

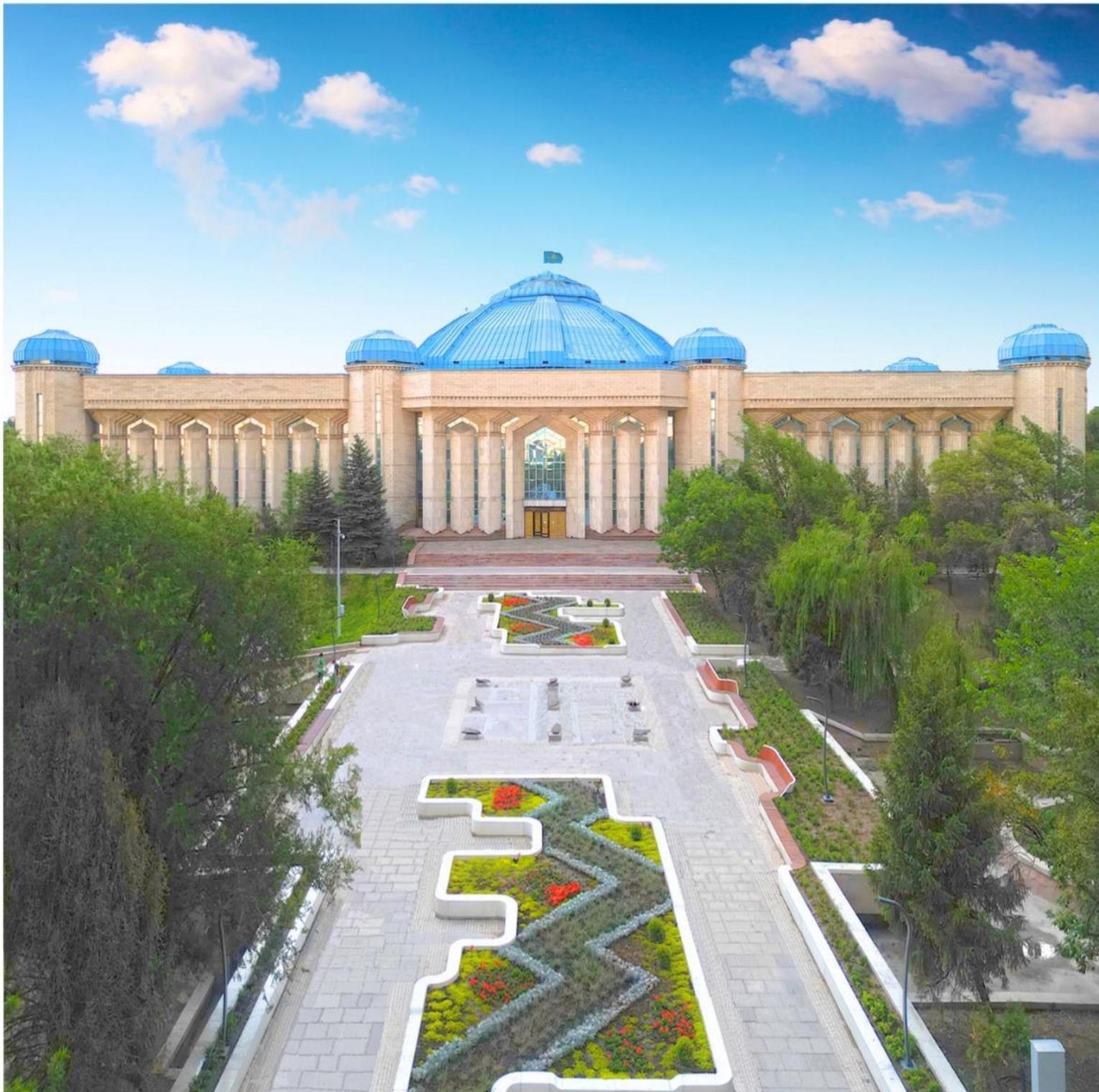
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THE ROLE OF HERBS AND SPICES IN TURKISH CUISINE IN HUNGARY

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Abstract. This paper examines the role of herbs and spices in the cuisine of Turkish communities living in Hungary, with particular attention to processes of cultural continuity, adaptation, and substitution. Based on ethnographic observation, informal interviews, and ethnobotanical literature, the study analyses how traditional Turkish culinary practices are maintained or modified in a Central European context. Special emphasis is placed on the acquisition of raw materials, the use of ethnic grocery stores, and the interaction between Turkish and Hungarian gastronomic traditions. The findings demonstrate that herbs and spices function not only as flavouring agents but also as cultural markers that contribute to the preservation of identity within migrant communities. While certain adaptations occur due to availability and local taste preferences, the core structure of Turkish gastronomy remains remarkably stable. The study contributes to the understanding of migrant foodways and highlights the ethnobotanical significance of everyday culinary practices.

Materials and methods. The research is based on qualitative ethnographic methods, including participant observation in Turkish households, grocery stores, and restaurants in Hungary, as well as informal interviews with members of the Turkish community. The analysis is complemented by a review of ethnobotanical, historical, and gastronomic literature. Comparative analysis was applied to identify similarities and differences between Turkish and Hungarian culinary practices, with particular attention to the use of herbs and spices.

Keywords: Turkish cuisine, ethnobotany, herbs and spices, migration, food culture, Hungary

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МАЖАРСТАНДАҒЫ ТҮРІК АСХАНАСЫНДАҒЫ ШӨПТЕР МЕН ДӘМДЕУІШТЕРДІҢ РӨЛІ

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Андатпа. Мақалада Мажарстанда (Венгрияда) тұратын түрік қауымдастықтарының асханасындағы шөптер мен дәмдеуіштердің рөлі, мәдени сабақтастық, бейімделу және алмастыру үрдісіне жете назар аударылады. Этнографиялық бақылауларға, бейресми сұхбаттарға және этноботаникалық әдебиеттерге сүйене отырып зерделеген мақалада дәстүрлі түрік аспаздық тәжірибелерінің Орталық Еуропа контекстінде қалай сақталатынын немесе өзгертілетінін талдайды. Шикізатты сатып алуға, этникалық азық-түлік дүкендерін пайдалануда түрік және мажар (венгр) гастрономиялық дәстүрлерінің өзара ықпалдасуы қарастырылады. Зерттеу нәтижелері шөптер мен дәмдеуіштердің тек хош иістендіргіш ретінде ғана емес, сонымен қатар мигрант қауымдастықтарының мәдени бірегейлігін сақтауға ықпал ететін мәдени маркер ретінде де қызмет ететінін ашып көрсетеді. Белгілі бір бейімделулер қолжетімділікке және жергілікті талғамға байланысты болғанымен, түрік гастрономиясының негізгі құрылымы айтарлықтай тұрақты болып қала береді. Зерттеу мигранттардың тамақтану жолдарын түсінуге ықпал етеді және күнделікті аспаздық тәжірибелердің этноботаникалық маңыздылығын дәйектейді.

