

# CUSTARD SLICE (KOTORSKA PAŠTA): TRACING THE CULINARY JOURNEY FROM FRENCH ORIGINS TO KOTOR'S LOCAL IDENTITY

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## *Abstract*

This paper is dedicated to the study of custard slice—a cake that represents a significant part of the cultural heritage of the Bay of Kotor, while also carrying a deeply rooted Mediterranean cultural heritage. Starting from the theoretical foundations of Claude Fischler, who asserts that food is an inseparable part of identity, and Massimo Montanari's starting point that food is culture, I explore the historical background, the making technique, and the cultural importance of this dessert that arrived in Kotor via Italy. The dessert's unique position within both local and broader Mediterranean cuisine highlights how food reflects the cultural complexities of the region. The gastronomic identity of this area was shaped by recipes of the most diverse origins, through constant contact with different people, who came, left, stayed, and assimilated with the local population. These interactions—be they cultural, economic, or political—created a culinary landscape that is as diverse as the people who influenced it. Considering the long-term presence of this delicacy in the gastronomy of Kotor, the aim of this paper is to document, for the first time, the evolution of *kotorska pašta*—not *cremeschnitte*, as it is often mistakenly called—by analysing historical sources, recipes, and narratives of individuals from the local community. This study reveals the ways in which this dessert has evolved, not only as a recipe but also as a symbol of local identity and continuity. By looking at the shifting contexts in which the custard slice has been prepared and consumed, this paper discusses how it reflects the social and cultural changes in the region over the centuries. My intention is to revive the story of this culinary masterpiece, understanding its importance in the local context and beyond. In doing so, I aim to connect the dessert's rich history with its modern-day variations, highlighting its enduring relevance in Kotor's culinary traditions. The methodology of this paper includes the study of historical documents, interviews with local residents, and the analysis of recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation. These sources offer unique insights into how the custard slice has maintained its place in the local culinary repertoire, even as it has adapted to changing tastes and influences. The combination of these methods allows me to create

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a comprehensive representation of the custard slice, from its beginnings to contemporary adaptations. The paper contributes significantly by documenting cultural heritage through the lens of Mediterranean food culture, enriching the global understanding of local culinary traditions. The study of this dessert provides a powerful example of how food is a living element of culture, constantly evolving yet retaining its roots. In exploring the custard slice, we gain deeper insight into the interplay between culture, identity, and the ways in which food continues to shape and be shaped by the communities that sustain it.

*Keywords:* Custard slice—koterska pašta, Kotor, Mediterranean cuisine, cultural heritage, gastronomy.

### *Introduction: Food and Cultural Identity*

Food is not merely a practical necessity; it is a cultural expression deeply embedded in the identity of individuals and communities. As anthropologist Claude Fischler argues, food is a “marker of identity” that not only satisfies physiological needs but also shapes individual and collective self-perception.<sup>1</sup> The relationship between food and culture is fundamental to understand how food functions beyond sustenance. The preparation, consumption, and sharing of food help form the narrative of social interaction, memory, and belonging. In this light, food transcends its material properties, acting as a medium through which personal and communal identities are constructed, communicated, and preserved. The cultural significance of food is particularly evident in the Mediterranean, a region historically defined by its diverse culinary traditions, geographical influences, and intercultural exchanges. As Carol Helstosky notes in *Food Culture in the Mediterranean*, the region’s cuisine reflects a rich tapestry of historical interactions and environmental factors.<sup>2</sup>

Massimo Montanaro’s assertion that “food is culture” underscores the idea that food traditions are not static; rather, they evolve, adapt, and reflect the ongoing dialogue between individuals, society, and history.<sup>3</sup> Food is imbued with symbolic value that ties individuals to their heritage, their community, and the larger world. The act of sharing a meal, or in this case, a dessert, can be seen as an embodiment of cultural practices and values, one that transcends generations. In this sense, food functions as a living tra-

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- 1 Claude Fischler, *Food, Self and Identity*, translated excerpts, *Social Science Information*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1988, pp. 275-292.
  - 2 Carol Helstosky, *Food Culture in the Mediterranean*. Greenwood Press, 2009, 45.
  - 3 Massimo Montanaro. *Food Is Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004, 12.

dition, embodying the accumulated experiences, beliefs, and social norms of a community. The culinary landscape of any region, particularly one like the Bay of Kotor, is shaped by both external influences and indigenous practices, illustrating a dynamic exchange of cultural knowledge.

The culinary traditions of Kotor, with their profound Mediterranean roots, provide a vivid example of the intersection between food and cultural identity. As Fischler notes, food offers a means of preserving cultural memory. It serves as both a personal and collective history, binding individuals to their ancestors and their environment.<sup>4</sup> The *kotorska pašta*, a custard slice, exemplifies this process. While it originated in France, its adaptation and eventual establishment in Kotor highlight the region's broader historical and cultural interactions. Its inclusion in the Kotor culinary repertoire represents not only a historical connection to the French culinary tradition but also the region's unique way of integrating external influences while preserving local customs. The presence of such a dessert in Kotor is not a mere coincidence but a testament to the evolving nature of food as it adapts to the specificities of place, people, and tradition.

In considering the role of food in shaping identity, it is also essential to engage with those who have questioned the significance of food in cultural representation. Some critics argue that food alone cannot be a definitive marker of identity. Sociologist Arjun Appadurai, for example, discusses the idea of food as part of "global cultural flows" in which food becomes commodified and detached from its original context, thus losing its cultural meaning.<sup>5</sup> While this critique brings valuable insights into the complexities of globalization, it overlooks the ways in which food continues to function as a symbol of local identity and cultural continuity. Even as food circulates globally, it is frequently reinterpreted and localized, maintaining its role as a site of cultural negotiation and identity formation.

Moreover, as food continues to globalize, some critics argue that its significance as a cultural identifier diminishes in favour of globalized tastes. For example, John Urry posits that global flows of food products lead to the erosion of distinct culinary identities, particularly when popular fast foods and industrialized food systems dominate local markets.<sup>6</sup> However, such views can be countered by the persistence of local culinary traditions,

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4 Claude Fischler, *Food, Self and Identity*, translated excerpts, *Social Science Information*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1988, pp. 275-292.

