

ÉCLAIRS AS TOP PASTRY DELICACIES AND THEIR COMPREHENSION BY THE MACEDONIAN GASTRONOMIC AUDIENCE¹

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ABSTRACT

The so called Éclair paste or Choux paste or Pâte à choux in French or Brandteig in German (Contemporary Cook, 1965) is an essential dough for the realization of different pastry and confectionery products such as the Éclairs, Paris-Brest, Cream puffs, choux pastry lattice, choux pastry pralines, mini cream puffs, mini eclairs, croquembouches, batons de Jacob, cygnes, religieuses, arlequins, couronnes, chouquettes, and choux florentines. This kind of dough is also used for certain oriental sweets like tulumba and some Spanish-Portuguese specialty churros. The Pâte à choux, is consisted of water or milk, butter, flour, salt, and eggs. Even though this kind of pastry seems very simple to be realized, there are certain rules that need to be strictly followed. The final intention of this paper is to check if the Macedonian gastronomic audience has a real knowledge about éclairs.

KEY WORDS: Pastry, Confectionery, Pâte à choux, Éclairs,

¹ original research paper

INTRODUCTION

Definition of éclair / ẽ-'kler

: a usually chocolate-frosted oblong pastry filled with whipped cream or custard. This is the explanation of this pastry found in Merriam-Webster dictionary.

According to the Oxford students dictionary (page201) éclair / i'kleə(r) *nca* pastry iced on top and filled with cream: *chocolate éclairs*.

The term éclair is of a French origin and it has two meanings. The first meaning is lightning is the natural luminous phenomenon accompanied by claps of thunder, which occurs during storms.

The second meaning of this term is a baked sweet cake made of choux paste, filled with cream and iced on top.

The éclair dough, which is the same as that used for profiteroles and cream puffs, is typically piped into an oblong shape with a pastry bag and baked until it is crisp and hollow inside.

Pâte à choux is the essential dough in the realization of numerous pastry and confectionery delicacies as the most popular Éclairs and cream puffs that are of a French origin, the churros that belong to the Latin world and the oriental Tulumba. The origin of the pâte à choux is dated to the XVI century. Popelini, an Italian baker, made a party in honor of Catherine de Medici, producing cakes that were made of dried dough on fire, the hot dough or “pâte à chaud” in French (Dovergne and Duquesne, 2011). In 1760, the famous French pastry chef Jean Avice brought this paste to a perfection and created the pâte à choux. He is also considered to be the creator of the madeleine.

Choux pastry, or pâte à choux, is a delicate pastry dough used in many pastries. Basic ingredients usually only include butter, water, flour and eggs. Instead of a raising agent, choux pastry employs its high moisture content to create steam, as the water in the dough evaporates when baked, puffing the pastry. Although it is often referred to as choux pastry, choux is completely different from other types of pastry, such as short crust, flaky, puff, filo etc. The mixture is based on a paste of flour and water, enriched with butter, then lightened with egg and by thorough beating. When cooked, the paste rises to form a crisp shell with a thin moist lining of cooked paste and a hollow center. The paste can be baked to make small or large buns (*chouin* French), fingers (for éclairs) or rings (large or small). It can also be deep-fried. (New Concise Larousse Gastronomique, p.293)

In the list below there is a catalogisation of the choux pastry dishes.

Table 1. List of choux pastry dishes in alphabetical order

	Name	type	origin
1.	Beignet	sweet	France
2.	Bosschebol	sweet	Netherlands
3.	Caroline	savory	France
4.	Chou	sweet/savory	France
5.	Chouquette	sweet	France
6.	Chouxnut	sweet	US
7.	Churros	sweet	Spain, Latin America
8.	Cream puff	sweet	US
9.	Croquembouche	sweet	France
10.	Eclair	sweet	France
11.	Gougere	savory	France
12.	Karpotka	sweet	Poland
13.	Ladies navel (hanımgöbeği)	sweet	Turkey
14.	Moorkop	sweet	Netherlands
15.	Nun's puffs (pets de nonne)	sweet	France
16.	Paris-Brest	sweet	France
17.	Pommes dauphine	savory	France
18.	Profiterole	sweet	France
19.	Religieuse	sweet	France
20.	St. Honore cake	sweet	France
21.	Tulumba	sweet	Turkey

The popularity of éclairs is so great worldwide, that certain pastry chefs became very popular while recreating them. One of the best examples is the world renowned French pastry chef Philippe Conticini who owns luxury sweet shops all around the world offering reinvented desserts.