Зерттеу материалдары мен әдістері. Зерттеу Мажарстандағы түрік үй шаруашылықтарын, сондай-ақ азық-түлік дүкендеріне және мейрамханаларына келушілерді бақылауды, сондай-ақ түрік қауымдастығының мүшелерімен бейресми сұхбаттарды қамтитын бақылау этнографиялық әдістеріне негізделген. Талдау этноботаникалық, тарихи және гастрономиялық әдебиеттерге шолумен толықтырылған. Түрік және мажар (венгр) аспаздық тәжірибелерінің ұқсастықтары мен айырмашылықтарын анықтау үшін салыстырмалы талдау жасалды, әсіресе шөптер мен дәмдеуіштерді пайдалануға назар аударылды.

Тірек сөздер: Түрік асханасы, этноботаника, шөптер мен дәмдеуіштер, миграция, тамақтану мәдениеті, Мажарстан (Венгрия)

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РОЛЬ ТРАВ И СПЕЦИЙ В ТУРЕЦКОЙ КУХНЕ ВЕНГРИИ

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Аннотация. В работе исследуется роль трав и специй в кухне турецких общин, проживающих в Венгрии, с особым вниманием к процессам культурной преемственности, адаптации и замещения. На основе этнографических наблюдений, неформальных интервью и этноботанической литературы исследование анализирует, как традиционные турецкие кулинарные практики сохраняются или изменяются в контексте Центральной Европы. Особое внимание уделяется приобретению сырья, использованию этнических продуктовых магазинов и взаимодействию между турецкими и венгерскими гастрономическими традициями. Результаты показывают, что травы и специи функционируют не только как ароматизаторы, но и как культурные маркеры, способствующие сохранению идентичности в мигрантских общинах. Хотя определенные адаптации происходят из-за доступности и местных вкусовых предпочтений, основная структура турецкой гастрономии остается удивительно стабильной. Данное исследование способствует пониманию кулинарных традиций мигрантов и подчеркивает этноботаническое значение повседневных кулинарных практик.

Материалы и методы исследования. Исследование основано на качественных этнографических методах, включая включенное наблюдение в турецких домохозяйствах, продуктовых магазинах и ресторанах Венгрии, а также неформальные интервью с членами турецкой общины. Анализ дополнен обзором этноботанической, исторической и гастрономической литературы. Для выявления сходств и различий между турецкой и венгерской кулинарными практиками был применен сравнительный анализ, с особым вниманием к использованию трав и специй.

Ключевые слова: турецкая кухня, этноботаника, травы и специи, миграция, культура питания, Венгрия

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Introduction. The best way to knowing, understanding and accepting a people is to start studying its cultural history – and one way to do that is by exploring its cuisine.

In my paper I explore and present the ways in which the use of herbs has changed among the Turks living in Hungary. As the common aphorism holds, “Tell me what you eat, and I’ll say who

you are”. This and similar proverbs indicate that once you are acquainted with the diet and foods of a people or an ethnic group you will also have learnt a great deal about the community in general.

Over the centuries, the different foods have migrated along with the people and under the influence of changing circumstances they, too, have changed and evolved. This migration has contributed to the variety and multiplicity of foods. A difference in even one ingredient will result in flavours characteristic of the given region or people. Sometimes it is enough to change the quantity of a spice or additive or to omit or add one, a variation in the manner of preparation due to circumstances in the environment or the technical facilities and the result is a new dish. The natural environment spreading out under our feet, all the plants that we only need to reach out our hands for and they give us food as we go along, all provide additional features to the cuisine and gastro-culture of any nation adapting to the characteristics of the landscape, the soil, the climate and the geographic position. A further feature that has contributed to the appearance of different food variants is the free or illegal trade (or smuggling) of commodities among countries.

During my research my goal was to find out whether and to what extent the culinary habits of these Turkish people changed after they had moved to and settled in Hungary. If so, how is this noticeable? How far do these people preserve their traditions? What are the herbs and spices they even use in this country? Are these the traditional variants and where do these people acquire them? If they are not available in this country, what do they use for substitutes? And, most importantly, how does the Hungarian cuisine influence the flavours of the traditional Turkish dishes, how far and to what extent have changes taken place. Naturally, the reverse also applies. It is easily possible that the Turkish people who have entered employment and started a family in this country (including those in mixed marriages) also affect Hungary’s culture as part of a kind of 21st century impact.

It is important to note that the shops established to serve the needs of these Turkish people are also visited by many Hungarians. Also, most Turkish restaurants follow their business interests when they offer mostly ‘Hungarianised’ versions of their Turkish dishes, to suit local taste. This way we can subtly hint that the impact of living together has already gently started to affect both cultures.

Discussion of the results. Hungary’s Turkish occupation had a favourable effect on our foods and our culinary culture. During these 150 years the two nations passed on a great deal of knowledge to each other. One such transmission was the use of intensely seasoned dishes, as well as mutton roast on a spit, stuffed cabbage or stuffed vine-leaves, to mention but a few [Ketter, 1985: 158]. There are also several plants which became wide-spread due to Turkish influence. They played a great part in both export and import. It was during the Turkish period that a great many people began to grow ornamental plants such as roses, tulips, hyacinths and lilacs. The same is true of crops such as cucumbers, almonds, currants, cherries and quinces [Surányi, 1985: 61-62]. Although rice was first grown in Europe in the 8th century by the Moors, the first plantations in Hungary appeared during Turkish rule. The need to supply the kitchen of the Turkish army caused the Turks to establish rice plantations in the South of the country – this production was reduced after the Turkish occupation not to gain momentum again until the 20th century, when breeds adapted to our climate began to appear [Ketter, 1985: 160].