5 Arjun Appadurai. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 33.

6 John Urry. *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Society*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications, 2000, 51.

which adapt to globalized food cultures while still asserting their unique identities. The *kotorska pašta*, in its current form, is a case in point. Though it is part of a broader European dessert tradition, it has been shaped by local tastes, available ingredients, and cultural preferences, thus maintaining its significance within the local community.

Furthermore, the analysis of sweet foods, especially desserts like the *kotorska pašta*, is particularly insightful. Sweet foods, often associated with indulgence and celebration, hold symbolic meaning within various cultures. As culinary historian Sidney Mintz suggests, “Sugar, and its related products, have come to symbolize prosperity, indulgence, and hospitality.”<sup>7</sup> In the Mediterranean context, sweets are not only consumed for their taste but also for their cultural and social significance. Desserts often mark special occasions, celebrations, and social rituals, reinforcing communal ties and shared values. The *kotorska pašta*, with its layers of rich custard and flaky pastry, is a dessert consumed during significant moments, whether for family gatherings or festive occasions. Its sweetness is symbolic of the joy of sharing, the celebration of life, and the expression of hospitality that defines Mediterranean cultures. This emphasis on hospitality is deeply rooted in the Mediterranean lifestyle, where conviviality and strong community bonds are central elements.<sup>8</sup>

As we explore the evolution of the *kotorska pašta*, we also explore the continuity of Mediterranean foodways, which reflect both the historical depth and the resilience of local culinary practices. The pastry’s journey—from France to Italy and to Kotor—serves as a metaphor for the broader process of cultural diffusion and adaptation. It highlights the role of food as both a cultural artefact and a dynamic force of change, linking past traditions to contemporary practices.

### *Historical Origins of the Custard Slice*

The custard slice, or *millefeuille*, has a rich and intricate history that reveals the interconnectedness of food, culture, and historical evolution of culinary practices and techniques. The journey of this dessert from its early origins in France to its spread throughout Europe and

7 Sidney W. Mintz. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Viking, 1985, 98.

8 Xavier F. Medina, et al. “Looking for Commensality: On Culture, Health, Heritage, and the Mediterranean Diet.” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 18, no. 5, 2021, p. 2605.

eventual arrival in Kotor, Montenegro, provides valuable insights into the ways in which culinary practices serve as conduits for cultural exchange and identity formation. Understanding the origins and evolution of the custard slice not only enriches our appreciation of this dessert but also offers a lens through which we can examine the broader history of Mediterranean cuisine and its influence on southern European culinary tradition.

The earliest recorded version of the custard slice, known in French as *millefeuille* (meaning “thousand layers”), is attributed to the late 17th century, specifically to the French chef François Massialot. Massialot, a prominent figure in the court of King Louis XIV, was instrumental in shaping the culinary landscape of France during this period. His cookbook, *Le Cuisinier Royal et Bourgeois* (1691), contains a recipe that closely resembles the modern custard slice, featuring multiple layers of puff pastry and custard cream. Massialot’s work, which was part of a broader culinary movement aimed at refining French cuisine, reflects a growing emphasis on both aesthetic presentation and technical precision in pastry making. The fact that Massialot is often credited with the creation of the *millefeuille* suggests that France, particularly the royal court, was at the forefront of the development of sophisticated pastries during the late 17th century.

Massialot’s *millefeuille* was not an isolated invention but rather part of a larger culinary tradition that sought to elevate food to an art form. The late 17th century saw the development of a sophisticated French culinary style that emphasized both aesthetic presentation and technical precision in pastry making, as evidenced by Massialot’s own cookbook, *Le Cuisinier Royal et Bourgeois*, which illustrates the growing trend of transforming cooking into a noble pursuit.<sup>9</sup> The proliferation of such desserts in French culinary culture speaks to the role of food as a symbol of both social status and artistic achievement. However, the custard slice’s history is not confined to France alone. Its subsequent spread across Europe provides a striking example of how food travels through both voluntary and forced means, reflecting the complex interactions between politics, war, and trade. For instance, the Napoleonic Wars in the early 19th century saw French culinary traditions, including pastries like *millefeuille*, being introduced to other parts of Europe as French chefs were captured or relocated due to military movements. Similarly, the expansion of European trade routes during the colonial period facilitated the exchange of

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9 Peter Ferguson. *The Culinary Arts in France: A Historical Perspective*. Culinary Institute Press, 2004.

ingredients and culinary techniques across borders, further influencing the spread of such pastries.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most significant events in the history of the custard slice's diffusion was the military campaigns of Napoleon Bonaparte in the early 19th century. Napoleon's conquests, which spanned much of Europe and into Russia, were not only military in nature but also cultural. As Napoleon's armies moved across Europe, they carried with them not only the language and political ideologies of France but also its culinary traditions. The custard slice benefited from this cultural transfer. The dessert, known as *Napoleon* in several countries, is a direct result of the cultural diffusion that accompanied Napoleon's military campaigns.<sup>11</sup> As food historian Jean-Louis Flandrin notes, the spread of culinary practices during this period was often intertwined with the expansion of empires, serving as a reflection of the political and cultural dynamics at play.

The spread of the custard slice during the Napoleonic Wars illustrates how food serves as both a cultural artefact and a medium for identity formation. In the case of *millefeuille* and its variations, such as *Napoleon* in the countries Napoleon conquered, the dessert became not only a symbol of French culture but also a sign of political power. The name "Napoleon" itself reflects the direct association of the dessert with the French emperor, underscoring the close relationship between food and national identity during times of conflict.