Picture 1. Classic Éclairs source: Serious Eats / Vicky Wasik

The Origin of Éclairs

An éclair is a long French pastry made from choux pastry, filled with pastry cream or custard and dipped in fondant icing. The most popular éclair is probably the chocolate éclair, which is topped with chocolate fondant and filled with chocolate custard or pastry cream. Another popular variation is the frozen éclair, which is filled with ice cream and topped with chocolate syrup.

Éclair means lightning in French. Why it has been applied to this pastry is unknown. Some think it's because you often eat them very fast, or as a reference to the gleam of light from the shiny fondant icing.

The gastronomic term "éclair" has been known since the 1860s in France and it describes the pastry previously called "petite duchesse" (eng. little duchess). It is believed that chef Antonin Carême invented the éclair. Its first print reference in English was in an article in *Vanity Fair* in 1861, and then in *Boston Cooking School Cook Book* in 1884.

Éclairs appeared for the first time around 1850 in Lyon. The basic recipe consists of pastry cream (flavored either with chocolate, coffee or vanilla) stuffed in a finger-shaped choux pastry, which is covered with a fondant icing. The origin of the éclair would come from the Little Duchess

reinvented by the famous French chef Antonin Carême (1783-1833). The Little Duchess was a choux pastry cake shaped into the shape of a finger and rolled in almonds. Carême has remodeled the latter by filling the choux pastry with apricot marmalade or pastry cream (with chocolate or coffee) and glazing it with fondant sugar. He also removed the almonds. However, the name éclair did not appear until 20 years after Carême died and its origin still remains an enigma.

In the book *La bonne cuisine française* (eng. *The Good French Kitchen*) written by Emile Dumont and published for the first time by Alfred Dégorge in 1879 in Paris the éclair can't be found as an article, but the pastry products that could be realized using the choux paste like the St. Honoré cake which is a puff pastry combined with a choux paste ring stuffed with a velvety cream *patissière* and salted caramel dipped profiteroles firstly filled with custard set on top of the ring. The center is decorated with *crème Chantilly*.

Realisation of Éclairs

The choux paste (pâte à choux) (brandteig) is a key component of the éclair. It has a wide range of applicative usage in pastry and confectionery. It is also used in making cream puffs, profiteroles, and gougères. This pastry rises only from the action of steam. There is no presence of any yeast, baking soda, baking powder, or any other kind of leavening agent.

Choux pastry is made by heating milk, water, sugar, salt, and butter to a boil in a pot, stirring in bread flour in one batch until it is totally incorporated. All the ingredients (milk, water, sugar, salt and butter) are set in the medium sauce pan, the mixture must be stirred constantly over low heat, slowly bringin to a rolling boil. Pan is removed from heat abd flour is added all at once, beating vigorously with a wooden spoon or a silicone spatula until dough comes away from side of pan and forms a ball, about 1 minute (Verlag, C. and Oetker, R.A., 1982). The most important is to dry the choux-dough until a thin film is stuck on the bottom of the pot. After this it must be allowed to cool to 60 degrees celsius (Gisslen, W. 2009, page 333) in order to add the eggs.