Aubergines (*tojáscsucsor*, *törökparadicsom* in Hungarian) originally come from Southeast Asia and India and found their way to this country through Turkish mediation to become an increasingly popular food. This is where we must also mention sweetcorn (*Zea mays*), poppies (*Papaver somniferum*), tomatoes and red paprika (*Capsicum annuum*) (further Hungarian names include *törökbors* and *pogánypaprika*).

There is a minor historical legend surrounding the introduction of paprika into this county in the 17th century. According to legend it was a Hungarian maidservant who pinched the seeds of ‘Turkish pepper’ from the garden of Mehmed Pasha of Buda. The Pasha saw the pretty young woman carrying her pitcher of water and had her taken to his Seray without delay. Locked inside the curious garden the young beauty could observe some very special flowers, including the paprika

plant which was growing its bright red crops just then. She observed how the Turkish people dry the red fruit of the plant, grind it into powder and use it to season their dishes. Because she liked the flavour, she got hold of some of the seeds of the plant. However, the young woman could not bring herself to forget her former lover, a young farmer. One day she had a lucky strike – she found a secret passage that her master had built and through this she could get out in the night to meet her loved one. One day she sneaked out carrying a small sack of seeds she had picked and gave it to her former fiancé, instructing him to take it home and plant the seeds. The young farmer did her bidding. By the following year every garden in the town was abundant with the paprika seedlings. The Hungarians grew very fond of the new red spice.

Although the legend about the young lovers is loveable, it is more likely that the plant, seen today as the national spice of the Hungarians (Fig.1-2), spread wide due to the activity of a handful of Bulgarian gardeners whom the Turks had invited into this country [Swahn, 2003: 174-177].

The Turks, who were also extremely fond of the fiery fruit of the paprika plant, had come in touch with it through Spanish and Portuguese mediation in the 16th or 17th century. Today there are innumerable variations and types in terms of flavour, colour, shape or growth rate. Hungary is now thought of worldwide as one of the leading producers of paprika, as well as several other plants, herbs and spices such as basil, garlic, parsley or various types of onions. In Turkey the most intensely produced herbs and spices are aniseeds, chili, bay leaves, oregano, poppies and sage [Swahn, 2003: 9].



Fig 1-2. Historically traditional methods of drying vegetables (tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, etc.) and fruits (plums, apricots, dates, figs, apples and grapes) by the nomadic peoples of the Eastern Hun Empire (including Hungarians, Turks, etc.) have been preserved to this day
<http://receptjeink.blogspot.hu/2011/12/keleti-konyha-kincese.html>. Photo: Andrea.Ban.

Herbs and spices in Turkish cuisine

Herbs and spices are substances we use in making or preserving our foods, due to their active agents (scent, flavour, aroma, colour or preservative effect). Mostly they come from plants (herbs and other plants produced for this purpose), but some others come from fungi, animal or mineral sources. According to another definition a spice is the part of a plant with an intense flavour or aroma which we add in small quantities to our food to preserve, enhance or modify the flavour or smell of our foods.

It is hard to tell how long humanity had been using herbs and spices. We cannot even estimate the century, but it is probable that flavouring goes back as far as cooking. Relevant testimony comes from the remnants of food and drink which were found in dried form on the surviving fragments of clay dishes placed inside graves next to the deceased [Swahn, 2003: 11-19].

Naturally, as gastro-culture changes continually and special foods appear and influences are adapted from different cultures, various plants can act either as herbs and spices or as core ingredients of main courses – such as dill, the leaves of vegetables, paprika, tomatoes, mint, lemon, yoghurt or cheese.

“Turks of this Land”

Turkish people living in Hungary are either new immigrants from Turkey or are persons of dual citizenship (born in this country) living here with their families mostly in the major cities. They employ themselves either in commerce (textiles, foods, jewellery, household products), as wholesale or retail traders, business owners in the service industry (restaurants, fast food places), market vendors or the employees of any of these. A considerable number are visiting students studying at our colleges and universities. The Turkish food shops and restaurants opened in order to serve the needs of these people conjure up a tiny little Turkey inside Hungary.

The spread of grocery offered by these shops and the manner in which they display their spices, seeds and kernels, pickles or packaged products are no different here from the appearance, quality, packaging or range of choice offered back in Turkey. These shops draw their custom from two sources. One type of customer – the majority – are Turks who are attached to what they got used to in their own country; the rest are Hungarians who like or are interested in Turkish cuisine. As I have learnt, these little shops make sure they stock everything that is required in order to cook the foods of the authentic Turkish cuisine (Fig. 3-4). They procure these goods with the help of Turkish suppliers and wholesale traders.

Customers can buy not only the foods and drinks such as tea or coffee, but also the cooking dishes and cups or glasses needed for preparation and service. Most of the Turkish inhabitants of this country feel a profound sense of patriotism and a respect for their original homeland – retaining their identity even when living at a great distance from Turkey they are deeply attached to the traditional Turkish flavours and dishes, to their manner of preparation and the raw materials used therein.



Fig. 3-4. Spices. (Turkey, Istanbul – bazaar row, 23 April 2016). Photo: Andrea Ban.

The cuisines they follow may be categorised into three types.

1. Authentic Turkish cuisine. Traditional dishes, flavours, preparation, herbs and spices; meals in accordance with the time of day; using raw material purchased in Turkish shops and coming from Turkish import. They will not substitute, not even the fresh vegetables, only if they are unable to buy Turkish import products.

2. Mixed cuisine. This means a place where Turkish and Hungarian dishes are served alternately. There may be several reasons for this, such as a simple liking for Hungarian food, Turkish-Hungarian mixed marriages; children get used to Hungarian dishes at school canteens and claim similar dishes as those they have been socialised on. Many Hungarian university and college canteens are aware of the diverging religious and dietary needs of foreign students studying in this country and serve a spread of dishes also suited to their taste, but the choice is still rather narrow. This also motivates Turkish students to familiarise themselves with Hungarian cuisine and eating our foods. Similarly, in order to meet children's needs, the foods served may include items such as hot dogs and hamburgers which are not characteristic of Turkey and are imported even into our country.