As the custard slice (it was made with three thin layers of puff pastry and two equally thin layers of creamy custard. On top, it was decorated with a smooth icing sugar glaze, beautifully complemented by an intricate chocolate lattice pattern) moved beyond France, it found particular resonance in Italy, where it became especially popular in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region. After Napoleon's conquest of Venice in 1797, the dessert made its way into the local Italian culinary tradition. This movement was not just a simple culinary transfer but rather an adaptation of the *millefeuille* to suit local tastes and available ingredients. As culinary scholar Giorgio Meloni argues, food migrations often involve a process of adaptation in which the

10 A. F. Smith. *The Oxford Companion to Food*. 2nd ed. Oxford University Press, 2001. David, Harvey. *The Culinary History of Europe: Trade, Politics, and the Spread of Food*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

11 The spread of the *millefeuille* and its variations is linked to the political and military influence of Napoleon's empire. Desserts like *Napoleonka* (in former Yugoslavia, particularly in Croatia and Serbia) and *Napoleon* (in Russia) adapted the original French recipe, reflecting local tastes and influences during this period of cultural exchange (Davidson, 2006; Ferguson, 2004).

local context plays a crucial role in shaping the final product.<sup>12</sup> In Italy, the dessert was given local names such as *carsolina* and *sfoiada*, reflecting the regional culinary vernacular. The adoption of the custard slice in Italy also led to important modifications. Italian versions of the dessert were typically larger than the French *millefeuille*, measuring about 6x12 cm, or twice the size of the original.<sup>13</sup> Also, there are local variations in the additions to the cream, which also make a significant difference in the taste between the French millefeuille and the Italian sfogliata. This adaptation was likely influenced by Italian preferences for heartier portions and a more practical approach to dessert serving sizes.

The fact that the custard slice was adapted to suit local Italian tastes demonstrates how food traditions are not static but constantly evolve in response to changing cultural, geographical, and historical contexts. The lack of glaze on the Italian *sfogliata*, for example, reflects a preference for simplicity and a desire to focus on the flavours of the pastry itself rather than on decorative elements. The larger size of the Italian version, meanwhile, may have been influenced by the regional practice of sharing desserts in a communal setting, where a larger portion size would be more conducive to group consumption. The lack of glaze on the Italian *sfogliata* can be viewed as part of a broader culinary trend in the late 17th and 18th centuries, which emphasized simplicity and the natural qualities of ingredients. This shift in culinary aesthetics aligned with the broader philosophical movements of the *Enlightenment*, a period that championed rationality, simplicity, and the rejection of excess in both art and daily life. As thinkers of the period began advocating for a more straightforward approach to living, the same ideals were reflected in culinary practices. The *sfogliata*, with its minimalistic presentation, was emblematic of this cultural shift, where the focus was placed on enhancing the natural flavours of the pastry rather than on elaborate decorations or heavy embellishments.<sup>14</sup> This desire for simplicity was not just a culinary preference, but also a reflection of the cultural and intellectual currents of the time. The Enlightenment's emphasis on clarity, balance, and natural beauty found expression in many aspects of life, including food.

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12 Giorgio Meloni. *Il Cibo e la Storia: Tradizioni culinarie nel Mediterraneo*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011.

13 Maria Bertoli. *Cucina del Friuli-Venezia Giulia: Tradizioni e innovazioni*. Trieste: Edizioni del Litorale, 2010.

14 Alan Davison. *The Oxford Companion to Food*. 2nd ed. Oxford University Press, 2006. Peter Ferguson. *The Culinary Arts in France: A Historical Perspective*. Culinary Institute Press, 2004.

From Italy, the custard slice spread to the Adriatic region, eventually reaching the coastal city of Kotor in Montenegro. Kotor, with its rich history of trade and cultural exchange, was an ideal setting for the introduction of new culinary traditions. The custard slice was embraced in Kotor, where it was known by its first local name *švoljata*. The dessert's arrival in Kotor can be traced back to the 19th century, likely as a result of trade and cultural interactions between Kotor and Italy. The local adaptation of the dessert is indicative of the broader Mediterranean culinary exchange that took place during this period, as goods and ideas travelled across the sea, bringing with them new food traditions. The adoption of the *sfogliata* in Kotor initially highlights the city's cultural contacts with other Mediterranean regions, as it reflects the exchange of culinary practices. Over time, however, it has become a marker of cultural identity for the Kotor community, symbolizing the blending of various traditions into a distinct local food culture.

The custard slice's journey from France to Italy and finally to Kotor is a testament to the power of food as a tool for cultural transmission and identity formation. The dessert, which began as a French court pastry, has become a symbol of the cultural exchange that occurred during the Napoleonic era and beyond. As culinary historian Elisabeth Rozin notes, "food is a dynamic reflection of both local and global forces, shaped by the interplay of history, geography, and human agency."<sup>15</sup> In the case of the custard slice, its evolution from a French creation to Italian and Montenegrin delicacies reflects how food can transcend national borders and become part of a shared culinary tradition. However, it is important to note that while these desserts share common origins, they are often presented as distinct and authentic delicacies, shaped by the cultural and national identities of each region. This phenomenon raises the question of whether this shared culinary history is truly a reflection of collective heritage, or if it serves the purposes of gastronationalism, where food is used to reinforce national identities.<sup>16</sup>

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15 Elisabeth Rozin. *Culinary Traditions in Europe: A Comparative Approach*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

16 Arjun Appadurai. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press, 2001. Michele DeSourcey. *The Globalization of Food: Culinary Identities and the Rise of the National Food Culture*. *Journal of Food Culture*, 2010.



*The Arrival of Custard Slice in Kotor*

Kotor, a charming coastal city in Montenegro, was part of the Venetian Republic from 1420 to 1797, a time during which its culture, architecture, and culinary practices were heavily influenced by Venetian customs. The Venetian Republic, as a maritime empire, not only facilitated trade but also the movement of people, ideas, and food across its vast territories. As A. G. Appadurai (1981) emphasizes, “The movement of people across borders is not merely the movement of individuals, but of their ideas, customs, and culinary traditions, which travel with them, adapting to new contexts while maintaining traces of their origins”(495). Kotor, with its strategic location on the Adriatic coast, absorbed the culinary influences of Italian coastal cities, particularly those in the Veneto region, which were already interwoven with similar food practices due to their shared access to the Mediterranean. Thus, it is not surprising that the early culinary landscape of Kotor reflected a strong Italian influence.

