



## Köftür (Cappadocian Jelly Beans) as a Sustainable Regional Delicacy

\* Emrah KESKİN <sup>a</sup> 

<sup>a</sup> Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Tourism Faculty, Gastronomy and Culinary Arts, Türkiye, Nevşehir

### Article History

Received: 13.04.2024

Accepted: 28.09.2024

### Keywords

Sustainability

Gastronomy

Sustainability  
gastronomy

Cappadocia

Köftür

### Abstract

Culinary culture is part of the touristic experience, as well as one of the mainstays of gastronomic tourism. Therefore, elements of culinary culture should be protected in order to ensure its continuation. As a dessert, Köftür is among the leading gastronomic products to come out of the Cappadocian region throughout the history. Thus, Köftür is considered as an important element in the domain of sustainable gastronomy culture. The present study was conducted through the qualitative research method. The study serves as a documentary analysis wherein the preparation of Köftür as a rural delicacy is monitored and the relevant preparation stages are investigated. The study concludes that since the rural preparation procedure of Köftür is protected throughout the ages, it is part and parcel of the gastronomic sustainability of Cappadocia. Therefore, Köftür is deemed to be among the rural delicacies contributing to the continuation of the sustainable culinary culture of Cappadocia.

### Article Type

Research Article

\* Corresponding Author

E-mail: [ekeskin@nevsehir.edu.tr](mailto:ekeskin@nevsehir.edu.tr) (E. Keskin)

DOI: 10.21325/jotags.2024.1477

## INTRODUCTION

Culture is the accumulated civilization of a given society, both impacting and being impacted by geography (Emekli, 2006). Cultural heritage comprises the characteristics, artifacts and rituals that have persisted throughout the ages to reflect the identity of a society (Park, 2010). Food and beverages are of indicative importance as elements expressing the characteristics of societies (Lee, 2014). Likewise, being part of the culture itself, food and beverages also serve as elements of the cultural heritage. Therefore, modes of nutrition and food products too fall within the cultural heritage elements of a society (Doğdubay & Giritlioğlu, 2011).

Foundations for the concept of sustainability were laid back in the 1970s. The will of individuals with environmentalist ideologies to conceptualize environmentally friendly behavior and to lay the groundwork for an overall thought system to this end led to the emergence of this concept (Lui, 2003). Sustainability can be defined as the body of approaches aiming to prevent the economic, social and environmental adversities borne out of the impacts of human activities on environmental resources, which reveal themselves in the long term (Coccosis, 1996). The aim of sustainable behavior within our domain is to ensure the continuation and protection of cultural values and assets which are an important aspect of tourism and one of the most important characteristics of the societal life (Akesen, 2009). Food and beverages, which serve as an important element of gastronomic tourism, are among the cultural assets for which efforts are made towards ensuring sustainability (McKercher et al., 2008). From the perspective of gastronomic tourism, which has become popular in the recent years, food bears motivating characteristics which promote a rural dining experience for tourists. Thus, the protection and continuation of such specific dishes is an important element for any given destination (Sims, 2009; De Jong et al. 2018; Sorcaru, 2019). Sustainable gastronomy products consist of food festivals, locally produced food, organic farming and organic products, local living culture and traditional production methods (Scarpato, 2002).

Gastronomic tourism consists of travels made to regions boasting rich gastronomic resources including primary and secondary manufacturers of gastronomic products, gastronomy festivals, fairs, events, cooking methods, taste tests and visits to all activities which have to do with food, for leisure or entertainment purposes (Lee, 2014). Gastronomy, which plays an important role in the continuation and success of gastronomic tourism, aims to pass the cultural elements of dining on to the coming generations in connection with certain environmental and socio-cultural reasons (Şimşek & Akdağ, 2017). Factors which ensure sustainability in gastronomy also contribute to the evolution, development and sustainability of destinations. In order to achieve sustainable behavior in gastronomy, destinations must protect certain characteristics of catering management (Everett & Slocum, 2013; Gössling & Hall, 2013).

Sustainable behavior leads to positive outcomes for any given destination. Measures taken for sustainability change certain adverse behaviors of tourists at a destination, as well as contributing to the protection of cultural integrity and to local development. Both for the touristic permanence of destinations and for achieving long term success, the utilization of cultural values in ensuring sustainability is of utmost importance (Buhalis, 2000; Lee, 2001).

The region of Cappadocia is one of those destinations boasting a rich gastronomic background, being influenced not only by Turks and Greeks but also by the Ottoman culinary culture. The gastronomic culture of Cappadocia offers food and beverages from various taste groups as sour, sweet, salty etc. The dessert Köftür is ranked among the sustainable gastronomic products of Cappadocia which has endured through the ages (Aslan et al. 2014; Şahin Perçin

et al. 2019). The present study discusses Köftür, which has been produced as a regional delicacy in Cappadocia for many long years. This study is significant in that this dessert which has gastronomic and cultural value also contributes to the sustainable gastronomy culture.