Picture 2. Phases of choux dough preparation

source: <https://hellosweetdessert.wordpress.com/tag/choux-pastry/>

The number of added eggs depends on the dryness of the choux dough. If the dough is nicely dried it will take more eggs. At this stage an absolute precision is needed. Too much eggs can destroy the dough, too little would make it very dry and during the baking would break and deteriorate. There is one way to judge when the paste is ready and that is using a spatula and constantly checking the consistency of the pâte à choux. The test is passed when dipping the spatula in the dough and lifting and a soft “beak” is formed on the spatula. Then the dough is ready to be baked and afterwards used for eclairs, profiteroles etc. After baking the eclair shells need to cool down and just then can be filled with crêmapâtisserie. Two methods may be used: Filling through small holes in one end using a pastry bag and Filling a previously lengthwise cut shell with a pastry bag (sandwich)

The tops of the eclairs must be dipped in chocolate or any other fondant or ganache. For a better texture and flavor instead of egg wash over the choux pastry can be added a thin layer of craquelin just before baking on top of the choux. The craquelin gives sweetness and crunchiness to the eclair and in this case even the ganache topping can be avoided.

When ready the dough is then placed in a pastry bag and piped onto a baking sheet in the long shape desired for eclairs. If making cream puffs or gougères, spooning could be done instead. The dough is then baked at a high heat to generate the steam and get the dough to rise. After 20 or 30 minutes depending on the oven, the temperature is lowered to complete baking and brown the pastry. The pastry must be totally baked and dried. The result is an airy, almost hollow shell that is crisp enough on top to be iced. After cooling, it is ready to be filled with a variety of fillings as desired. A thicker filling is best to prevent the bottom of the pastry from getting soggy. Pastry cream is often the filling. It is thick custard made with egg yolks, milk, sugar, cornstarch, and may include butter.

The icing should be one that hardens, such as fondant or ganache. This allows the eclair to be handled easier. A second flavor of icing may be piped on top for decoration and added taste.

Yield: (1440-1500 g) Dough

Milk*	240ml*	80%*
Water	240ml	80%
Salt	9g	3%
Sugar	15 g	5%
Unsalted butter	210g	70%
Bread flour	300g	100%
Eggs (10-11eggs)	480-528 g	160-170%

Total dough weight 1494-1542 g 498-514%

*In order to insure crispiness of the product, water should be replaced with milk

Yield: (1440 g) Method: Stirred custard

Milk	1qt	1 lt
Vanilla bean, split	1	1
Granulated sugar		225 g
Egg yolks	10 yolks	180 g
Cornstarch		75 g
Unsalted butter		60 g

RESEARCH ABOUT THE COMPREHENSION OF ÉCLAIRS AS A TOP PASTRY SPECIALTY BY THE MACEDONIAN GASTRONOMIC AUDIENCE

The survey method was followed by examining the understanding of the local community regarding the eclairs as a top pastry specialty. The research was conducted in Ohrid, Struga, Bitola, Tetovo and Skopje in the period between October 2021 and April 2022. The questionnaire was intended for pastry customers and gastronomy students, and the purpose was to determine if the gastronomic audience really knows what eclairs really are. The results were really awkward. Even gastronomy students have lack of knowledge about this world famous pastry delicacy. The research sample was taken from the random population, all in all 300 visitors of local restaurants and gastronomy students.

The research was agreed with 10 culinary establishments that have eclairs in their gastronomic offer. The eclairs are publicly exhibited in vitrines and they can be found on the menu. Due to professional courtesy the identity of restaurants and pastry shops are not revealed in this research.

METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire contains general data regarding the socio-demographic characteristics: sex, age, education degree, and place of permanent residence. During the fieldwork, a systematic observation was used to collect primary data for empirical analysis. The research, referring to the understanding of

the Macedonian gastronomic audience about eclairs and it was conducted by applying the technique of visitors' survey. The time interval of research activities refers to the period between October 2021 and April 2022. The survey questionnaire covered 300 fully completed surveys. The questionnaire also assessed the various contents through the Likert scale. The results obtained are sublimated in tabular reviews through an average score and standard deviation.

Research Sample Characteristics

The total number of processed questionnaires was 300 and it is important to note that the answers were received from the respondents to all questions. Therefore in all questions, there is no difference in the sum of answers. The characteristics of the sample are given in the following table.

