balkan states were almost exclusively regulated by great power considerations following the rules of the balance-of-power game" (Todorova, 2009, p. 169). Territories of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Slovenia, Montenegro, Serbia, the European portion of Turkey (Thrace), and Kosovo, although not recognized by all states in the world, have been mentioned in time under the term "Balkans" (Clemens, 2010; Crampton, 2013). The Balkan region is surrounded by the Adriatic and Ionian Seas to the west, the Aegean Sea to the south, Marmara and the Black Sea to the east that project into the Mediterranean Sea, while the northern border, defined by the rivers Danube, Sava, and Kupa according to some scholars (Akova & Demirkiran, 2013), is not throughout accepted. The region's definition and borders are considered a "fastidious problem" (Vezenkov, 2017, p. 125). Its name was introduced after the Turkish occupation (Todorova, 2009, p. 162); it is the literal translation of Stara Planina (Old Mountain in Bulgarian), the mountain chain spanning across Bulgaria up to east part of Serbia, into Turkish (i.e., Koca Balkan) (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). The Balkan Mountains play a significant role in determining the region's climate. In the north and center part of the Balkans there is a temperate climate with cold winters, warm summers, and a good rainfall distribution, in the south and along the coastal areas there is a Mediterranean climate favorable for growing olive trees, characterized by hot-dry summers and mild-wet winters. The geographical position and the climate have determined the type of crops grown, animals raised and the availability of local native foods. These, together with the different cultural influences and the traditional regional cuisine that has formed based on them have defined the eating habits and lifestyles of the Balkan people maintained over time and transmitted from generation to generation, most often through oral transmission (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995).

2.1.1 Proximity to other global cuisines: Middle East, Central Europe, Africa, and Asia

The Balkan cuisine is rich in unique, tasty, and various dishes (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). Due to its close proximity to other major global cuisines, the Balkan traditional cuisine is influenced to various extend by the Middle Eastern especially Arabic, Persian cuisine, Mediterranean cuisine, Central European especially French, Italian, and German culinary traditions, North West African, and as well as Armenian. What is the percentage of influence from Turkish, Greek, Armenian, Arabic, Persian, etc. on the Balkan cuisine is still argued (Jelavich & Jelavich, 1963).

Based on archaeological historical data including prehistoric, medieval paganistic times and the Ottoman Empire ruling in the region "it is the Ottoman elements (often including Byzantine ones) or the ones perceived as such that are mostly invoked in the current stereotype of the Balkans" (Todorova, 2009, p. 162). Some influences to the Balkan traditions are related to the way alcoholic drinks are consumed, which is definitely not influenced by the Ottoman Empire. Mixing wine with water, rakia with water, ouzo with water, etc. is popular among the Balkan nations including Serbian, Croatians, Albanian, Bosnian and Herzegovinian, Greek, Turks, etc. with the exclusion of Bulgarians who, like the Thracians, prefer to drink all the alcohol undiluted (Stavrev, 2016). The custom is more likely to be part of Byzantium and Roman traditions.

The cookery of the region "is an amalgam of centuries of practice enriched by Greek, Turkish and Central European adoptions," spanning between the Middle East and Western Europe (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). The eating habits of the Balkan countries are predisposed to being some hundred years vassals of the Ottoman Empire (Bradatan, 2003). The Balkan culture is the result of "centuries of integrated life under Turkish rule" that have led to "a sameness in demeanor, outlook, eating attitudes and habits" (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). Coffee drinking is one among the many conspicuous consumption social habits that have survived the Ottoman Empire in every region of the Balkans. Coffee houses served as social centers to exchange gossips, tell stories, make intrigues and plots, and discuss the political and religious issue of the day (Jelavich & Jelavich, 1963). Traces left in the Balkan cuisine by the Ottoman period can easily be found in Oriental food preparation techniques and in the names of some dishes which, even with modified recipes, maintain the same names—*moussaka*, *turlu guvech*, *imambayaldi*, *kyopoolu*, *shish kebab*, *pilaf*, *baklava*, *kadaif*, *guvetch*, and others. Balkan cuisine is also characterized by very diverse, strong, and spicy food, which could be roughly said to be a combination of Oriental, Byzantine-Greek-Mediterranean cuisine. Most of Balkan populations have been shaped by the food and diet habits of the Ottoman Turks. It is not known how much of the Balkan dishes are of Turkish origin, with different countries claiming dishes as their own (Diker, Deniz, & Çetinkaya, 2016), but it is generally recognized that the Turks had a major role in introducing or popularizing them to the region (Jelavich & Jelavich, 1963). Dishes like "ćevapčići, moussaka, köfte, baklava, sour soup are part of an older shared heritage, despite variations of climate, belief, nationality and economic circumstances" (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). As stated by Bradatan (2003), "the persistence of similar cooking tastes all over Balkan Peninsula, despite the existence of very different political regimes and levels of development, (. . .) could be a result of the particular conservative characteristics of eating habits and of a low pressure toward change" (Bradatan, 2003).