However, the specific introduction of Italian pastries such as the *kotorska pašta* (custard slice) occurred much later, in the 19th century. This pastry’s journey can be traced back to the gradual spread of French pastry techniques across Europe, which were then embraced and modified by Italian bakers. As Italy became more interconnected with France and other European regions in the 1800s, these French-influenced pastries began to surface in Italy before reaching the Adriatic coast, and eventually Kotor.<sup>17</sup> By around 1895, this new wave of pastry culture reached Kotor, introduced by the Rainis family, who played a pivotal role in the local culinary scene. The Rainis family, originally from Udine in northern Italy, opened the first pastry shop in Kotor, known locally as *pašticerija*, in 1895. Andrea Rainis, who had moved to Kotor five years prior to the shop’s opening, became a central figure in bringing this culinary innovation to the city. The pastry shop, located in the heart of Kotor’s main square,<sup>18</sup> quickly became a beloved establishment for locals and visitors alike. “The introduction of a new pastry was not just the arrival of a treat,” as noted by culinary historian C. L. Threlfall (1992), “but the beginning of a social ritual where food becomes a symbol of the meeting between two cultures.”(532) The Rainis

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17 Alan Davison. *The Oxford Companion to Food*. 2nd ed. Oxford University Press, 2006. Massimo Montanari. *The Culture of Food*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006. Lidia Guarnaschelli. *The Food of Italy: A Journey for Food Lovers*. New York: Rizzoli, 2012. M. Hess. *Cuisine and Culture: A History of Food and People*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

18 Currently, Prva banka is located at that place.

family brought with them not only pastries from their homeland but also regional specialties such as the “švoljata,” a custard slice, which would eventually become the *kotorska pašta*. These pastries, alongside other Italian treats like “fave dei morti” (almond cookies),<sup>19</sup> “bigné” (today’s cream puffs or today’s profiteroles) were warmly embraced by local pastry chefs, who integrated them into Kotor’s evolving food culture. *Pišinger* was also present in Kotor at the time. While it is commonly accepted that *pišinger* is originally a Viennese specialty, its arrival in Kotor reflects a complex interplay of historical and cultural influences. It is plausible that this delicacy was introduced to Kotor through Italian channels; however, it is essential to contextualize this within a broader historical framework. The region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, including cities such as Udine and Trieste, was not part of Italy in the modern sense before the mid-20th century. Instead, these areas were integral to the Habsburg Monarchy for centuries prior to World War II.<sup>20</sup> This historical context is significant not only in terms of shifting political borders but also in understanding cultural and culinary exchanges. The deep ties between these northern regions and Austria, particularly Vienna, fostered a strong culinary connection, wherein pastries, confections, and techniques from the imperial capital permeated local traditions.<sup>21</sup> The Habsburg presence in Kotor from 1797 to 1805 further reinforced these influences, embedding Central European elements into the local gastronomy. Thus, while *pišinger* may have reached Kotor through Italian connections, its true origins lie within the Austro-Hungarian culinary sphere, exemplifying the intricate fusion of Mediterranean and Central European traditions that have shaped the region’s gastronomic identity. Recognizing this layered history is essential for understanding not only the trajectory of individual recipes but also the broader cultural framework within which cuisine of the Bay of Kotor has evolved. Kotor’s culinary landscape serves as a testament to the region’s historical position at the crossroads of empires, where Mediterranean ingredients and techniques intertwined with Austro-Hungarian influences, creating a gastronomic heritage that defies simplistic classification. Over-

19 These delicious sweets with a lemon flavor are prepared for the Day of the Dead and All Saints’ Day.

20 Thomas Stigler. *Cultural History of Viennese Cuisine: Recipes and Anecdotes from the Time of the Habsburg Monarchy*. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2015.

21 Daša Ličen. “Reinventing Habsburg Cuisine in Twenty-First Century Trieste.” *Folklore*, vol. 71, 2018, pp. 85-106. Retrieved from: <https://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol71/licen.pdf>

looking this historical and cultural complexity would mean disregarding the very essence of the Bay of Kotor cuisine: a dynamic interplay of maritime trade, imperial legacies, and local adaptation.

The transmission of these culinary traditions was not limited to specific dishes like *pišinger* but extended through the families and individuals who carried them across generations. The influence of the Rainis family extended beyond just the introduction of pastries. Andrea's children,<sup>22</sup> particularly his daughters, played a role in spreading these culinary traditions further. Two of his daughters, Elvira<sup>23</sup> and Marcella,<sup>24</sup> married in Kotor, further embedding the Rainis family's culinary legacy within the local community. The third daughter, Marietta,<sup>25</sup> moved to Buenos Aires, Argentina, with her husband between the wars. In the 1990s, Captain Vjeko Radimir from Kotor,<sup>26</sup> visiting Buenos Aires, stumbled upon an original *kotorska pašta* in a random pastry shop, suggesting that Marietta had taken the recipe with her to Argentina, thus linking the two continents through this beloved dessert.

Following the departure of the Rainis family to Zagreb due to the onset of World War II, the tradition of the custard slice continued in Kotor through other local pastry chefs. Among them was Mr. Pero Bošković, a well-known pastry chef, who opened his own pastry shop in Kotor's Saint Tryphon square after the war. At Bošković's pastry shop, according to the memories of Kotor residents, there were wonderful cakes. Pero had three sons and two daughters. Our interlocutor, Mr. Dender, knew two of his sons, Jovo and Branko. Pero's wife, Eugenia was Italian. Given the well-documented culinary exchanges between Italy and the Adriatic region, it is plausible that Eugenia introduced certain cake recipes from her homeland. Likewise, Pero's interactions with the Rainis family suggest that local adaptations of foreign pastries were shaped by personal and professional networks. Such processes align with broader patterns of culinary diffusion in port cities, where migration and trade facilitated the blending of diverse gastronomic traditions. Bošković's version of the *kotorska pašta* began to differ from that of the Rainis family's *švoljata*. His custard slice is the one that most closely resembles the current *kotorska pasta*. Unlike the

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22 Andrea Rainis and his wife Andrijana had five children, three daughters and two sons.

23 Elvira was married to Dušan Mijatović, and their son Željko was the husband of the aunt Tonka, the aunt of Mr. Aleksandar Dender, who was our interlocutor and provided valuable information from his family during my research.

24 She was married to Mato Brozičević. Their sons, Nino and Atiglio, lived in Zagreb (Croatia).

25 Her married surname was Duhović.

26 Captain Vjeko Radimir from Kotor was our interlocutor.

Rainis version, Bošković's custard slice was firmer, with three solid layers of pastry and two layers of filling, while Rainis's version was flakier, with crisp pastry layers and a softer filling, which often included maraschino,<sup>27</sup> giving it a unique flavour. His innovative adaptation of the custard slice became the standard in Kotor and remains a symbol of the city's pastry tradition for a while.