Table 1 Characteristics of the research sample (by author)

Variable		Characteristics of the research sample	
		Frequency	Percentage %
gender	male	134	44.7
	female	166	55.3
age	Under 18	33	11.0
	18-28	76	25.3
	29- 39	106	35.3
	40-49	34	11.3
	50-60	25	8.3
	61 +	26	8.7
Educational level	High school	85	28.3
	University	175	58.3
	Postgraduate degree	40	13.3

Men make up 44.7% of the research sample, while women make up 55.3%. Out of the total number of respondents, 17% belong to the age category over 50 years. In fact, 8.3% belong to the category of 50 to 60 years, while 8.7% of the respondents belong to the age group of 61 years and above. Only 11.3% belong to the age group between 40 and 49 years and 35.3% belong to the age group between 29 and 39 years. In the age category between 18 and 28 years belong 25.3 % and under 18 years 11%. The majority of the respondents or 71.6.7% belongs to the younger age group

below 39 years of age. Regarding the level of education were obtained relatively normal results.

Results and Discussion

The answer to the first question should indicate the knowledge of responders regarding eclairs. As can be seen from Table 2, the two main and dominant answers of respondents are the "round choux pastry with cream filling" (30%) and the "puff pastry with cream Chantilly filling" (23%). Other answers regarding the knowledge of the gastronomic audience regarding eclairs were "Sponge cake with cream filling" and "oblong choux pastry with cream filling and glaze on top" are presented in a statistically insignificant percentage, 15 %, and 1%; "fried choux pastry with cream filling" and "biscuit with chocolate glaze" was rounded out by 15% each, or in total by 30% of the respondents. The answer "oblong fried choux pastry with sugarsyrup" was chosen by 33 respondents or 11 %.

Less than a third of the respondents recognized eclairs as round choux pastry with cream filling. Only 1% of the respondents could identify eclairs, and they are gastronomy students.

Table 2. Identification of Eclairs by the Macedonian gastronomic audience

	Frequency	Percentage %
Round choux pastry with cream filling	90	30
Puff pastry with Cream Chantilly filling	69	23
Oblong choux pastry with cream filling	3	1
Fried choux pastry with chocolate glaze	15	5
Sponge cake with cream filling	45	15
Other	0	0
Biscuit with chocolate glaze	45	15
Fried oblong choux pastry with sugar syrup	33	11
Total	300	100 %

In order to have a better understanding why éclairs are mistaken with creampuffs an inspection of pastry shops was needed. 50 pastry and sweets shops were controlled regarding the presence or absence of éclairs. The

results were very surprising, only in 1 of the 50 establishments original éclairs were offered, while in the rest they were swapped with cream puffs and large profiteroles. No wonder why the respondents couldn't identify properly this world famous pastry.

CONCLUSION

Éclairs seem to be a worldwide popular sweet delicacy. Contrary, in the Republic of Macedonia the majority of the population can barely differ éclairs from cream puffs, profiteroles and other similar deserts. It is evident that the Macedonian gastronomic audience mistakes éclairs as cream puffs and other choux pastry based desserts. There is lack of knowledge regarding the form and shape of éclairs as well as their origin. The majority of the respondents identified éclairs as Albanian or Turkish desserts. This is probably because of the absence of real éclairs in the pastry shops in Macedonia and most probably because of the mispronunciation of the word éclair. According to the Macedonian pronunciation of the word éclairs the accent is set on the first syllable and that makes the word to sound rather Turkish or Albanian. The respondents involved in the research gave very strange answers regarding their knowledge about éclairs. The only respondents that could identify the dessert correctly were gastronomy students who learned about éclairs during their studies at the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality in Ohrid and were able to prepare them by using a technical sheet of a standardized recipe. Finally, can be concluded that the Macedonian gastronomic audience can identify eclairs neither in shape nor taste. The reason for that can be traced to the transfigured preparation of allochthonous desserts as specific as éclairs with local ingredients and manipulation of shape and texture.

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