2.1.2 Attitudes, values, and customs: the cuisine outlived the Ottoman political power

The inhabitants of the Balkans "are the descendants of an extraordinary rich mixture" of Thracians, Illyrians, Mycenaeans (the earliest known Greeks), and Macedonians. It was after the Romans invasion of Illyria in 168−167 BCE that the region became politically and culturally united. However, the years that followed have shaken the area's unity and deepened the gap between people; later, in 375 the Roman Empire was split into West and East and, after its fall in 476, a series of invasions and incursions from Ostrogoths, Huns, Alans, Avars, Slavs, Slovenes, Serbo-Croat group of tribes, and Bulgarian South-Slavonic groups have followed (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). Further instability in the region was caused in 1054 when the Christian Church was separated between the West and East into what are nowadays the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Catholic Church. Later, under the Ottoman Empire occupation, the Balkans were strongly shaped by the Ottoman Turks feudal system and civilization leaving marks seen up to these days (Balkan Countries, 2020). In 1354 the Ottoman Empire sovereignty started in the Balkans (Diker et al., 2016). The Ottoman Turks, who captured the Byzantine fortress of Gallipoli expanding into the Balkans from the south, have dominated the region until end of the 19th century (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). The rule of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans is seen as an agent of backwardness that left the region "untouched by the great ideas and transformations of the Renaissance and the Reformation" and "further brought a deep cultural regression and even barbarization and social levelling out" (Todorova, 2009, p. 182).

While the Ottoman invasion might have delayed cultural and economic development by five centuries according to some historians, for the cook this was a time of prosperity when new foods, plants, and aromatics have been introduced from South West and South East Asia and Africa; among these were crops like okra, filberts, durum wheat, spearmint, flat-leaved parsley, eggplant, improved chickpeas, and grape varieties that were used for the table, as well as for producing currants and sultanas (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). During the 14th century, the Ottoman palace kitchen was using fruits from the Thrace (Diker et al., 2016). Between the 15th and 16th century the common bean, first mentioned in a Turkish document from 1498 to 1513, entered the Balkan region across the Atlantic and soon became an important supplementary staple. Pumpkin varieties such as the common pumpkin and vegetable marrow (*Cucurbita pepo*), the sweet cushaw pumpkin (*Cucurbita moschata*) and the winter pumpkin (*Cucurbita maxima*) were other early arrivals dated from 1542. The small hot pepper (*Capsicum annuum* ssp. *microcarpum*), initially domesticated in Mexico and Guatemala, was brought into Spain by Columbus and from here introduced to the Balkans by the Ottoman Turks in the 16th century, possibly via Egypt. This was soon to be dried and produced into a hot culinary powder (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). As the empire expansion in the Balkans continued, most of the

