

## Oven Kebab in Turkish Culinary Culture and the Determination of Kebab's General Characteristics

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### Abstract

People started to include meat in their menus with the discovery of fire. Several cooking techniques were developed related to meat. One of the most proper methods of cooking meat is cooking it as kebab. Different kebab types have been made all over the world. In Turkish Cuisine, oven kebab can be shown among the most important kebab types. This kind of kebab, which takes its name from the place in which it is cooked, is called “fürun” kebab in the local language. The main objective of the research is to determine changes concerning the kebab production and consumption from the past to the present. In the study, interview technique, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was preferred. It's been observed that the quality of the kebab has remained almost the same throughout the years. The research is considered to be important in the field of gastronomy as it is one of the few studies on oven kebab.

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## INTRODUCTION

Today, as a result of changing consumption habits, it has been observed that cultural and traditional values constitute a field of activity in tourism sector. The promotion of local products and giving them prominence make an important contribution to the tourism sector (Yenipinar et al., 2014). Highlighting the local products ensures the recognition and usage of the local cuisine. What's more, the local products are considered to be the elements of attraction for local and foreign tourists visiting the region (Kızılırmak et al., 2014). Regional dishes are of great importance in terms of representing a region. The local dishes are defined as the dishes that are held superior to other dishes and that have become a tradition and are mostly prepared by the public on special occasions. As a result of a study that was carried out by Ankara Patent Office and ATO (Ankara Chamber of Commerce) it has been stated that there are 2205 kinds of products that can be classified as regional. In regional diversity there are various factors such as geographical location, historical phases, ethnic structures, beliefs, economic and cultural relations of the region (Atonet, 2018; Hatipoğlu et al., 2013).

Many products with local characteristics have taken their place in Turkish cuisine. Besides local products, meat products are important for Turkish cuisine, as well. Throughout history, Turkish people have gladly consumed the meals that are made with meat and meat products. Doner kebab and some other different kinds of kebabs that come out as a result of this consumption habit have been consumed with Turkish names in many parts of the world. As for the word kebab, it is a Persian word. In some of the sources it's thought to have come from Arabic word "kebbeb". Its meaning is reported as meat cooked by fire or over fire (Erbay, 2006, p. 91; Erdem, 2008, p. 116). There is no specific information about where the kebab first came from. However, in some sources, it is reported that the traces of kebab were found in Anatolia for the first time. Anatolia's being home to many civilizations reinforces this view. around 180 bread and pastry names as well as kebab names and recipes can be seen in the inscriptions from the Hittites, who lived in Anatolia. When we go further, it can be said that kebab has been made since the discovery of fire as it is a product cooked on fire (Erbay, 2006, p. 91). Especially in the cookbooks written in the 1900s, it is mentioned that the oven kebabs made from duck and goose meat were loved and gladly consumed (Işın, 2009). In the Divan-ı Kebir, the kebab is defined through the couplet which says kebab gives strength to the heart.

Konya, one of the most important cities of Turkey, is famous for its kebab recipes. The lamb cooked in the oven is called "oven kebab", and as the saying goes, "Fürun kebab". The one cooked in tandoor is called either "buck or "tandoor lamb". The habit of gathering the same occupational groups in the same regions is quite common in Konya. Another occupational group gathered in a single area is the place where there are a lot of kebab shops and known as "the center of kebab masters". In general, "The center of kebab masters" is the street and its surroundings right next to Garanti Bank, which is opposite the palace bazaar. It is a region that was home to a number of different restaurants that cooked various meals which were presented to the taste of the citizens of Konya in the past (Bülbül, 2007).

## Research Method

In this study, face to face interview technique, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. The examination's being flexible with the qualitative research method and the subject's being able to be examined around the participant has an edge on (Aslan et al., 2014, p. 6). The sample of the study consists of chefs and business operators working in oven kebab enterprises in Konya since pre-Republic period (before 1923). Because, the richness of Konya's culinary culture has always attracted the attention of gastronomy tourists and Konya is gradually

becoming one of the most important destinations in terms of gastronomic properties (Yetiş, 2015, p. 14; Büyüksalvarcı, Şapıcılar & Yılmaz, 2016). The limitation of this study is that the number of enterprises concerning the pre-Republican period is low. It was found that there were 4 enterprises with these characteristics. Interviews were held with the working chefs and enterprises owners who volunteered to participate. The study was carried out in November and December 2018, with a total of 12 participants. The questions asked within the scope of the study were prepared in accordance with the literature review and opinions of experts in their fields. In cases where there were not enough answers to the questions asked to the participants, new answers were received by directing new questions in a way that the participants could understand more clearly. The interviews were recorded in writing in accordance with the requests of the participants. The interviews were held in an appropriate environment and lasted for approximately 60-90 minutes. For the interviewed participants, the expression sp (source person) was used. In Table 1 demographic information of the participants can be observed.

