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Early Period of Islamic Culinary Art and Culture by M. Ömür Akkor (2022)*

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Abstract

The author completed his undergraduate education at Uludağ University, Department of Economics. The author, who has been working on culinary history and culture in various excavation sites in Turkey for about 10 years, has 26 books on culinary culture and food histories. In addition to these works he has carried out, he has been traveling in Turkey for 26 years. Having completed his travels on the basis of Turkey's provinces, Akkor continues to explore every city, country by country today. In the first part, Akkor talks about short few years he spent in Kilis, where he was born, and some memories of those years while he talks about the table manners and kitchen practices in general in the second part "Culinary Culture of the Period". In the third part, he initially mentions the basic foodstuffs. In the following part of the same section, the foods belonging to the Early Period mentioned in the Qur'an and Hadith-i Sharifs and the recipes of the products prepared with these foods are given. After every two pages and recipes, two pages are supported with images of plates decorated with Islamic art and photographs of the prepared products.

Keywords: Early Period, Islamic Culinary Art, Islamic Culinary Culture.

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1. Introduction

The author Akkor, who completed his undergraduate degree in the departments of Economics at Uludağ University, has been conducting studies on culinary history and its culture at different excavations sites in different parts of Turkey for nearly 10 years. The author, who has a number of books on culinary culture and food history, has travelled in Turkey for 26 years and he continues to do so. Throughout the book, Early Period Islamic Cuisine associated with the Period of the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) and the Four Caliphs is mentioned. The book divided into three parts is basically consists of the sections named: “Getting Started”, “Culinary Culture in the Period” and “Dishes in the Period”. In the book, where the basic culinary information of the Early Islamic Period and food groups in the Hadiths are mentioned, it focuses densely on food recipes.

In the first chapter, “Getting Started”, the author starts the book talking about his childhood days in Kilis and the time people came together and spent time in the tomb of Sheikh Mansur Simati in Kilis. It is thought that the author emphasizes the similarities with Islamic Culinary Culture by mentioning the traditions such as offering food in this tomb. While talking about the Early Period of Islamic Cuisine throughout the book, the focus is on the Period of the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) and the Four Caliphs.

In the “Period Culinary Culture” section called the second part of the book, while it is stated that the equipment we use today that prepared with different materials were also used at that time, and some of these equipment were exemplified. While it is stated that there is generally not any concept of an independent kitchen in the Arab society, which mostly lived in tents in the early periods, it is stated that although it does not fully reflect the kitchen in today’s sense, there are also sections reserved for preparing food in tents. It is expressed that in this period many number of the tools similar to today were being used in the kitchens. It is stated that the differences from today’s equipment are the materials that were used in equipment production. It is also stated that while utensils are usually made of wood, especially date palm, cooking equipment is made of copper, earth or stone, the equipment used for the storage of products such as honey and oil is generally prepared from leather.

While emphasizing the importance of offering food in this period, it is expressed that the treats made at the banquets are seen as an indication the wealth of the people. At the same time, the importance of providing food for those who come to Mecca for Hajj is emphasized. Although this practice was called “Rifade”, it was stated that this tradition continued until the end of the period of the Four Caliphs.

It is stated that Arab cuisine was influenced by the cuisines of neighbouring countries in this period, the effects of Iranian cuisine were particularly evident in Arabic cuisine and products from these cuisines were also included in the invitations. In the cuisine of the period, it was advised that drinking water should be pure, clear, coming out of the source and that it should be protected from sun and wind. At the same time, it is mentioned that with the advice of the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh), attention was paid to the issues such as leaving the table before getting full, not consuming the food when it is too hot, and feeding those who are hungry.

Bread is shown as one of the most important food of the period in the “Period Foodstuffs” section, which is called the third part of the book. It is expressed that bread, which was initially produced from barley and wheat, diversified over time and also produced from rice and corn. It is mentioned that bread made from rice was mostly produced in the form of lavash, however, it was mostly consumed by the poor. It is stated that bread could be consumed only as a single meal. Also in this period, dried cheese called "Ekit" is mentioned. At the same time, a product called "Sevik" is mentioned, which is obtained by roasting and pounding cereals and used in some dishes and bread making. In the period, it is mentioned that “black pepper, cumin, ginger, cress, mustard, nigella sativa l as spices to flavour the food,

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“fresh mint, basil, musk, cinnamon, rose water” to add flavour to the dishes, “saffron, spinach” to colour foods; “citrus, verjuice, sumac, vinegar and lemon” to add sourness, “dates, honey, grapes, figs” are used to add sweetness.

It is also stated that basic products such as “Leek, onion, garlic, celery, zucchini, gherkin, cucumber, tallow, clarified butter, butter, lard, olive oil, sesame oil” were used in this period. It was written by Akkor that “sheep, cattle, camel, chicken, and fish meat” as well as “rabbit” and “some birds” meats were consumed as animal sources. After this general information mentioned in the book, the book continues with the products mentioned in the Qur’an and Hadith-I Sharifs and the recipes in which those products were used. These products are listed as “date”, “bread”, “olive and olive oil”, “gherkin and cucumber”, “zucchini”, “lentils”, “celery”, “garlic”, “ginger”, “mustard”, “gigella sativa”, “onion”, “basil”, “citrus”, “herise/keskek /asur (dishes made of pounded meat and wheat), “meat”, “bird meat”, “qudret halva”, “chard”, “honey”, “vinegar”, “milk”, “musk”, “pomegranate”, “fig”, “grape”, “quince”, “butter”. After these products and the recipes prepared with these products, the book is concluded with the measurement chart and references.

2. Conclusion

In the book, information about the Islamic Culinary Culture in the period of Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) and the Four Caliphs, the food groups of the period and the recipes of the products prepared at that time are included. For the food groups and recipes mentioned in the book, the Qur’an and Hadith-I Sharifs are cited.

Although there is useful information about the period’s culinary culture, table manners, equipment and product groups, this information is not considered sufficient. When the book is generally evaluated, it mainly consists of recipes and visuals. Since the title is so comprehensive, the readers may expect to find more about Islamic Culinary and Culture in early period which is slightly discussed.

In most of the book, the Qur’an and Hadith-I Sharifs are cited as references and in the recipes of the food and products prepared with these food, cup or spoon measures are used for many different product groups. This way of displaying the amount in the book is not seen accurate. It is very important that the recipes are prepared correctly in order to ensure the continuity of local dishes (Aydoğdu & Mızrak, 2017). However, in the “Measurement Chart” section at the end of the book, the equivalents of these measurements are given. Along with the fact that this table is thought to enrich the book, it is considered that the ingredients in the recipe should be expressed in the correct unit of the measure in the products recipe section (Zencir, Özoğul, Göde & Ekincek, 2018).

In addition to this information, the plate images of Islamic Art used throughout the book and the product photos after the product recipes section are seen as an essential richness for the book. The existence of the book is very important for the literature in order to evaluate the subject in a wider perspective. At this point, the book written by Akkor makes sense on the grounds of preparing a book where product recipes will be prepared in more detail and information about Early Period Islamic Culinary Art and Culture will be conveyed in much more detail.

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