food was obtained from the conquered territories. During the 16th century, regions in the Balkans such as Moldavia, Walachia, and Macedonia constituted the primary sources of meat, wheat, barley, and grapes for the Ottomans (Diker et al., 2016). In the 17th century, Turks have introduced the Damask rose (*Rosa damascena*) whose flagrant, sweet tasting reddish-pink flowers became an important agricultural crop and a cottage industry. This oil-bearing rose is much appreciated to these days; nearly 100 km south of the Balkan Mountains it is found one of the major producers of rose oil—the Rose Valley in Bulgaria, near the town of Kazanlak (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). In the 17th century, important food products were also brought from the Balkans to Anatolia, like Tulum cheese (from Walachia and Macedonia), round cheese (from Euboea, a Greek island), *kaşkaval*—a round yellow cheese made from sheep's milk (from Tekirdağ, in Eastern Thrace, and Limni, in North Western Euboea)—and salt (from Walachia) (Diker et al., 2016). Maize, an American staple, was introduced via Egypt in the 17th century and moved north reaching Romania and Hungary. Many of the Turkish imports were spread in the Balkans and later to other parts of Europe, like Austria, Germany, and Hungary by the Bulgarian market-gardeners, known as the "Gardeners of Europe." By the end of the 17th century, these Bulgarian professional gardeners were hiring or buying land in large towns in Europe to cultivate their own improved vegetable varieties such as chili peppers, onion, cucumbers, cabbage, green beans using own methods and terms, and so, the concept of cooperatives was developed. Their influence can be best seen in the Hungarian's most characteristic seasoning, the paprika, originated from the Bulgarian *piperka* (meaning pepper). Two centuries later, the potato made its way from the Americas into Romania via Germany, Albania, and Czechoslovakia, as well as from Italy into Dalmatia and Albania (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). In the 19th century meatball, known today as the İnegöl meatball because its association to İnegöl—a city in the Bursa Province of Turkey, was brought from Bulgaria to Anatolia by migrating Turks. When the Ottoman sovereignty ended in 1913, the large Muslim population who migrated from the Balkans to Anatolia and to other regions brought with them the Balkan cuisine that was characterized by: (1) using meat without nerve tissues when preparing main meals; (2) using primarily milk and dairy products; (3) using frequently leek, potato, spinach, zucchini, and cabbage; (4) using tail fat, butter, and sesame oil; (5) using frequently offal; and (6) using milk, farina, and dough when preparing desserts (Diker et al., 2016).

2.2 A history of cooking and preservation methods in the Balkans

2.2.1 Balkans—the gateway to Europe

The Balkans are considered the birthplace of all European cookery that is believed to have commenced some 8000 years ago (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995), and the gateway of domesticated animals and plants to Europe; these have been first introduced by

8500 cal. BP in Greece and have rapidly spread to varying degrees along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and into Central Europe within three millennia (McClure, 2013). Early farming in Balkans arrived through various mechanisms, "including combinations of migration of farming populations from Anatolia and acculturation of indigenous hunter-gatherers, via land and sea" (McClure, 2013). Remains of domesticated plants, such as barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), einkorn wheat (*Triticum monococcum*), legumes like lentils (*Lens culinaris*), Haba beans (*Vicia faba*), peas (*Pisum sativum*), and domesticated animals like goat (*Capra hircus*), sheep (*Ovis aries*), cattle (*Bos taurus*), pig (*Sus domesticus*), and dog (*Canis familiaris*) have been documented for the Balkan area (McClure, 2013). Early farming, with its origins in South West Asia, was a culturally transformative process that spread across Europe over millennia at different pace, probably depending on climate, environment, as well as the type of interactions that existed between the hunter-gatherers and farmers of the regions. It was in the interior of the Balkans where farming was established and where the first livestock movement beyond their natural South West Asian climate took place. Widespread evidence of early pottery, especially for dairying, has been found here. Although farming dominated the area, evidence of pottery used for processing aquatic resources has been found in the north region of the Balkans (i.e., sites from the Iron Gates of the Danube River), highlighting a diversity in practices mirrored by the environmental and cultural setting (Cramp et al., 2019). Often, polished stone axes and pottery were found next to remains of domesticates (McClure, 2013), suggesting that cooking was already in place. It appears that nomadic hunters used pots for cooking even before settled farming appeared (Crofton & Black, 2016, p. 79).

Modern humans have continuously lived in the Balkans since the Upper Paleolithic era (beginning approximately 40,000 years ago) (Kovacevic et al., 2014). With the arrival of domesticated plants and animals, people begun to transition from hunter-gatherers to farmers (Kovacevic et al., 2014) and to live in permanent shelters, to build houses and adapt their environment to their needs (Crofton & Black, 2016, p. 77). As the communities' size and population density rose following decreased residential mobility, there was a shift from the small transient sites typical for Early Neolithic to larger, longer-lived settlements "that can reasonably be labeled villages; clusters of pits and 'pit-dwellings' give way to rows of substantial rectilinear houses; and portable material culture becomes increasingly elaborate and abundant" (Orton, 2012). It is believed that around 100,000 people were living in the Balkans in small settlements like villages of up to 30 houses. The houses were simple constructions with one to two rooms made of chaff and clay that would keep warm at winter times and cool in the summer (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995).