3. Households that cook Hungarian dishes. Although this is very rare, and it is hard to declare that any such household is 100% Hungarian, but there are some which are predominantly so. This is the result of mixed marriages, but these are mostly Turkish people who are unable to acquire Turkish import all the time because there is no shop to meet their needs near where they live and acquiring such products is difficult.

It is important to point out that even in kitchens preparing Hungarian dishes or adapting a Hungarian style to any extent people do not use pork, in line with Muslim prohibition, and substitute it with beef, mutton or poultry.

Acquiring products

As I have just mentioned, Turkish people are very much attached to their own foods and drinks. The Turkish shops are stocked by Turkish suppliers, importers or wholesalers, whether we are talking of dry goods, fresh vegetables or meats, frozen, dried or tinned products.

People insist not only on the sight of well-stocked stores but also the experience of being served in the right way. Turkish customers like products of the meet counter to be ready to cook. This means that it is cleaned, chopped, washed, pre-packaged so you only need to rinse it through and can get down to cooking straight away.

They have a broad range of foods made from minced meat, which is put through the mincer two or even three times until they reach the consistency that Turkish people favour.

The cultivated plants of Turkish gastronomy in Hungary

The Turkish dietary spread eaten in a normal day, and the mealtimes are practically identical between the Hungarian and the Turkish peoples. Hungary's Turkish inhabitants, belonging to various Turkic groups, follow their traditional Turkish cuisine and make their dishes accordingly.

The three mealtimes are distinguished in the same way as in our culture, but the dishes eaten at these mealtimes, and the foods eaten between mealtimes are different. For snacks Turkish people eat mostly oily seeds prepared in any number of ways, sweet, savoury and spicy (chickpeas, sunflower seeds, pistachio, almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, walnuts etc.) (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Selection of spices, side dishes (rice, bulgur), beans, chickpeas, etc., presented in Turkish style in Hungarian Turkish shops (Budapest, 25 June 2016). Photo: Andrea Ban.

Breakfast

Breakfast is eaten together. It is very ample and varied. There are several types of cheese served: harder, softer, white, salted etc. They very rarely eat smoked cheese, it is not characteristic in this part of the world – white soft cheese are far more common. Another typical breakfast food is a type of pastry rolled out thin and stuffed with various types of stuffing (meat, spinach, potatoes, cheese) – this is called “borek” (*börek, burek or byrek*) is a family of pastries or tarts popular in southeastern Europe). This is accompanied, as all other meals, with yoghurt, cottage cheese and cut meats. On the breakfast table you will always find various salads (mostly made from cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, olives, aubergines and pumpkins and raw fresh herbs such as dill, parsley and mint). Although compared to green plants available in Turkey the spread is narrower in Hungary. In Turkey, village people just walk out to their garden and pick what they had grown, or whatever nature had placed on their plate: *common knotgrass (Polygonum aviculare, in Hungarian: madárkeserűfű)*, *common dandelion (Taraxacum officinale-pitypang)*, *shepherd's purse (Capsella bursa pastoris – pásztortáska)*, *buttonweed / roundleaf mallow (Malva neglecta – papsajtmályva)*, *bitter dock (Rumex obtusifolius – lórum)*, *common purslane / pursley (Portulaca oleracea – kövér porcsin)*, *stinging nettle (Urtica dioica – csalán)*. to mention but a few plants that constitute the ingredients of people there. The modest range available in this country consists of cultivated herbs such as pre-heated dill, mints, chives, spring onions, parsley and celeriac leaves. To a smaller extent Turks living in Hungary use potted herbs also, mainly relying on the offer of the supermarkets. For flavouring they use lemons.

Flavoured spreads from aubergines

Turkish people like to mix the sweet and the savoury, this is why they usually end their breakfast with jam (fig, sour cherry, apricot, grape, melon or strawberry), honey and *tahin pekmez*, a traditional ending to breakfast. Pekmez is a very sweet grape must cooked until thick which they spread on bread and eat as a sweet. Honey is also eaten on bread, not in the tea.

It is common to include *menemen* (similar to Hungarian *lecsó*) on the breakfasts table. The ingredients are the same as Hungarian *lecho* – onions, tomatoes, tomato paste, paprika. It is made with eggs, the same as in Hungary, but they chop the ingredients much smaller than we do, and flavour it with chili, olive oil, garlic, oregano, parsley and black pepper. Turkish people chop their

vegetables very small for any salad, claiming that the flavours come out much better that way – as anyone will testify who has tasted them. This is particularly true in the case of vegetables grown under a hotter climate, which arrive in the shops and restaurants all the way from Turkey.

Lunch. Soups.

There are several similarities in the flavouring of the dishes these two nations make for lunch. However, Turkish dishes are lighter and not as fatty as ours, their soups are sourer. This is also related to the climate – in hotter weather it is refreshing to eat and drink slightly sour things. They are very fond of cream soups, but meat soups and bouillons are also a part of the cuisine. One basic ingredient much used for soups is *bulgur*. Bulgur is a type of durum wheat rich in fibres, which is harvested before it is fully ripe. It is then pre-cooked or steamed for a short time and dried in the sun. During that time the grain completes ripening. It is sold in two sizes – one variant consists of half and whole grains, another of grains crushed small to the size of semolina.) Further ingredients are sweet corn, different types of lentils, spinach, dried and fresh beans, mushrooms, cabbage, peas, parsley, carrots, celeriac and potatoes. *Herbs used* are peppermint, lemon, paprika (chili, hot, sweet, ground, pulbiber, garlic, red onions, spring onions, leeks, thyme, tomatoes (whole, peeled, puréed), celeriac, carrots, parsley, nutmeg, dill, oregano. *Other flavour enhancing agents used as a spice* include salt, sugar, vinegar, butter, yoghurt, sour cream and cheese.

Second course: the subject of the present paper are mainly plants and their use in the diet of Turks living in Hungary. It is only in passing that I wish to speak about similarities in the cuisine of the two peoples and their causes, but I do not aim to survey the entire repertoire, as we are looking at one of the richest and most varied cuisines of the world.