**Table 1.** Demographic Information about Participants

No	Name-Surname	Hometown	Year of Birth	Occupation
1	Ali ŞENGÖNÜL	Konya	1977	Business administrator-Master
2	Ayhan ŞENGÖNÜL	Konya	1979	Business administrator- Master
3	Ali ONUR	Konya	1992	Master
4	Adem KURT	Konya	1988	Master
5	Numan ÖZARPA	Konya	1993	Business administrator- Master
6	Şener POLAT	Konya	1975	Master
7	Adem YAŞAR	Konya	1947	Master
8	Ömer AYDOĞAN	Erzurum	1982	Master
9	Hüseyin ÇINALI	Konya	1989	Business administrator- Master
10	Ali ATUN	Konya	1960	Business administrator- Master
11	Hüseyin Alper ATUN	Konya	1990	Business administrator- Master
12	Süleyman ÇITAK	Konya	1976	Business administrator- Master

## Theoretical Framework

### The History of Oven Kebab

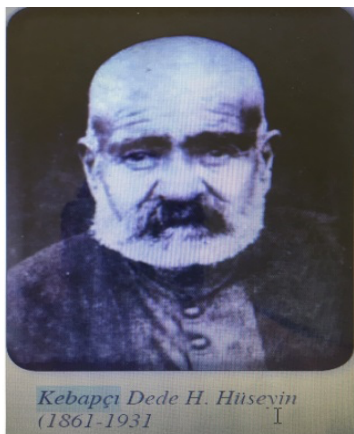
The origin of the oven kebab dish dates back to the Seljuks (sp 1,2). In Mevlana's Mesnevi this product is referred as sheep head kebab and oven kebab. From this perspective, it is understood that it has a history of approximately 800 years (sp 5,6,10,11,12). In 1907, Şükrü ÇEŞMECİ and Master Arif opened the first oven kebab hall in Konya Covered Bazaar. In this enterprise, palm size bun (a different from today's palm size buns more like a loaf bread) was first made and sold, and later the enterprise was turned into a kebab hall. During the conversion to the kebab hall, the palm size buns were sold in the mornings and oven kebabs were sold in the afternoons. With the name of Hacı Şükrü, this enterprise is still running (sp 1,2). In 1934, the owner of the Ehil kebab enterprise, Hasan Hüseyin ÖZARPA, grew up in the “Gas Oil” enterprise, which was located among the old stove selling shops opposite the Covered Bazaar. Subsequently, Mehmet ÖZARPA sustained this profession (sp 5). In the past, kebabs were found in different places; the Covered Bazaar and Wheat market were the most common places. Master Arif is the oldest known master. He is the master of Hacı Şükrü and Gazyağcı Şükrü. Apart from these masters, kebab makers Ahmet YARASA, Mehmet Çelik GÖK, Hacı Ali ŞENGÖNÜL and Mustafa YILMAZ are the known masters of the 1925s. The name of Hacı Şükrü's assistant is kebab master Osman MAT (sp 7). “Gazyağcı” business owner and master (sp 9) reported that Ali GAZYAĞCI, who first started kebab business, took the name “Gazyağcı because of buying and selling gas

oil. Following Ali GAZYAĞCI, Mehmet GAZYAĞCI continued his profession. It is known that for the first time in the years of 1889-1892, an enterprise was opened on oven kebab (sp 9).

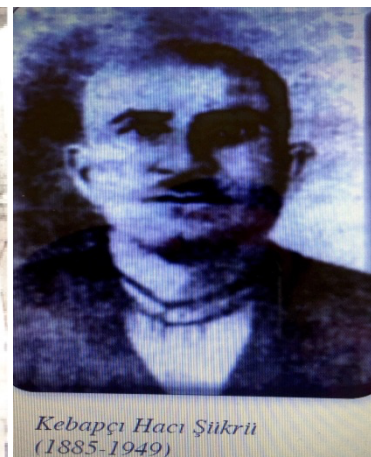
As a result of the question we asked, it was understood that all of the source persons definitely remember Master Arif among the first master names. It is known that Master Arif took the surname “Kebab along with the surname law. Odabaşı (2001) reported that the oldest oven kebab maker in relation to the oven kebab was Master Arif and Hacı Şükrü, who grew up next to him and maintained the profession. According to the information provided by the source persons, it is seen that Konya oven kebab has been officially made in enterprises for more than a hundred years. Çuhadar, Küçükyaman and Şaşmaz (2018) reported in their study in the Isparta region that an enterprise claiming to be the oldest on kebab has been in service for more than a century. However, it was reported that, it produced not only kebab but also different regional dishes. Table 1 shows the enterprises and their representatives from the first representatives to the present day in line with the information provided by the source persons.