The early farmers living in villages had a more-or-less sedentary life, relying for subsistence on the domesticated plants and animals. During these times "clear shifts in land use are visible with the appearance of the new subsistence strategy"

(McClure, 2013). By the early sixth millennium BCE, pioneer farmers who have settled inland Balkans have introduced the South West Asian style of cultivation and herding and had to face the challenges of new environment (i.e., unfamiliar ecological conditions) (Ivanova, De Cupere, Ethier, & Marinova, 2018). Unlike to the climatic conditions in the north of the Balkans, the similar environmental conditions (Mediterranean and sub-Mediterranean) characterizing the Aegean littoral and the river valleys that traverse the interior of the Balkans meant no requirements for major adaptations in crop cultivation (Ivanova, 2018). According to Orton (2012), domesticates have been introduced to the Central Balkan region c. 6100–6000 cal. BCE and the next 1500 years that preceded this period have brought remarkable changes. In the Early Neolithic (end of seventh millennium BCE–6000 cal. BCE), cattle dominated over caprines along the hills and river valleys from the center region of the Balkans, while in the plains of the north, the high-altitude plateaux of Macedonia to the south sheep and especially goats dominated; overall, domesticated pigs had a negligible role. In the later Neolithic (from around 5500 cal. BCE), the importance of cattle over caprines has increased markedly. In time hunting, which was still an important activity, had rapidly declined at sites with long-term occupations (Orton, 2012).

2.2.2 The crops of the Balkan people

The inhabitants of the Balkans were mostly agrarian, feeding on cereals (e.g., improved barley, millet, three types of wheat including wheat bread) and vegetables (e.g., onion, garlic, black winter radish, lentils, white cabbage) they grew, as well on fruits from fruit trees they cultivated (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). Archaeobotanical research conducted over the last 20 years has evidenced that cereals, pulses, and fruit constituted the staples of the prehistoric Balkan communities between the Early Neolithic and the Iron Age (seventh millennium BCE–first millennium BCE) (Valamoti et al., 2019). During the Christian era, primitive einkorn and emmer were replaced by bread wheat, rye cultivation began, and sourdough bread became more common. Then came the Romans who did not introduce any new crops. During their conquests many of the Balkan plants such as the cultivated grape vine, the bread wheat, and the walnut have been dispersed to other regions in Europe, along with the craft of producing leavened bread (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995).

Up to present days, the Balkan people could be defined as grain-eaters, like most East Europeans, unlike the meat-eaters West Europeans. The bedrock of the Balkan diet is heavily consisting of wheat flour and bread, supplemented with fruit and vegetables, milk, yogurt, and cheese, and plenty of grilled meat in later times adopted as great part of the daily staple food consumed throughout the region (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). Since the arrival of the first farming communities, cereals have constituted their main source of food. The environment and culture of the region are believed to have

played an important role in the way people prepared their food. Cereals could be consumed whole, ground finely or coarsely, roasted, boiled, smoked, and further be processed with the help of fire and liquids (e.g., water and milk) into bread/porridge like foods and for preparation of beer that would have served various requirements—nutritional, seasonal, and social (Valamoti et al., 2019). The selection of the species and their preparation into meals are seen as a result of the natural vegetation-human culture interplay that would have formed regional culinary identities. According to Valamoti et al. (2019), culture is "shaped, named and incorporated in each society's belief systems, transliterated into daily and life experiences, collective memory and identity. Food preparation and consumption form arenas where social roles are learnt, power relations forged, negotiated and renewed" (Valamoti et al., 2019).