The period of Turkish occupation has brought many advantages. Dishes that the Hungarians adopted from the Turks probably include stuffed cabbage or *sarma* which plays a role in both Turkish and Transylvanian cuisine to this day; and is still referred in Transylvania as *sarma*.

The same is true of *stew* (*pörkölt* in Hungarian) type dishes. The technique used in *stew* is so ancient, that probably even the Hungarians of the age of the Conquest made most of their meat dishes in this way. To fry and seal the diced cubes of meat before further cooking is still the first move of any good mutton dish to this day, and as we know, mutton is the most important meat staple both in the Cumania (Kunság) in Hungarian area and in Turkish cuisine. Naturally, *stew* was not made in the same way in the past as it is today, as paprika was not introduced to Europe, including Hungary, until the 16th century. The method of cooking *stew* varies also from one province of Turkey to another, which is mostly related to the quantity of onions or water used. One informant from Yogzat province who was born in Akdagmadeni said that their *stew* is like that cooked by the Hungarians – with plenty of sauce on top, made with lots of onions and chicken paprika is flavoured with yoghurt. One modification in Hungary is that we add sour cream, a richer and more creamy substance, and this informant claimed that this makes Hungarian *stew* tastier and more flavourful. Another informant who had come from a village near Istanbul described their local *stew* as a drier dish made with less sauce and adding little onion. Ground red paprika, black pepper, tomatoes and paprika are indispensable spices in making both variants of *stew*. It is interesting that the informant from Azerbaijan mentioned marjoram and mint in place of paprika when describing their variant of *stew*.

As a side-dish to go with meat dishes they use either potatoes, also popular in Hungary (prepared in many ways), rice, bulgur (the half and whole grains) or steamed vegetables. Of the cultivated plants the most widely used are aubergines (raw and dried), paprika (the type used for stuffing, dried or raw), red lentils, cabbage, chickpeas, dried beans and, last but certainly not least, grape leaves which are used in both a raw and a pickled form for their dishes.

Turks living in Hungary also use a wide array of herbs. They prefer spice mixtures prepared and sold in shops. The range of herbs and spices used for main courses is similar to those used in soups, but it also includes cinnamon, basil, marjoram, capers, cumin, coriander, ginger, bay leaves, allspice, pine kernels and blueberries. They also use white wine to enhance flavours (Fig. 6-7).

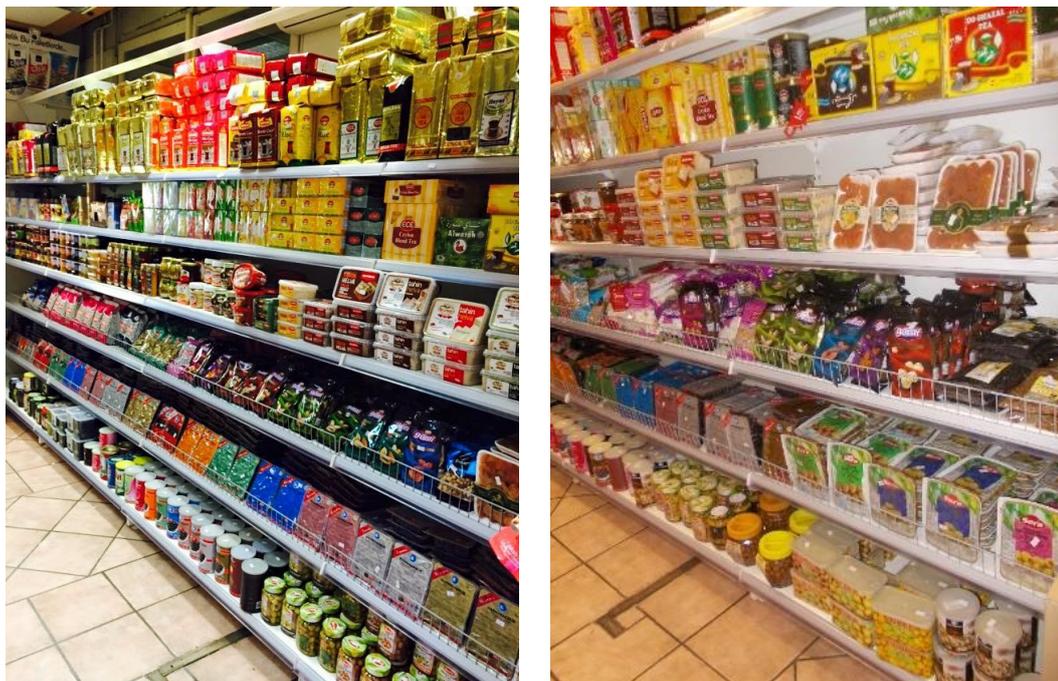


Fig. 6-7. Product assortment in Turkish grocery stores in Hungary – all items are Turkish imports (Budapest, 16 July 2016). Photo: Andrea Ban

Starters, salads, vegetable spreads

Apart from the vegetables mentioned before, aubergines are also used frequently as an ingredient for salads. They use a wide range of spreads made from vegetables, but aubergines are certainly the most widely used plant. It is flavoured with any of the herbs and spices described above.

Cakes, sweetmeats

Turkish cuisine, true to its standard, is also rich in cakes and sweetmeats. While Turkish people have a clear preference for ready-to-cook products and deep-frozen cakes, there is also a great deal they make at home. Turkish cakes are very sweet, they use lots of honey, sugar syrup, fruit syrups (date, pomegranate, carob etc.), fruit jams (fig, apricot, strawberry, rose). Dried and candied fruits (Fig.8) also appear both as raw materials and as flavouring, as do seeds and nuts (pistachio, sesame seeds, walnuts, almonds, chickpeas). Cakes are usually flavoured with orange water, rose water, cinnamon, vanilla, grated coconut, yoghurt or cocoa. Turkish people also have pancakes and what Hungarians call *langos* (savory doughnut fried in oil). They had never tried eating pancakes with jam, sugar and cocoa etc. Even cottage cheese is eaten in savoury form only. They were used to eating pancakes with sour cream, savoury minced meat, etc. However, because they like sweet flavours, they soon came to like the Hungarian version and now prepare their pancakes in the same way. Their *langos* is the same as the Hungarian variant.