The *kotorska pašta* would eventually become a key feature in other pastry shops across Kotor, including *Zdravljak*,<sup>28</sup> which had been a prominent pastry shop in the city prior to and after World War II. Known for its exceptional pastries, *Zdravljak* became famous in the 1960s for its custard slice, as well as other delights like *pišinger* and *štrudel*. Famous Kotor pastry chefs, including Mr. Gojko Vujović, worked at *Zdravljak*, where they honed their skills and contributed to preserving and evolving local pastry traditions.

The evolution of *kotorska pašta* took another turn in the 1960s, when, unfortunately, the pastry shops in Kotor began to close, and with them, the presence of this dessert gradually diminished. During the 1960s, Yugoslavia implemented economic reforms aimed at decentralizing the economy and increasing efficiency. However, despite these reforms, the private sector remained restricted, particularly in areas such as hospitality and retail. The state favoured socially owned enterprises, leading to a decline in the number of private businesses, including pastry shops. One of the key factors was the introduction of high taxes and strict regulations on private entrepreneurs, making it difficult for small private businesses to operate. Additionally, state policy often prioritized collective and state-owned enterprises, further marginalizing the private sector.<sup>29</sup> Despite these challenges, local women in Kotor continued to preserve the tradition of pastry making, but in a more informal manner—often preparing pastries at home or for special occasions. The absence of private pastry shops did not signify the end of the culinary tradition, but rather its transition into domestic kitchens, where women maintained and adapted these practices.

27 Maraschino is cherry liqueur, distilled from the Marasca variety native to the Dalmatian coast, was particularly associated with Zadar, where production had been established since the 18th century. Its distinctive aroma and subtle bitterness made it a prized ingredient in both confections and beverages across Europe.

28 It was first located on the main square "Pjaca od oružja," on the ground floor of the Bjeladinović house, until the mid-1970s, when it moved to the Dojmi tavern (in front of the old town), and later to the square of Saint Tryphun.

29 Milford Bateman. "Small Enterprise Development in the Yugoslav Successor States: Institutions and Institutional Development in a Post-War Environment." *European Journal of Development Research*, 2000, 12(2), 12-38.

This shift reflects broader socio-economic changes in the region, where the state-controlled economy reshaped both the food industry and cultural practices surrounding food. Thus, the decline of local pastry shops in Kotor during the 1960s was not solely driven by changing consumer tastes but was deeply rooted in the political and economic context of socialist Yugoslavia. However, the tradition was not entirely lost. A handful of Kotor women, including Mrs. Melita Krivokapić, Nada Zef, Violeta Milošević and others, began to preserve and make the pastry at home, ensuring that the recipe as adapted by the pastry chef Gojko Vujović, survived in its modified form. Mrs. Krivokapić, who learned the craft from Darka Filipović<sup>30</sup> before her passing, began making and selling the *kotorska pašta* again fifteen years ago, reviving the tradition for future generations.

As local culinary traditions continue to evolve, the *kotorska pašta* stands as a testament to the city's rich cultural heritage, shaped by centuries of migration, trade, and cultural exchange. It is not just a pastry but also a symbol of Kotor's unique position at the crossroads of Adriatic and Mediterranean influences. The persistence of this dish through generations underscores the significance of food in maintaining cultural identity and continuity in a world marked by constant change.

### *A Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Contemporary Recipes*

This section examines the original Italian recipe for “pasta sfoglia” and its adaptation into the contemporary *kotorska pašta*, highlighting the modifications in ingredients and preparation methods that have occurred over time.

#### *Original Italian Recipe: Pasta sfoglia*<sup>31</sup>

This original recipe, considered the first documented and preserved version used in Kotor when the custard slice first arrived, holds significant

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30 Mrs. Darka Franović, originally from Herceg Novi (Montenegro), completed her pastry apprenticeship in the early 1950s. In 1953, she began working at the Zdravljak pastry shop in Kotor, where her supervisor was Mr. Gojko Vujović. He taught her the recipe that was made at the Zdravljak pastry shop in Kotor. (These valuable pieces of information were provided to us via email by Mrs. Melita Krivokapić, in response to our inquiry).

31 The original Italian recipe was provided by Mr. Aleksandar Dender, President of the Italian Community of Montenegro, during an interview in 2023. We take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to him for the invaluable and insightful information he has generously shared with us.

historical value for the region's culinary heritage. Passed down through generations, it was carefully preserved within the Rainis family, with Tonka, Mr. Aleksandar Dender's aunt, playing a key role in safeguarding this traditional recipe. Its importance lies not only in its culinary authenticity but also in its contribution to understanding the evolution of Kotor's gastronomic identity. As part of the broader Mediterranean heritage, this dessert reflects the rich cultural exchanges and culinary traditions that have shaped the region for centuries, connecting local taste with wider Mediterranean influences.

Mr. Dender provided us with a photograph of a yellowed handwritten Italian recipe. The document is composed in a continuous narrative, without distinct sections or bullet points, resembling a letter rather than a list. The handwriting is elegant yet challenging to decipher due to its style, the document's age, and the discoloration of the paper. Despite these challenges, we have transcribed the content. The importance of preserving such traditional recipes cannot be overstated, as accessing the original texts was a challenging task due to their age and the difficulty in interpreting handwritten documents. The act of transcribing this historical recipe is essential in safeguarding cultural heritage and ensuring that both the knowledge of the recipe and the embodied skills required for its preparation is passed down to future generations. As the culinary historian Jean-Louis Flandrin has emphasized, "Recipes are more than just instructions; they are the history of a culture's creativity, identity, and adaptation."<sup>32</sup>

Pasta sfoglia<sup>33</sup>  
 ¼ farina 2 rossi d'uovo  
 ½ bicchier d'acqua  
 il succo di mezzo limone  
 si fa un panetto poscia  
 si fa uno sfoglio entro si  
 mette ¼ di farina con ½ lb.  
 di burro fresco che col ¼ di  
 farina si avrà ben stemperato.

32 Jean-Louis Flandrin. *Food and Society: A Social History of Food*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, 45.

33 The original recipe for *pasta sfoglia* is attributed to the Italian chef Andrea Rainis, whose detailed instructions have been preserved and are now presented here. The text is transcribed exactly as it appears in the original. Since it was handwritten on paper, the words that were split at the line breaks on the page are also preserved in the transcription. Additionally, it was transcribed with all errors, which have been faithfully retained in this version.