**Table 2.** First Known Oven Kebab Masters in Konya (sp 1,2,5,9,10)

1st Generation	2nd Generation	3rd Generation	4th Generation	5th Generation
Şükrü ÇEŞMECİ (1885-1949)	Hacı Ali ŞENGÖNÜL (1926-2001)	Şükrü ŞENGÖNÜL (1951-2018)	Ayhan ŞENGÖNÜL (1979- Alive) Ali ŞENGÖNÜL (1977-Alive)	
Hasan Hüseyin ÖZARPA (1926-1998)	Mehmet ÖZARPA 1957-alive)	Musa Numan ÖZARPA (1993- alive)		
Ali ATUN (?-1969)	Mevlüt ATUN (1929-2003) Hüseyin ATUN (1933-2003)	Ali ATUN (1960-Alive)	Hüseyin Alper ATUN (1990-Alive)	
Ali GAZYAĞCI (1816-1900)	Mehmet GAZYAĞCI (1883-1973)	Hasan Hüseyin ÇİNALI (1929-1998)	Ali ÇİNALI (1956-Alive)	Hüseyin ÇİNALI (1989-alive)



Scanned with CamScanner



Picture 1. H. Hüseyin, one of the first representatives of oven kebab known as the grandfather of kebab

Picture 2. Hacı Şükrü's shop in 1926, inside covered bazaar, Ahibaba Street

Picture 3. Kebab maker Hacı Şükrü (Kebab master)

Today, apart from Konya oven kebab is made extensively in cities such as Izmir, Ankara, Karaman, Istanbul and Antalya (sp 1,2,5,6,9). Oven kebab is an important type of dish that has gained value on a national scale. Although it

continues to be cooked in its original form in regions other than Konya, there have been some changes depending on the structure of the region and people of that region and these changes brought about changes in taste and name.

### **The Features of the Oven**

In the construction of the oven, sille stone from the sille neighborhood of Konya is used. Oven dimensions are generally calculated as 2.5x2.5 m. However, the dimensions may vary depending on the intensity of the work. It has the same characteristics and is made in the same way as the traditional flat bread oven, but the kebab oven has a lower dome. The reason for the lowness of its cupola is to heat up the inside more quickly and to fry the meat fast (sp 1,2,3,4,10,11,12). As a result of the interviews with the source persons, almost all of them reported that the same construction technique of the oven was applied. However, source person number 7 stated that oven kilns should be low. This showed that the oven characteristics reported by Seçim (2018) and the kebab oven characteristics were the same. Stone-based ovens have always made Turkish cuisine more delicious throughout history. Baking kebabs in a stone-based oven is an important issue.

### **Oven Kebab Cooking**

The meat to be made kebab is removed from bones a day before and left to age. After the meat has aged the preparations start with the morning call to pray. Oak wood is placed into the stone oven and burned for about half an hour in order to be free of sooting. Oak wood produces less soot compared to other wood. The meat placed into the copper basin is put into the oven (sp 5,9). While the meat is cooking, it should be turned upside down 200-300 times or perhaps more. Upside down turning should be done with wooden sticks. If metal sticks are used, they stick into the meat, the meat gives out the broth and loses its flavor. After the kebab is cooked, the remaining oil from another kebab which has been made earlier should be added to the kebab right before taking it out of the oven (sp 5,6). If the meat is fatty, enough this process is not necessary (sp 1,2,3). With low quality meats, some water may be added during the cooking process. Out of the source people 5 and 6 reported that if the meat is from a yearling lamb a mug of water, about 2 litres, is added when it is still raw, but if the meat is from a suckling lamb there is no need to add water. The meat comes as a carcass. The parts such as foreshank, ribs and breast are cut and prepared for the kebab by removing the bones. The remaining rear leg is taken to another section with the purpose of grilling. After the meats are placed in the copper basin, a blazing fire is set first. Then it is cooked by closing the lid when the wood has turned into ember. The meat is turned upside down from time to time and the cooking process continues (sp 3, 4). Approximately 1 kg of boneless oven kebab is obtained from 3 kg of bony meat (sp 5, 6).