2.2.3 Pottery and methods of cooking in the Balkans

The cooking method (e.g., heating, frying, baking, roasting), as well as the utensils used (e.g., pots and pans) provide particular taste and texture to a dish and oftentimes it will give the name of that dish. Examples are the Balkan dishes *lonac, güveç, tava, tavche* that have acquired their name from the backing crock or copper pan these are cooked in and served (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). Evidence of the variety of ancient food preparation methods used by inhabitants of the Balkans as early as the seventh millennium BCE through the first millennium BCE have been discovered after 20 years of archaeobotanical studies conducted by Valamoti et al. (2019). The researchers found at 20 sites located in Greece and Bulgaria cereal fragments that resulted from methods like boiling, sprouting, malting, grinding, mixing porridge, or bread-like foodstuff "suggestive of the interplay between available ingredients, cultural traditions and the complex interaction between society and environment" (Valamoti et al., 2019). Cereals like the cultivated einkorn wheat, the common millet (*Panicum miliaceum*), the larger-grained emmer wheat, the hexaploid bread wheat, the wild indigenous one-seeded einkorn wheat, and a six-row naked barley were grown by self-sufficient farming families (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995; Valamoti et al., 2019). The grains were then ground into flour "using long, open-ended saddle querns" and the flour was used to make bread by baking the dough in igloo-shaped ovens "conserving heat better than some advanced sophisticated ovens" (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). Fire, out or indoors, has been essential from the dawn of time. Even today, primitive outdoor hearths are made by shepherds, woodcutters, and herdsmen, and more elaborate ones, "with slabs on the three sides for shelter from winds," are made by Hungarian shepherds in Transylvania, Romania. Roasting meat over a wood fire is still popular to these days. For Easter whole lambs are spit-roasted "over a long pit lined with olive-wood embers" by many Greeks. In highland Macedonia and Serbia, lamb and pig are cooked "speared on an iron rod" and in Bosnia-Herzegovina two fires about two meters apart are set to roast lamb and the "embers gradually drawn nearer the meat" as cooking progresses. Fireplace

cooking was done during the dry hot summer days at night. In Greece and Crete small charcoal stoves have been used for approximately 5000 years. "Foufoú (the modern-day Greek earthenware) and magkáli (the tin rectangular, from the Turkish 'mangal') are reminiscent of the braziers used in ancient Minoan palaces. Indoor fireplaces trace their history to the Stone Age when man kept a fire for warming his cave and probably for some simple cooking, too" (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). In the Neolithic, the Balkans settlements were single-room gabled cottages built of clay, stone, and wattle that had in the center, directly on earthen floor, a fire for heating, cooking, and for making parched grain. Hearth cookery was still used for home cookery even after the advent of electricity, since wood was abundant in most regions. A portable convex lid-oven was used for baking only one dish or loaf and was later borrowed by Romans who have improved it and spread it as far as lowland Britain, where was known under the name of *clibanus* and was popular for baking bread and meat. In various sites in the Balkans, such as Serbia, Kosovo, and Bulgaria, archaeologists have uncovered remains of clay ovens that have been radiocarbon dated to 4500–4250 BCE. Bread ovens closely resembling those from ancient times are still used nowadays across Balkan villages (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). The earliest evidence of clay hearths was discovered in a Greek cave dating from c. 34,000 to 23,000 years ago; the hearths were most probably used for cooking purposes (Karkanas et al., 2004). In Bulgaria, at a site near Stara Zagora, archaeologists unearthed a clay model of a plump loaf with holes in its top surface, resembling the porous structure of a naturally-fermented sourdough, which was dated to approximately 5100 BCE. Besides growing cereals, communities pursued hunting, reared stock, and gathered supplementary foods: "Meat was roasted over a fire or boiled into kinds of soups or pottages in clay pots, perhaps with herbs, seeds and grains" (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). Milking of domesticated animals and use of milk appear to have taken place in the Balkans in the early sixth millennium BCE. Then cheese making soon followed; fragments of perforated conical clay pots used for cheese draining have been discovered in Bulgaria (Ethier et al., 2017; Evershed et al., 2008; Ivanova et al., 2018; Kaneva-Johnson, 1995; Orton, 2012). Wild fruits, vegetables, and herbs were dried in the summer for use in the lean seasons. The Thracian tribes were "pickling vine shoots in brine, as well as salting and smoking beef and mutton" around the 4th century BCE, for own consumption and export (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995). Young vine shoots were gathered by the Thracians from their extensive vineyards; these were kept over a barley layer in jars filled with brine, covered with a cloth bag and left to ferment spontaneously. The Balkans have also a long history in producing one of the region's food staple—the soured cabbage, also known as sauerkraut that is a chief source of vitamin C during winter times. Sauerkraut is the result of the spontaneous fermentation of lactose found in the juice of white cabbage by the enzymes in the bacteria present on most vegetables, to lactic acid that acts then as a natural preservative. Nowadays, pickled whole head cabbage can also be found to buy in local supermarkets in the Balkans (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995), as well as other parts of the globe. Fermentation of grains, vegetables, meat, and fish is believed to