Besides sour cream, honey is the only thing that Turks living in Hungary regularly buy in our shops or at our markets. They find them much nicer. Turkish people used to the flavours of very white soft cheese have also grown fond of Hungarian hard smoked cheeses and made them a regular raw material in their kitchen.

By contrast, as regards the quality of rice, Turkish people have such high expectations that even the most expensive rice available in this country does not hit the standard of the cheapest rice they would purchase in Turkey.

I must make separate mention of the range of choice they expect in terms of chickpeas and olives – one reason they avoid Hungarian shops is that they fail to meet these expectations (Fig.9).



Fig. 8-9. Selection of dried fruits and olives. (Turkey, Istanbul–bazaar, 23 April 2016). Photo: Andrea Ban

As regards the chances of substituting green herbs and vegetables, all of my informants replied that they like the Turkish types and mostly shop in Turkish shops, but if they fail to get access to Turkish products, they will buy fresh products at Hungarian markets (paprika, tomatoes, cucumbers, celeriac, parsley, carrots, onions, garlic, aubergines, pumpkins or fruit), but are unlikely to buy them in the supermarkets.

There are some cultivated plants which they can only access in Turkish shops: yard-long beans (*Vigna unguiculata*) or the fruit of the carob plant.

It is worth mentioning briefly that some of the restaurants and fast-food places run by Turkish people in Hungary and offering traditional Turkish dishes are not all that traditional anymore. Due to business policy, some of these restaurants hope to increase their audience by altering some of the recipes. As they put it, they have ‘Hungarianised’ their cooking. This does not mean modifying the meat – using pork is out of the question even if the goal is to please us or to increase profits. ‘Hungarianising’ means they have introduced Hungarian flavours into dishes which allowed it. They transformed their dishes into more full-bodied, fatty and spicy courses.

Herbs

A brief description of the herbs most commonly used by Turks living in Hungary and their use.

Bay leaves (*Laurus nobilis* – *Defne* in Turkish) This is an evergreen garden herb. The active agent is the leaf which is used in both raw and dried form. In folklore medicine its leaves were crushed and placed on wounds, scratches and burns because it contracts the blood vessels and reduces bleeding. If stored in oil, the leaves produce a unique flavour [Vermeulen, 2005: 164-165]. It is used for flavouring soups, vegetable purées, sauces, gravies, marinades, meat dishes and pickles.

Black pepper (*Piper nigrum* – *Karabiber*): this is an indigenous shrub of the tropics. One of the most widely used herbs of Turkish and Hungarian cuisine. The Hungarian word (*bors*) is of ancient Turkic origin and had come into Turkish from Iran through commerce [Racz, 2013: 155-156]. They use it as a spice. It gives a hot, piquant flavour to soups, meat dishes (roast or grilled meats, stews and ragouts). It is a spice used for sauces, gravies, salads, side-dishes and savoury cakes.

Lemon (*Citrus x limon* – *limon*). In both popular diet and popular medicine this is a very important plant. In cases of sore throat, it is recommended to eat the flesh of a lemon mixed with sugar [Vermeulen, 2005: 87-88]. They use the peel, the flower and the juice of the fruit alike. The

juice is used against fever and high blood pressure; it improves digestion and is the No. 1 home remedy against stomach and liver complaints. People suffering from a cold are made to smell lemon flowers. In the region of Bursa people pour hot water over lemon zest and 7-8 leaves of mint (*Menthae-nane*) and drink the resulting drink. In the area of Döşemealtı it is common for wool dyeing master's to place ground lemon zest into the dye to render the colour more lasting [Bartha, 1993: 42]. If you place a slice of lemon over an insect bite it reduces the swelling [Vermeulen, 2005: 87-88]. It is used widely in the patisserie industry and medicine in a number of ways even today. Lemon is used to flavour soups, salads, sweets and cooling drinks.

Lemon grass (*Melissa officinalis* – *ogul otu, kovan otu, turuncan, limon otu*): in popular medicine herb tea made from the leaves of lemon grass is recommended against stomach complaints. It is used most commonly by people suffering from insomnia. It reduces profuse menstrual bleeding if administered as a bath [Bartha, 1993: 42]. It is considered an elixir of life for body and soul. Due to its antidepressant quality, it gives the body a new lease of life. If made into a tincture and flavoured with honey it has a relaxing, soothing effect and is therefore recommended before sleep. It has the capacity to reduce cramps and nervous stomach pains [Vermeulen, 2005: 184-185]. Besides its remedial effects it is used to enhance the flavour of refreshing drinks (*szörbet-sörbet-serbet*), soups and sweets, which lends a lovely cool, refreshing flavour on hot days.

Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare* – *raziyane, rezene, tatlı anason*): the seeds, flowers and roots are used likewise. A tincture of the seeds improves the appetite and helps get rid of winds. Nursing mothers also drink it hoping for plentiful milk. It is also good for people with kidney problems as it enhances urine secretion. The root, if boiled with honey and bandaged over the wound will cure the bite of a dog with rabies. In veterinary medicine it is known as an effective remedy against poisoning (Bartha, 1993: 42). In folk medicine the tincture of fennel is used to this very day as a remedy for the eyes, as it has the quality to improve the eyes. Women used to drink it to prevent obesity, men drank it after major feasts to help them feel better [Rácz, 2013: 434].

Garlic (*Allium sativum* – *sarmisak*) Garlic is one of our most healthful plants. Its medical qualities strengthen the body, cleanse the veins and thus it is used in the case of cardio-vascular diseases. It also restores the blood's cholesterol level [Vermeulen, 2005: 36-37]. The juice of garlic boiled with pine leaves will stop a toothache. Head wounds are rubbed with a mixture of garlic, olive oil and honey. It is also good against coughs and a hoarse voice. Combined with fig leaves it is stuck on insect bites and the bite of dogs with rabies. If consumed with olive oil, it will start urine production and improve general health. The ashes of garlic mixed with honey will get rid of rashes and reduce blood pressure. People usually take its cloves, boil them, crush them, mix them with flour and make small balls of which they swallow a few each day. In Erzurum women in labour are made to smell garlic to help the placenta detach more easily [Bartha, 1993: 44]. Garlic has long been one of the most characteristic flavoured herbs used in folk gastronomy. It is used to season meat dishes and vegetables purées (in Hungary, for these are not characteristic in Turkey), salads, cheeses and other dairy products cut into thin slices or crushed. It makes a delicious cream soup! It is used both as a seasoning and as raw material in cooking.