### **Important Points in Cooking Oven Kebab**

In kebab cooking using copper pots made of cooper is important. The copper used should be neither too thin nor thick. In addition, it should be tinned every 2 months (sp 1,2,9,10,11). The wood used to cook oven kebab is burned on the left side of the oven (sp 3,4). Like many other mines copper has been used since the early periods of BC. After Islam came to the region, during the Great Seljuk period copper culture was combined with Anatolian culture and became pots and pans used in almost every house (Kerametli, 1974: Aslanapa, 1989). Copper was widely used in the Ottoman period. The pots made of copper were highly developed in the Ottoman period in terms of richness of form, variety of pots, richness of material - making techniques and mastery of decoration. During this period, copper processing was developed especially in provinces such as Afyon, Çanakkale, İstanbul, Muğla, Sivas and Kayseri, as

well as art workshops in Konya (Belli and Kayaoğlu, 1993). The use of copper vessels is very common in Konya cuisine. Trays, ewers, bowls, large deep copper dishes, cauldrons and basins are the leading vessels made of copper in Konya. Today, production still continues even though it has decreased.



**Picture 4.** Oven Kebab Cooking

#### **The Meat Used for Oven Kebab**

The meat used in kebab should be from 18-22 months old lamb. Lamb's foreshank, brisket and shoulder are ideal areas for oven kebab. If the lamb used is a grazing animal the quality will be high. Lambs should be aged for at least one day after being slaughtered (sp 1,2,9). The weight of the lamb is an important criterion rather than the number of months. The lamb should weigh approximately 15-18 kg. If the animal is big, it is fatty and if it is small it is lean and unsavory. In the past, old kebab masters used to make kebabs with mutton and the demand was high (sp 9,10,11). In summer, more yearling lambs are used for oven kebab whereas in winter suckling lambs are used. In fact, it is known that in the past, oven kebab shops were closed during the lambing season of sheep (sp 3). Dağdeviren (2005) reported that the most ideal meat to prepare kebab dishes is from 12-18 months of unmated male or female lamb. He explained this quality criterion by the fact that the meat of young animals not being fatigued and being tasty and the kebabs with the best taste are the ones consumed on the day they are made (Dağdeviren, 2005). Meat quality is especially of great importance in the production of kebab varieties. Corporate businesses usually buy meat from the butcher, but chain businesses have now established their own butcheries by raising their own animals.

#### **The Characteristics of Wood Used in Oven Kebab Cooking**

Oak wood should be used as logs. The desired performance from fire cannot be achieved with wood chopped in small pieces. Oak wood is preferred by bakers since it continues to burn for longer periods and does not soot (source people 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,9). Previously, juniper wood was also used but it is not preferred because of bursting as it burns (source people 5,6). In a study conducted by Çuhadar, Küçükyaman and Şaşmaz (2018) in Isparta province, they reported that an enterprise working on oven kebab and different oven dishes also used oak wood. However, any



information wasn't given about why oak wood was used. In this study, it has been determined that its burning for longer periods and not sooting is effective in the preference of oak wood.

### **The Presentation of Oven Kebab**

The presentation of classic oven kebab is made with meat on round flatbread and onion along with it. In some periods, scallion was offered rather than onions. Nowadays, more appetizer varieties have been used because of the rich table expectation. Since changing the presentation will change the taste of the kebab, it is not appropriate to put appetizers next to it (sp 1,2,3,5,9,10,12). Although it was not preferred to use cutlery in kebab service in the past, today it is known that cutlery is given to customers (sp 3,4,5,6). In kebab service and consumption mainly loaves are preferred. Some consumers even used to bring their bread with them. The reason for this preference was that the loaf bread absorbed more fat and the people liked fat (sp 5,6). In the past, besides kebab, other than onion palm size buns with or without filling (Loaf-like bread) used to be given. Bread / pita varieties were not given as applied now. This view confirms the information given by sp 5 and 6. Dorsay (1982) stated in his column in the newspaper he wrote oven kebab as being lamb tandoor piece on a large portion of round and flat bread. This portion comes to you with plenty of pepper and parsley. It is a delicious dish prepared in the restaurant's own oven. He also explained that if you do not eat much bread, it is more appropriate to ask for rice with this dish.

### **The Demand and Promotion of Oven Kebab**

Those who have not tasted the oven kebab before are more demanding than the others. Especially, the guests coming from the provinces where oven kebab is not made show more demand (sp 1,2,3). Sp 5 and 6 declared that the people coming to their enterprises are mostly from villages and small towns. They reported that this was due to the location of the establishment (Old garage area) (sp 5,6). After the interviews done with the source persons, it was seen that the enterprises in the old settlements were more traditional. What's more, the demand in these regions generally comes from the local people. Mostly middle aged (30-50) and older (50 and more) people come to oven kebab shops. As for the young people (18-30), they prefer fast-food-style enterprises (sp 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9).