have its origins in the Stone Age, but written references come much later from the Roman author Pliny the Elder on sauerkraut (Tannahill, 2002). In the Balkans, preserving fruits and vegetables, as well as meat and fish in jars and tins is an important industry. In many Balkan households the food is prepared and stored for winter months using this long-established traditional method, which is considered by some as a better alternative to the manufactured one (Kaneva-Johnson, 1995).

2.3 Food as a social marker in the Balkans

A cuisine is a social institution that does not easily change. This is determined not only by the type of ingredients used, but by the etiquette of eating and order of the meals that are learnt early in life through direct experience, too. Although some things might be added or changed as a result of interacting with people having different habits (e.g., etiquette of eating), the early experiences in life will always define what we perceive as being a "good" or "bad" meal. For this reason, eating habits are regarded as conservative parts of one's personality (Bradatan, 2003).

Direct or indirect social factors, including culinary traditions and beliefs, play an important role in shaping eating behaviors that are established at younger age through family rules and various learning mechanisms (Eertmans, Baeyens, & Van den Bergh, 2001). In the Balkans it is usual to eat three times a day (i.e., breakfast, lunch, and dinner), with the remark that the most important and usually the most common meal is lunch. According to the shared eating behaviors among the Balkan countries, table etiquette requires consumption of all the food served and not taking more than someone is able to eat (Taylor & Williams, 2017). It is considered rude for uneaten food to be left on a plate. The same applies to drinking alcohol (Taylor & Williams, 2017). Another special eating tradition is related to the specific attitude toward bread. In Bulgaria and Serbia is considered inappropriate to cut bread with a knife or stab it with a fork. Part of the table etiquette among the Muslim is related to some religious bans including eating with the left hand in Islamic society around the world (Taylor & Williams, 2017) and in the Balkans. Balkan eating habits include several components such as the type of food used, how it is prepared, how it is served, and how it is eaten. The Western man can be noticed immediately because of his mastery of the details of the table manners, because for his world the use of the wrong fork is considered a crime as serious as spitting in public. For the people of the Balkans, table manners are not so important. Foreign food tends to be shunned by the working classes, but in the upper middle and upper class it becomes a prestigious object. Knowledge of foreign food shows the city and the cosmopolitanism of the eater. The consumption of food has always been important as an indicator of status. Lavish food is part of the ancient tradition of food hospitality used mainly to impress strangers during the grandest occasions when an ordinary daily menu is not to be served (Fox, 2014).

Foods and eating habits that are typical for a region may be relevant only to those living in that geographical area, but not to the inhabitants of a geographical area with different characteristics (Diker et al., 2016). For example, pork meat is popular especially during holidays like Christmas and New Year, however this is consumed in different quantities in different areas of the Balkans (Bradatan, 2003). Studies of Bradatan (2003) found that although the geographical proximity is an important marker in shaping dietary preferences, as seen in the similar pattern of using ingredients by the people in the Balkans, it is not the only one. Other factors that shape the food habits of people are their beliefs and the dominant religion in the region, the personal traits of the individuals, as well as the psychological, sociological, and economic characteristics of the society they are living in (Diker et al., 2016). As such, countries with large religious population are expected to consume less meat because of long fasting periods (Bradatan, 2003). The beliefs, lifestyle, and traditions of societies are reflected in various food cultures. Traditions have shaped the way a food is selected, prepared, as well as the method of eating (e.g., fingers, spoon), when and how often we eat, and the size of portions (Diker et al., 2016). Dishes like *sarmale*, *baklava*, *musaka*, white cheese (Feta), *halva* are part of the traditional cuisine of many Balkan communities and, although these might be found under different names served in restaurants across the world with Balkan-specific menus, they will have similar taste (Bradatan, 2003).

Finally, it may be concluded that the food and eating habits in the Balkans not only have shaped the culture of the region, but have also formed the basis of the complex social connections and relationships between people that remain to these days. They are an integral part of the people's lives, of the Balkans past and present, and will be for the Balkans' future generations.

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