Sfoglio che resti come una  
 massa si lavora molto colle  
 mani morbida quando è tutto  
 amalgamato si piega e  
 ripiega un 10 volte a mo  
 di fazzoletto si fanno che forme  
 si vuole o sfogli cartacee ecc.

Here is the English translation of the original Italian recipe, broken down into ingredients and preparation method for clarity:

*Ingredients:*

¼ flour  
 2 egg yolks  
 ½ glass of water  
 juice of half a lemon  
 ¼ flour  
 ½ lb. of fresh butter

*Preparation method:*

combine the flour, egg yolks, water, and lemon juice to form a dough.  
 roll out the dough into a thin sheet (sfoglia).  
 then, add ¼ of the flour to ½ lb. of fresh butter, mixing it well to create a smooth paste.  
 once the dough is smooth, work it by hand to make it soft.  
 after everything is well combined, fold and refold the dough about 10 times, similar to folding a handkerchief.  
 shape the dough into any form desired, such as paper-thin layers (sfoglie), etc.

The modern *kotorska pašta*, as prepared by Mrs. Melita Krivokapić,<sup>34</sup> a master pastry chef from Kotor, incorporates several modifications to the traditional recipe:

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34 This recipe was provided to us during our research and the interview conducted in 2023 by Mrs. Milita Krivokapić, to whom we extend our gratitude. Not only did she share the recipe orally, but she also generously offered to demonstrate each step of its preparation. Additionally, this recipe, under Mrs. Krivokapić's guidance, was printed for the first time by the Kotor Tourism Organization during the summer of 2024 in the form of a brochure. With the invaluable assistance of Tourism Organization staff members Mrs. Vanja Petrović and Mr. Marko Ciovčić, I was granted access to the printed version of the recipe prior to its official release, which coincided with the celebration of the Kotor custard slice festival ("Fešta kotorske pašte"). This early access allowed me, with their permission, to present it at the 4th Mediterranean Studies Symposium, held in Palermo from June 13 to 16, 2024. I take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to all

*Ingredients:*

500 grams of vegetable shortening  
 500 grams of flour  
 250 ml of cold water  
 1/2 tablespoon of salt  
 7 eggs  
 1 litre of milk  
 120 grams of flour  
 300 grams of sugar  
 2 packets of vanilla sugar

*Making the pastry:*

Mix the flour with a portion of the shortening. Then add the water and let the dough rest for 20 minutes.

Incorporate the remaining shortening into the dough and roll it out into a rectangular pan.

Folding the dough is essential to achieve a layered texture. Fold the dough eight times, folding twice consecutively (repeat four times), then let the dough rest for 15-20 minutes.

Bake the pastry on the back of a baking tray for about 15-20 minutes at 220°C, depending on the oven's strength.

Once the pastry is baked, poke it with a fork.

*Making the cream:*

Whisk the eggs and some cold milk in a bowl. After whisking, add the rest of the hot milk. The whisked mixture is then added to the dry mixture of flour and sugar.

Cook the cream over low heat for 20 minutes until it thickens.

Once the cream is done, add 20 grams of butter to melt, and after stirring, the cream becomes glossy.

When filling, it is crucial that the pastry is cool, and the cream is hot.

*Comparative Analysis*

The evolution of the traditional Italian *pasta sfoglia* into the contemporary *kotorska pašta* reflects significant adaptations driven by ingredient availability, culinary preferences, and environmental factors. While the original Italian recipe omits the cream—likely because *crema pasticciera* was considered a standard and therefore unnecessary to specify—Mrs. Melita Krivokapić's recipe provides a detailed guide for both the pastry and

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persons involved for their recognition of the importance of publishing all this information provided by them in an academic paper, thereby preserving it for future generations.



the cream. Her cream preparation method, which involves whisking eggs with cold milk to prevent curdling, demonstrates a precise and thoughtful approach aimed at preserving the smooth texture of the cream.

This adjustment aligns with the requirements of modern palates and kitchen environments, where control over ingredients and their interaction is paramount. One notable change involves the omission of lemon juice from the dough preparation, a key element in the original recipe. Mrs. Krivokapić explained that locally grown lemons are not available in Kotor throughout the year, and during that time, even supermarket lemons were not consistently available. The lemons that were available were often imported and of lesser quality, making it impractical to include them in the recipe. This highlights a pragmatic adaptation to local conditions, where ingredient availability directly influences culinary practices. Another significant change involves the substitution of lard with vegetable shortening. Mrs. Krivokapić opts for vegetable shortening produced by fabric Zvijezda (Croatia), citing the odor of lard as a deterrent, likely influenced by changes in livestock diets that affect an aftertaste that was less desirable in the pastry. She acknowledges a slight difference in the taste of the pastry layers when using shortening but emphasizes its practicality. Additionally, she highlights the seasonal challenges of working with shortening, noting that summer temperatures soften the fat, complicating the layering process and requiring chilled ingredients to ensure a successful outcome. Interestingly, while powdered milk was used in the past by workers at the pastry shop Zdravljak, Mrs. Krivokapić refrains from using it, as contemporary powdered milk often carries an unpleasant aftertaste that can detract from the cream's flavour.

Her meticulous choice of ingredients reflects a dedication to preserving the authentic taste of *kotorska pašta*, while making concessions to modern ingredient standards and availability. This balance reveals an ongoing negotiation between tradition and innovation, where Ms. Krivokapić adjusts certain elements to adapt to contemporary circumstances without compromising the dish's essence. For example, the substitution of lard with vegetable shortening helps to avoid the undesirable aftertaste influenced by modern livestock feed, while the seasonal unavailability of locally grown lemons led to her practical decision to omit them, ensuring the pastry's continued relevance without sacrificing its core identity. In addition, there is no longer any alcohol in the cream that affects its flavour. The transformation of the recipe also underscores the cultural significance of *kotorska pašta*. Since its arrival in Kotor, the pastry has consistently comprised three layers, maintaining its core identity while allowing for innovations. Mrs. Krivokapić shared with me that the prepa-

ration of just three layers can take up to three hours, emphasizing the labour-intensive nature of this pastry and the skill required to perfect it. Reflecting on the broader implications of these changes, it is evident that culinary traditions evolve in tandem with societal and changes in available resources. This includes factors such as the availability of local ingredients and modern production practices, which influence how traditional recipes are adapted over time. As Michael Pollan notes, “The way we eat represents our most profound engagement with the natural world”.<sup>35</sup> This sentiment aptly captures the dynamic relationship between tradition and adaptation in the case of *kotorska pašta*, where the recipe’s evolution mirrors the changing socio-economic conditions, lifestyles, and resource availability, all of which influence daily food practices.

