The harmony of wine and cheese: experiences from Turkey
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Cheese culture is an integral part of Anatolian gastronomic tradition. Although cheese is generally consumed at breakfast in Turkey, there are tasteful cheeses which match very well with Turkish wine. However, there has been very little scientific research on pairings of Turkish wine and cheese. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to discover the perfect Turkish cheese and wine matches. For this reason, five wine experts were interviewed in order to find out the most suitable Turkish cheese and wine pairs. The interviews were recorded. Data was analyzed by using content analysis.

There is no precise information about where and when the cheese was produced for the first time but it is estimated that nomadic Turkic tribes in Central Asia and Middle Eastern communities produced cheese many years ago. Early nomadic tribes used animal-skin bags to transport cow and goat’s milk. According to archaeological excavations cheese making dates back to 6000 BC. In 300 AD, cheese was a commodity traded between the Mediterranean countries.

Turkey has variety of cheeses. According to official resources, more than 50 varieties of cheese are produced in Turkey. However, it is estimated that this number is over 100 with local varieties. Cheeses such as white cheese, kashar, tulum cheese (bryndza), whey cheese, as well as Mihaliç, Van herby cheese, Civil, Çamak, Ezine, Malatya and Urfa cheese, Hellim, İzmir tulum, plaited cheese and Karin Kaymağı are also available.

The common feature of Turkish cheese such as white cheese (feta type of cheese) is being fresh. These kind of cheeses are not matured so they should be consumed immediately. However, there are matured cheeses such as Tulum cheese (Erzincan Tulum and Ermenek Tulum which is similar to Roquefort cheese). These kinds of cheeses are matured in goat skin and are stored in caves. In some regions, aromatic herbs (including thyme, horsemint, Siyabo, Suv, Heliz, Sirmo, Mendo) are added during the production process. For example Van herby cheese is a typical one. Sürk cheese, from Hatay region is produced by using herbs such as parsley, thyme and chili pepper that gives the red color to the cheese.

Plaited cheese, produced using raw milk has a plat shape and is usually common in Karacadag region. Nomadic tribes produce this kind of cheese during April–May especially using sheep milk and sometimes the mixture of sheep, goat and cow milk.

Kashar and gruyer cheeses are produced in Kars region which is located in the north eastern part of Turkey by the border of Armenia. Tradition of making kashar was learned from Molakans, one of the Caucasian community settled down Kars before the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian war. Making gruyer tradition dates back to 1890 which was started by the establishment of a dairy farm by Swiss investors.

Turkey has an ancient winemaking tradition. There are indigenous and international grape varieties which are widely used for wine making in Turkey. One of the indigenous variety is Emir which is planted in the Mid-Southern Anatolia region while Narince is produced in the Mid-Eastern Anatolia. Sultaniye, Bornova Misketi and Çalkarası are from Aegean region while Öküzgözü and Boğazkere are from Eastern Anatolia. International varietes such as Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Shiraz, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon are also cultivated in the Aegean, Marmara, Mid-Southern Anatolia and Mediterranean regions.

This research shows that some Turkish cheese can be matched with Turkish wines. For example, DLC Sultaniye Emir produced from Sultaniye which is a savoury, fruity and sour grape of Denizli region and Emir of Cappadocia that strong and fresh wines can be made, is a good match with Ezine cheese which has a creamy, rancid, salty, acidic taste. Also, Sarafin Sauvignon Blanc, a fruity wine having the aroma of green apple, green plum and fresh herbs go well with Ezine cheese. Besides, Kayra Vintage Öküzgözü, with an intense blackcurrant and blackberry flavors, and its tannin texture has a good pair with Kars Kashar. Kavaklıdere Kalecik Karası with its fruity taste and vanilla and cacao aroma match very well with Erzincan Tulum cheese which is matured in a tulum that made of leather.

Keywords: Turkish cheese, Turkish wine, wine and cheese pairings.