### **Significance of the Study**

The traditional nutritional habits and destination-bound local delicacies of any geographical region play an important role in the touristic promotion of a destination (Esen, 2022). Local dishes are important in that they provide information about the demographics, consumption habits and modes of preparation of existing food stuffs in their region to properly orientate the relevant destination (Bérard and Marchenay, 2008).

Nevşehir, which is one of the ancient cities of Anatolia with thousands of years of accumulated knowledge, stands out especially with its viticultural activities and regional products such as Köftür, which is prepared by processing grapes (Yeşil, 2020). This product, which is especially popular during autumn and winter months is prepared collectively by the local communities and considered one of the important local assets of the region. Investigating the studies conducted on the subject at hand, it is seen that there are some studies describing the preparation process of Köftür; however, there is a limited number of studies examining the cultural and local value of this dessert. From this perspective, the preparation stages of Köftür are observed and recorded in the present study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Local cuisine is a precious asset for destination gastronomy tourism. Even a single local cuisine item could provide many opportunities. Nevşehir is a major tourist destination in the Central Anatolia, widely known because of being the core part Cappadocia. Nevşehir's local cuisine is mostly based on wheat, potato, legumes such as lentil, chickpea, and bean, pumpkin, grape, sour cherry, quince, and lamb/sheep meat. Grapes, which are among these products, are among the important gastronomic values of the region and therefore are important for the region (Yıldız & Yıldız, 2024).

Grapevine is a plant which can be cultivated extensively throughout the world. There are several methods for grapevine cultivation since the climatic and soil-related requirements can be met in many different areas. Türkiye ranks among the top countries in the world when it comes to grape and grapevine cultivation, with around 4 million hectares of land utilized to this end. Grapes cultivated are grouped according to different modes of consumption as table grape, wine grape and seeded and seedless grape (Semerci et al. 2015). The amount of grapes cultivated in Türkiye has rendered the country one of the leaders in grape exports in foreign trade. Thus, grapes and grapevine are of significant importance in the utilization of unexploited lands for fruit and vegetable farming and the generation of national income (Gözener et al. 2014; Bashimov, 2017).

There is a vast number of grape varieties being cultivated in Anatolia, with many of such varieties being awarded a geographical indication. The abundance of grape varieties in Anatolia has led to the generation of many different food products made from grapes (Erol & Çontu, 2019). Nevşehir is one of the cities in Anatolia where grapes have been cultivated for millennia. Nevşehir ranks the 4th city in grape cultivation in Türkiye. Excavations conducted in the Cappadocian region have demonstrated that grape cultivation continued for many millennia in and around Nevşehir (near Uçhisar, Göreme, Avanos, Ürgüp, Derinkuyu, Kaymaklı and Ihlara). Nowadays, the Vintage Festival wherein the cultural richness of the region is displayed is organized each year in Nevşehir, with grape and grapevine

related activities (Yeşil, 2021). Viticultural activities starting around the month of October is also considered as a period of preparation for the upcoming winter for the local communities.

Grape varieties cultivated in Nevşehir are named Çavuş, Emir, Dimrit, Parmak, Buludu, Beyaz Büzgülü, Kızıl Üzüm, Razıkı, Kayseri Karası, Kara Burcu, Şıradar, Kara Üzüm, Tilki Kuyruğu, Beyaz Üzüm, Horoz Karası, Mor Üzüm, İsmailoğlu Üzümü, Çatal Karası, Hafızali Üzümü, Ada Karası, Nevşehir Karası, Sultaniye, Keten Gömlek, Narenciye, Göğcek, Gül Üzümü, Mor Hevenk, Karanlık Dere, Deve Dişi, Ağın Beyler, Topak Çavuş, Çubuk Siyahı, Çubuk Beyazı, Hacıoğlu Siyahı, Küp Üzümü, Süt Üzüm, Osman Bey, Beyaz Sahabi, Siyah Sahabi, Siyri Pek, Merzi Kara and Gevşen (Uysal & Yaşasın, 2017; Yeşil, 2021). The "Emir" and "Siyah Üzüm" varieties are distinguished from others in that they are used in making molasses (Yolcu, 2018).

Köftür, pekmez [molasses], bulamaç, dolaz, pelver, aside, kuru üzüm [raisins], hevenklik üzüm, şıra tarhanası, ağda, ayva boranisi, kıtır kabak tatlısı, bitirgen kayısı tatlısı, cevizli pekmez sucuğu, üzüm turşusu [pickled grapes], pestil, pekmez helvası, pekmezli şeker pancarı yahnisi, pekmezlik karışık hoşaf are among the products made from grapes in Nevşehir (Erol & Çontu, 2019; Yeşil, 2021). These food products which are unique to the culture of Nevşehir are prepared towards the end of the summer and at the beginning of autumn, and are preserved for consumption during winter months (Yolcu, 2018).