### *Festival of Kotorska Pašta*

The Festival of *kotorska pašta*, held annually in Kotor since its inception in 2014, represents a cornerstone of the city’s culinary and cultural heritage. Initiated by the late Mrs. Dragana Knežević (1958-2023), then-president of the local community of the old town, the festival has become a beloved tradition that continues uninterrupted, even during challenging times like the pandemic. This year’s 11th edition, scheduled for June 15th, stands as a testament to the resilience and enduring significance of this unique celebration.

In the course of researching, we reached out to Mrs. Knežević, hoping to gain deeper insights into her motivations and vision for establishing this significant event. However, despite her goodwill, the advanced stage of her illness prevented her from responding to our specific questions. Tragically, she passed away shortly thereafter, leaving behind a legacy that speaks volumes even in her absence. While we lack her direct answers, we offer here our interpretation of her vision, as inferred from her enduring contributions to the community and the festival itself. The dedication and foresight of Mrs. Knežević were instrumental in establishing the festival as a means of safeguarding and promoting *kotorska pašta* as an emblem of Kotor’s identity and local cuisine. Her work has left a lasting legacy that extends beyond the festival itself, ensuring that the skills, recipes, and cultural importance of *kotorska pašta* are preserved for future generations. In

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35 Michael Pollan. *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin Press, 2006, 10.

recognition of her contributions, last year's festival (2024) is being held in her memory, with a special dedication included in the official brochure, prepared by the city of Kotor and the local tourist organization.

As a symbol of Kotor's rich culinary tradition, the festival serves a vital role in preserving and passing down the art of making *kotorska pašta*. The event features workshops where participants, including younger generations, are taught the techniques necessary to prepare this intricate dessert. Each year, approximately 1,000 pieces of *kotorska pašta* are distributed to visitors, ensuring that this delicacy remains accessible to locals and tourists alike. By involving the community in these efforts, the festival fosters a shared sense of pride and continuity, bridging the gap between past and present. The festival also includes a competition aimed at encouraging young people to take an active interest in learning how to prepare *kotorska pašta*. This initiative not only ensures the preservation of traditional skills but also instills a deeper appreciation of Kotor's culinary heritage. As Sarah Pink aptly noted, "Food is not simply a means of sustenance but a powerful symbol of cultural identity."<sup>36</sup> The Festival of *kotorska pašta* embodies this principle, using the custard slice as a medium to celebrate and sustain the cultural narrative of Kotor.

In addition to preserving culinary traditions, the festival contributes significantly to the development of local tourism. Held annually in June, the event attracts a diverse audience, from local residents to international visitors, drawn by the promise of experiencing an authentic aspect of Kotor's cultural life. According to Timothy and Ron, "Heritage tourism plays an essential role in linking communities to their past while creating economic opportunities for the present."<sup>37</sup> Workshops, competitions, and the distribution of *kotorska pašta* are integral parts of the festival's itinerary, offering an immersive experience that goes beyond mere consumption. Visitors are invited to engage with the process of creating *kotorska pašta*, fostering a deeper connection to Kotor's culinary and cultural identity. The event thus serves as a model of sustainable cultural tourism, where local traditions are celebrated and preserved while contributing to the city's economic and social vitality. The Festival of *kotorska pašta* has always been more than a celebration of a dessert; it is a reflection of the community's resilience, creativity, and shared heritage. As the festival continues to grow and evolve, it remains a shining example of how local traditions can be preserved in

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36 Sarah Pink. *Doing Visual Ethnography*, 3rd ed. (London: SAGE Publications, 2013), 25.

37 Dallen J. Timothy, and Ron Amita. *Cultural Heritage and Tourism: An Introduction*. Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2013, 56.

the face of modern challenges. In the words of renowned historian Eric Hobsbawm, “Traditions are invented as much as they are preserved, and their reinvention reflects the needs and values of the societies that celebrate them.”<sup>38</sup> While *kotorska pašta* can be seen as an ‘invented tradition’ in the sense that its recipe and preparation have evolved over time to reflect the changing cultural and social context of Kotor, it also draws upon a deep historical legacy of local pastry-making, blending both innovation and preservation. The Festival of *kotorska pašta* is a living tradition, embodying both continuity and adaptation, ensuring that Kotor’s rich cultural legacy remains vibrant for generations to come.

### *Discussion: kotorska pašta – A Unique Culinary Tradition*

In Kotor, the traditional dessert known as *kotorska pašta* holds a special place in local culture. The name itself is a localized adaptation of the Italian term “pasta sfoglia,” where “pasta” typically refers to a variety of foods made from dough, such as pasta or pastry, while “sfoglia” refers to the layered puff pastry dough. This term, when translated directly into English, can cause confusion because the word “pašta” is commonly associated with pasta in many languages, especially among tourists or non-locals. As Mr. Aleksandar Dender mentioned in our conversation, he believes that the name “pašta” is misleading, as in Italian, “pasta sfoglia” refers to the pastry dough, not the dessert as a whole. Therefore, the term *kotorska pašta* might mislead people into thinking it refers to a pasta dish, which is not the case.

However, from a linguistic and cultural perspective, the name *kotorska pašta* proves to be an incredibly fitting choice. It represents a local interpretation of an Italian and French culinary tradition, transforming these foreign influences into something uniquely from Kotor. Today, the local community not only preserves the recipe but also connects it to the region’s rich history of cultural exchanges. This dessert serves as a tangible reflection of Kotor’s ongoing interaction with diverse culinary practices, offering a narrative of how external influences were adapted and integrated into the local food culture. The word “pašta” has been seamlessly integrated into the local vernacular, reflecting how language adapts over time to mirror cultural shifts. According to sociolinguist David Crystal, such cultural adaptations in language are not merely random changes, but rather reflections

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38 Eric Hobsbawm and Ranger Terance eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 5.

of the social dynamics and cultural identity of a region.<sup>39</sup> In this context, the term *kotorska pašta* links Kotor's culinary heritage to the broader Mediterranean tradition while simultaneously distinguishing it as a distinctive local dish. The use of "pašta" in this context allows the dessert to retain a connection to its Italian roots, but it also reinforces the sense of local pride and uniqueness that the city of Kotor fosters. Edward Sapir, a noted anthropologist, emphasized that "food names are more than just practical descriptors—they are symbols of collective memory and identity, binding communities to their history and culture" (Sapir, 1929). In this way, *kotorska pašta* not only serves as a testament to the region's culinary history but also to its continued relevance in shaping the city's cultural narrative.