The number of ads prepared about kebab should be increased and festivals should be organized (sp 1,2). A better promotion should be made as some of the customers may confuse oven kebab with well kebab or tandoor kebab (sp 3,4,5). A gastronomy festival should be organized in Konya as soon as possible and the promotion of this kebab should be made within the scope of this festival (sp 9). Odabaşı (2001) reported that the biggest mistake for the oven kebab was selling the meat cooked in a pressure cooker under the name of tandoor kebab by some enterprises and he also stated that this situation affected the oven kebab negatively. Nevin HALICI, one of the famous authors of Konya, stated that the lamb cooked in the oven was called oven kebab and such kind of dishes with different characteristics should not be sold under the name of oven kebab. The one cooked in tandoor is either called tandoor lamb or buck. She stated her views that confusing these two dishes with each other has an especially negative effect on oven kebab (Halıcı, 2008).

### **The Changes Observed in Oven Kebab**

Many things have changed from past to present in the oven kebab. For example, enterprises have become more luxurious compared to the past. And this has attracted people. There has been no change in terms of cooking. We can say that there have been a number of partial changes in presentation (sp 1,2,9). There have been some changes in the

majority of enterprises, but some are still following their old-fashioned habits. Customers who come to these establishments are not provided with forks and knives, and ayran is served in pitchers to them. Along with ayran, generally turnip juice is preferred. (sp 5,6). In the past, since oven kebabs were cooked with fatty meat, far too much fat remained unsold. People used to come and buy this fat, and okra, chickpeas, red beans and eggplant dishes were made in the houses. In the past, it was mostly cooked with the şenergah (the lower part of the rib), the horse quarter (the upper part of the animal's shoulder blade) and the floor (under the rib). Today, mostly lean meat is preferred. There are not so many people that know the names of these meat parts (sp 7)



**Picture 5.** A restaurant scene from Konya in 1948 (Source: Dedeler kebab, 2019).

### Conclusion and Implications

Meat and meat products have been the most important products of the kitchen throughout the history of the Turkish cuisine culture. Meat products were consumed while both riding on horseback and preparing festivities. Perhaps, kebab is the oldest of the meat dishes in Turkish cuisine. Kebab has been prepared in different ways in every region of Anatolia. The oven cooking technique is the most widely known one. While it is called with the name of the technique (well kebab, tandoor kebab, oven kebab) in some regions and in others it is called with the name of the place in which it's made (Adana kebab, Manisa kebab etc.). Konya oven kebab is an important dish that has found a place in the field of gastronomy both in Turkey and the world. In addition to being consumed in almost every region of Konya, this product is produced under the name of Konya oven kebab in different provinces and offered for consumption. The known history of Konya oven kebab is more than a hundred years. However, when it's thought that this dish is mentioned in the works of Mevlana, it can be said that the history of the product dates back to almost 800 years. Interviewing the representatives of a product that has such a long history and recording their methods and handing them down to future generations is of great importance in terms of the formation of social memory. Through the study conducted, the information transferred has been recorded by interviewing with the owners and employees of the oldest known enterprises in Konya. Stone ovens are used in Konya for making kebabs. And this makes the cooked products become more delicious. The production of the kebab oven reflects the characteristics of the ovens of traditional flat bread baked together with ground meat and tomatoes. The meat used in the oven kebab and the animal that it comes from stands out as an important issue. It has been observed that the meat should be from a male



or a female lamb under one year of age, but in some seasons even younger animals are used. The chefs pay attention that the wood used in kebab making should be oak wood. It has been determined that the guests coming from other cities indent for the cooked kebabs more. Although there are small differences in the presentation of kebabs from past to present, almost the original authenticity has been preserved. Further promotion of the oven kebab will contribute to the gastronomy tourism of Konya. Public institutions and organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector will have the chance to reach larger masses by acting together. It should not be forgotten that the dishes, which date back to ancient times, are a part of our cultural treasure and should be recorded in consultation with the surviving representatives. By determining the enterprises that act according to the registered characteristics of kebab, domestic and foreign tourists should be directed to these enterprises. It is of great importance that domestic and foreign tourists who come for kebab tasting participate in kebab making. Tourists should choose their own meat for making kebabs and be within the production process by constructing their own ovens. This will contribute to the promotion of kebab at world standards.

### Declaration

The contribution of all the authors of the article to the article process is equal. There is no conflict of interest to be declared by the authors.

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