Köftür is one of the grape products prepared in Nevşehir for consumption in autumn and winter. In order to make Köftür, first the grapes are crushed and the must that is produced is left to simmer. Once the must is concentrated, wheat flour is added and the mixture is stirred until it thickens. The mixture which now has a thick consistency is poured onto a metal or wooden tray until it reaches a height of 2 cm and is then left to cool. Once it cools, Köftür pieces are cut and shaped to liking. Cut pieces of Köftür are laid on a cloth to be sun dried. Once the pieces are dried, they are put into a container and stored in a cool and dry place. During storage, a sugary film may form on Köftür. This saccharification has to do with the maturation of Köftür. Stored in earthen containers, Köftür is placed on dining tables during winter months (Gerçekaslan & Aktaş, 2020; Yolcu, 2018).

The following pictures display the rituals for the preparation of Köftür.



**Picture 1.** Crushing Grapes (Picture taken by the authors)

In Picture 1, the grapes picked are put in sacks and crushed according to the regional method to produce grape

must. The juice of crushed grapes is being collected in vessels.



**Picture 2.** Simmering of Grape Must (Picture taken by the authors)

Picture 2 shows the simmering process wherein the grape must is mixed with flour for consistency. Another important raw ingredient utilized during the simmering is marl [pekmez toprağı, lit. "molasses earth"]. With its high calcium carbonate content, marl decreases the acidity and settles the colloids (Becerikli & Başoğlu, 2018). Marl is added to the must which is simmering in a cloth. At this stage, flour is slowly added to the grape juice to prevent aggregation. During the simmering process, vine shoots from last year's grape bunches are burned in the fire.



**Picture 3.** Cut and Shaped Pieces of Köftür (Picture taken by the authors)

In Picture 3, the pieces of Köftür cut and shaped after the thickening and cooling process following the simmering can be seen. Towards the end of the month of September, Köftür is laid on flat housetops for sun drying. After the

drying process, Köftür becomes edible.



**Picture 4.** Pots Used to Store Köftür (Picture taken by the authors)

Picture 4 shows the earthen pots also known as "cheese pots" utilized for the storage of cut, shaped and dried pieces of Köftür in a cool environment. At this point, the Köftür kept inside the pots are edible. The pieces can be dished up to liking for consumption.

According to Becerikli (2015), as a Central Anatolian product, Köftür has a higher mineral content and nutritional value when compared with other grape products and also serves as a good antioxidant source. Köftür is a healthy snack. For sanitary consumption, Köftür needs to be kept at a temperature below 24 °C. When stored at this temperature, Köftür keeps its moisture balance and stays at the quality standards under which it is prepared and produced (Aktaş and Gerçekaslan, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

Regional products like Köftür, when produced with due attention being given to the relevant standards, contribute to the promotion of the region and development of gastronomic tourism (Eren et al., 2019). Being one of the prominent delicacies of its region, Köftür leaves tourists with a certain impression of the culinary culture of the destination they are visiting, as well as providing a dynamism for touristic activities therein (Aslan et al., 2014). The sustainability of viticultural activities depends on the protection and processing of grapes and grape products in accordance with the culinary culture of the region (Erol & Çontu, 2019). In ensuring the sustainability of gastronomic tourism, the identification of Köftür as a gastronomic asset and an exclusive product is of great importance for the region.

In recent years, viticultural activities have generated a certain tourism potential under the heading of "viticulture tourism", beyond the manufacturing of consumption-oriented products. In this sense, visitors to the region or individuals interested in viticultural activities may be put through a gastronomic experience by getting them involved in the vintage activities or the preparation of grape products (wine, Köftür, etc.). The promotion and publicity of prominent products of a region would provide economic input for the destinations and positively impact the sustainability of such products (Köse & Çelik, 2017).

Many cultural features housed by destinations are deemed to be of importance in developing gastronomic tourism and offering various experiences to tourists. Cultural features and cultural elements are part of sustainable gastronomy (Correia et al. 2008). The continuation of the culinary culture of a given destination can be ensured through the sustainability of gastronomic tourism (Baran & Karaca, 2021). Investigating previous studies conducted, it is observed that a close relationship exists between sustainable culture and the development of tourism (Bratec, 2008; Gössling & Hall, 2013; Durlu Özkaya et al. 2013; Akdağ & Üzülmmez, 2017). Therefore, regional products owned by destinations are considered to be important.

In the examination performed, it was found that the dessert Köftür is among the gastronomic products of Nevşehir the traditional preparation method of which has endured through the ages. Köftür is a dessert prepared in rural Cappadocia during the autumn season. The region of Cappadocia is a destination with many officially registered gastronomic product varieties (Yönet Eren & Ceyhun Sezgin, 2021). This dessert which is prepared through protected regional methods serves as an important cultural product in ensuring the gastronomic sustainability of the region of Cappadocia. Therefore, the official registration of this product and continued preparation thereof by placing due attention on following the regional preparation methods would contribute greatly to the sustainable gastronomy culture of this destination.

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