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) is both a medical and a cooking herb. It is excellent against nausea. It was also used against asthma. Its characteristic spicy, piquant and sweet flavour is known to many as the typical spice of oriental foods. It is often consumed with just a small bit of cheese [Vermeulen, 2015: 309-310]. The rhizome of ginger is ground and added to fish dishes, meats, sauces, salads, cakes and drinks. Ginger can be the spice of any kind of food.

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris* – *kekik, kekik otu*): The active agent is in the flowers, the leafy stem and the leaves. The pressed oil is used for improving the appetite, in the case of indigestion, or is boiled with water and vinegar and used as a gargle or against toothache. The same tincture if used as a footbath will alleviate rheumatic pain. During epidemics it is used to disinfect clothes. The part of the plant above the root is used in fabric dyeing. Wool tanned first with alum will turn yellow, tanned first with chrome it will turn brown and tanned first with copper sulphate it will turn

greenish grey. In Isparta if a woman wants to conceive, she will tie some thyme over her womb. A tea made from thyme is supposed to render childbirth easier [Bartha, 1993: 43].

Dill (*Anethum graveolens – Dere otu*): this plant is considered sacred in Egypt and was introduced to Europe during the Roman Empire. It was used in popular medicine to cure headaches and vascular disorders [Surányi, 1985: 239]. It is also known and used as a substance suited to strengthen the stomach, get rid of winds and gall and help lactation. Its tincture was also widely used against insomnia and colic. “Dill water” is known as a carminative, digestive substance and as helping sleep, while today it is an important component of liquid medication for children [Rácz, 2013: 384-385]. Its culinary application is to use the flower and leafy stem in pickles. It is very good for enhancing the flavour of salads, soups, meat dishes, sauces, gravies and cakes.

Coriander (*Coriandrum sativum – Kishnish*) – this is an ancient spice which is known to have been grown in Egypt as far back as 1500 BC and which was introduced to Europe by the Romans (Surányi, 1985: 240). Meats were stored and preserved after rubbing ground coriander into them. The parts used are the seeds and the leaves. The oil pressed from the seeds is an additive to perfumes. As a spice it is used for seasoning meat dishes, pickles, soups, cakes and drinks. It is one of the important ingredients for curing ham. An indispensable spice of Oriental cuisine [Vermeulen, 2005: 94-95].

Cumin (*Carum carvi – helps the secretion of stomach acid, cures digestive pain. Excellent against menstrual and intestinal cramps. Carminative and thus forms a part of tea mixtures for babies. The carvon contained in the seeds is excellent for disinfecting the intestines, it is known to kill bacteria and fungi. The young green leaves are mixed into salads and, directly before serving, into soups. Besides flavouring potato and cabbage-based foods and meat dishes it is often sprinkled on top of bread and other bakery products [Vermeulen, 2005: 78].*

Mint, peppermint (*Menthae piperita – nane*): it is grown and known worldwide for the active agent in its leaf and its essential oil. It was first transferred from the Holy Land to Greece and from there with the help of merchants to the countries and Asia and Europe. The active agent is in the leaf which is used in popular medicine as a tea for enhancing the appetite, as a carminative, a tranquiliser or against inflammations of the stomach and the intestines. Used as a gargle it helps sore throats, or as a compress against inflammations. Women tie a few leaves of mint over their womb to help fertility. In Erzurum women in childbed used to drink mint tea against cramps of the lower abdomen [Rácz, 2013: 514-517].

Oregano, wild marjoram (*Origanum vulgare – keklikotu*) this plant is grown both as a medical and a culinary herb. This is the herb grown and exported in the largest quantities in Turkey. In folk medicine its tea was given to people to combat internal infections. For sore throats and bronchitis or for aiding digestion they made a stronger tincture [Vermeulen, 2005: 211-212]. As a cooking herb it is used for sauces, on pizzas, for pasta and meat dishes (grilled or roasted), for salads (raw), or for flavouring vinegar, beer and other alcoholic beverages.

Paprika (*Capsicum annuum – Kırmızı biber*) Earlier we have already spoken about the spreading of paprika in Turkey and Hungary. Depending on its type it can be sweet (used for salads or too cook), very strong and hot (Cayenne or Chili paprika) which is used as a spice either raw or dried. Red pepper is also used in a dried form and crushed to larger flakes. It is used in a wide array of foods. Today, *stew (pörkölt* in Hungarian) and *gulyás* are unimaginable without the flavour and colour it produces. It is a basic ingredient and spice in soups, meat dishes, pastas and salads in raw, boiled, steamed, fried, grilled or dried forms (whole, diced or ground). It is an important raw material and spice for various lecho type dishes.

Tomato (*Solanum lycopersicum – Domates*) tomato is another vegetable and herb which came to Hungary with Turkish mediation. Its first written mention occurred in a catalogue by one Heindel in 1651 [Surányi, 1985: 216-218]. Besides gastronomic use it also has considerable medical effects. The alkaloid called tomatin is used to produce creams against fungoid infections and inflammations. In folk medicine a compress of green and red tomatoes was used to suck out

open and poisonous wounds, swollen sores [Rácz, 2013: 585]. Tomatoes first became popular as an ornamental plant, today they are one of the most wide-spread herb and vegetable. It is used widely – in sauces, salads, pickles, drinks, in a puréed form (often as raw material or flavouring for the former), in soups and lecho types of foods. It is excellent for enhancing the flavour of meats.

Spinach (*Spinacia oleracea – Ispanak*) this is a cultivated plant with a slight laxative effect and a high iron content. It is used as a vegetable to cook and a salad. Turkish people eat it raw as a salad.