Some countries in the region have similar desserts but with different names and taste. For example, in Slovenia, the famous "*Blejska kremna rezina*" consists of two layers of puff pastry with a rich vanilla custard filling in between. Additionally, it differs from the Kotor version in that it contains a layer of whipped cream further altering its texture and flavor. In Croatia, the "*Samoborska kremšnita*" is similarly made with two layers (instead of three as in *kotorska pašta*) of puff pastry and a custard filling. The custard slice of Samobor has also a small amount of egg white cream on top. Additionally, it is typically served warm, while the *kotorska pašta* is traditionally served cold. These variations in the recipe demonstrate the uniqueness of *kotorska pašta* and its adaptation to the tastes and ingredients available in Kotor, reflecting the local culinary identity. These distinctions are significant because they highlight how regional cuisine is deeply tied to cultural heritage. In this light, *kotorska pašta*, with its unique name and preparation method, is a vital part of Kotor's cultural identity and the broader Mediterranean culinary tradition.

### *Conclusion*

The significance of *kotorska pašta* extends far beyond its delightful taste, embodying a unique intersection of culinary tradition and local identity. As this study demonstrates, the dessert is not merely a regional specialty—it is a living representation of Kotor's rich history, cultural evolution, and Mediterranean heritage. The name *kotorska pašta*, although it may cause confusion to outsiders, carries a deep cultural resonance, rooted

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39 David Crystal. *English as a Global Language*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

in both language and tradition. While the word *pasta* commonly refers to pasta dishes in many languages, in Kotor, it denotes the layered puff pastry unique to this dessert. This adaptation of the Italian term *pasta sfoglia* highlights how food evolves to reflect specific cultural contexts, enriching both the language and the culinary landscape. At the heart of this study lies the understanding that food plays a vital role in the formation and preservation of cultural identities. In the case of *kotorska pašta*, the dessert has become a living tradition, passed down through generations. Its preservation is not only a result of meticulous preparation but also a collective commitment by the community to celebrate and safeguard it. The annual *kotorska pašta* festival stands as a testament to this commitment, serving as both a cultural safeguard and a vibrant expression of local pride. By honouring this dessert, the festival reinforces Kotor's connection to its past, ensuring that the recipe and the cultural knowledge it carries remain vibrant for future generations. Food, especially desserts, is intricately tied to the identity of a culture. In the Mediterranean, where food is closely linked to both the landscape and the people, these dishes transcend mere sustenance—they are powerful expressions of culture. As we have seen with *kotorska pašta*, the combination of pastry and cream serves not only as a treat for the senses but as a narrative tool, telling the story of Kotor's historical influences, from Venetian rule to the interaction of local Italian and French culinary traditions. With its balanced textures and flavors, *kotorska pašta* becomes a vessel that preserves and transmits the memories and customs of Kotor's people, offering a tangible connection to their cultural heritage.

Through the *kotorska pašta* festival and the continuous practice of passing down the recipe, the dessert also offers a lens through which we can examine the broader Mediterranean cultural landscape. Scholars such as Appadurai (1986) have shown that food functions as a form of cultural production, carrying meanings that extend far beyond the sum of its ingredients. The process of making and consuming *kotorska pašta* is not only about taste; it is about connection—to one's heritage, community, and shared history. The *kotorska pašta* festival provides a space for these connections to be celebrated, where both locals and visitors engage with Kotor's rich culinary heritage, fostering a sense of belonging and continuity. The Mediterranean diet, renowned for its emphasis on fresh, local ingredients, plays a fundamental role in shaping regional identities. While it is true that the ingredients used in *kotorska pašta* may not always be sourced directly from local producers, this dessert can still be seen as a part of the Mediterranean culinary narrative, reflecting the broader tradition of combining accessible, familiar ingredients to create meaningful regional dishes.

es. In the context of Montenegro, where food heritage is deeply intertwined with Mediterranean influences, desserts like *kotorska pašta* represent not only the historical exchange of culinary practices but also the adaptation of those practices to the evolving realities of modern food production.

As scholars such as Mintz (1985) and Counihan (2009) suggest, food is deeply intertwined with our understanding of identity and place. While the ingredients and flavors of *kotorska pašta* are similar to those of other regional desserts, its significance lies in its role within local traditions and its status as a beloved part of Kotor's culinary heritage. By preserving and promoting this dessert, Kotor ensures that its culinary traditions continue to thrive amidst global cultural influences, reminding us of the importance of maintaining a connection to the past while embracing the future. It is of utmost importance that the authentic *kotorska pašta* continues to be served in Kotor's cafés today. This dessert serves as an ambassador for the culture it represents, and any poor imitation i.e. any attempt to replicate *kotorska pašta* with inferior ingredients, such as poor-quality cream or dry pastry layers could lead to a negative perception of Kotor's most renowned sweet treat. The preservation of the original recipe guarantees that the dessert remains a true representation of the city's heritage, a cultural landmark that endures and continues to be cherished. Ultimately, *kotorska pašta* is more than just a dessert—it is a reflection of Kotor's broader cultural significance within the Mediterranean context. The efforts to preserve it through community-driven initiatives like the annual festival emphasize the importance of food not only as a cultural artifact but also as a means of cultural expression. As food continues to shape both local and global identities, the legacy of *kotorska pašta* stands as a testament to the enduring power of tradition, identity, and community. This study contributes not only to the academic understanding of Mediterranean food heritage but also highlights the critical role food plays in maintaining the balance between local traditions and global influences. By preserving *kotorska pašta*, we ensure that the culinary identities of small communities, like Kotor, remain vibrant, relevant, and meaningful for future generations.

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