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum – Maydanoz*) this is a widely known medical herb in popular medicine due to its digestive and diuretic effect. There are many sub-species which differ either in the shape of the root (root parsley), or its length or thickness or in the leaf (leaf parsley), which can be smooth or frilled. In the kitchen they use both the root and the leaves as flavouring or raw material for soups, side-dishes, meat dishes, salads, but frilled leaves are also used for gastronomic decoration due to their bizarre appearance.

Rosemary (*Rozmarinus Officinalis – kush dili*) this plant is popular in Turkey both as a gastronomic and a medical herb. The tea is taken against stomach and intestinal complaints; the extract is rubbed to ease the pain of rheumatic joints. It probably came to Europe through Turkish mediation. The alcoholic extract or rosemary was the first distilled perfume used in Europe (Aqua Reginae Hungaricae). During the Great Plague there were many superstitious methods of protection existing among the public and the medical profession alike. Melius himself warns, “...although its smoke will purify a house where Death is present, but it will only get rid of the smell, not the Death itself.” In Hungary today it is known mostly from folk songs, but in Transylvanian folk cuisine its use as a herb is still widely known [Bartha, 1993: 41]. Before the appearance of refrigerators people used to rub dried and ground rosemary leaves into meat which used to preserve it for a long time – it did not go off and received a fresh flavour. The preservative effect is also the basis of its medical quality [Rácz, 2013: 635]. It is used in many dishes, mostly to flavour meats, primarily roasts, soups and salads.

Carrots (*Daucus carota subsp. Sativus – Havuch*) are an important vegetable and vitamin source originally from Asia. Its use is versatile. In its raw form it is used as a salad. In cooking it is a raw material or flavouring for soups, sauces, gravies and meat dishes. Baby carrots are used for pickling.

Cloves (*Syzygium aromaticum, formerly Caryophyllus aromaticus*) is the scented bud of a tropical tree on the Spice Islands of the West Indies [Rácz, 2013: 686-688]. It will significantly modify the flavour and bring about a special aroma if added to ham or cabbage. In popular medicine chewing a clove stopped toothache [Vermeulen, 2005: 281]. It is also good against digestive problems. It is a versatile spice used for meats and sweets alike.

Carob (*Ceratonia siliqua – akasya*) the fruit when ripe contains 30% saccharide as well as pectin, tannins and the essential oil which creates the flavour so characteristic of the fruit of the St. John's fruit tree. Ground carob stops diarrhoea and protects the intestines from excitants. The pressed juice of the seed is used against vomiting and reduces hunger. It was first cultivated in the East, and we have the Arabs to thank for spreading it, who make a fruit syrup from it called kaftan – a substance known to purify the voice and thus well known among singers. The seed when dried has a very constant weight and this was used for a long time in weighing precious stones – the word keration, meaning seed, is the root of the word karat still used today for the weight of gold [Rácz, 2013: 690-691]. Carob syrup is one of the most commonly used syrups in Turkish cuisine when it comes to adding a sweet flavour to any dish. The candied variant of the fruit is also eaten.

Garden onion (*Allium cepa – sogan*) is a vegetable and flavouring of primary importance in Turkish households. It enhances appetite if consumed in yoghurt together with chicory (*Cichorium intybus–hindıba*) and vinegar. It makes the body more resilient and onion juice mixed with honey improves the eyesight. In Erzurum if a pregnant woman is threatened with premature birth they make her drink the juice of onion skin. The external, yellowy brown skin has long been known and

used for dyeing wool and fabrics. It produces a pleasant yellow or olive-green colour depending on the tan used first. It is highly valued, hence the proverbial warning that onion skin is the shirt of angels, it must not be burnt. Popular belief also holds other prohibitions – on Friday nights you are not allowed to eat onions and when there is a waning moon you are not allowed to plant onions or work the land in any way at all. Small children all know the riddle ‘A bearded old man grows underground – what is it?’ (*Yer altında sakallı baba* [Bearded Father Underground]) the answer being none other than onion [Bartha, 1993: 44-45]. Popular belief also holds that a string of onions worn around the neck is able to keep the devil at bay. It prevents disease and is an excellent medical herb [Vermeulen, 2005: 34-35]. It is used as raw material or flavouring in several dishes. Cream of onion soup is not only delicious – it is much recommended in the autumn and winter period against colds. It provides the basis for pörkölt and other stews and determines their thickness. It is used widely for soups, meats, pastas and salads, boiled, fried, steamed, raw or grilled.

Sage (*Salvia officinalis* – *ada chayi, kutas bitki*) the active agent is in the leaves and the flowers. As a dyeing plant it will colour wool yellow if tanned with alum, light brown if tanned with chrome and greenish grey if tanned with iron sulphate [Bartha, 1993: 45]. Pour hot water over the flowers and used the liquid to purify the urinary tract, to stop draining the strength by sweating or to cure stomach complaints. The leaf is used frequently as an element of herb mixtures both fresh and dried. It makes for excellent flavouring for roast meats and salads.

Celeriac Zeller (*Apium graveolens* – *Kereviz*). In popular medicine it is used widely as a diuretic. It is not to be used by pregnant women. Commonly advised as a remedy against joint aches, rheumatism and asthma [Vermeulen, 2005: 47]. It is known to enhance sexual desire. Celeriac is grown both for its leaves and its root. The leaf is used fresh or dried and crushed; the root is used fresh cut into round slices or diced fine and dried. It is a flavouring and raw material used for soups, meat dishes, sauces, gravies and salads.

These are the herbs and spices used most widely by Turkish people living in Hungary.

Conclusion. To sum up, my investigations have led me to the conclusion that Turkish cuisine and gastronomy has always been rich in the use of herbs and spices which so magically enhance the flavour of our foods. These have remained constant as time passed, even though new ones have been incorporated due to various social, commercial and weather influences, but we can safely declare that overall, the traditional and authentic kitchen of the Turks has retained its ancient gastro-culture passed down for centuries.

Sun-drying is not a novel technique, as the migrant peoples of the Oriental Hun empire (Hungarians, Turks and other ethnic groups) already used this method to preserve a great portion of the food they produced. In Turkey this is natural to this very day. They sun-dry their tomatoes, paprika, aubergines and other cultivated plants. Sun-drying is also used for juicy fruits (plums, apricots, dates, figs, apples and grapes).

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