BOUNTIFUL EMPIRE
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A History of Ottoman Cuisine

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A prince eating a meal in a garden, 1605-7.
O
ver the six centuries of the Ottoman Empire’s existence, from its establishment in Anatolia in 1299 until the dissolution of the sultanate in 1922, food culture bound people of different classes and backgrounds together, defining identity and serving symbolic functions in the social, religious, political and military spheres. Food provision and regulation was seen as one of the sultan’s obligations in his paternal role and was one of the keys to the success of the empire as it expanded.

Ottoman cuisine evolved from a synthesis of the Turkish cuisine of Central Asia with foodways inherited from the Safavids, Abbasids and Byzantines. From the fifteenth century onwards it developed a distinct identity characterized by a spirit of innovation and self-confidence that left a lasting mark on the cuisines of a vast area ranging from Egypt to the Balkans. This cuisine was a source of pride for the Ottomans, who, in the words of the Turkologist Robert Dankoff, saw it as reflecting the greatness of their empire.1

The Ottoman Empire used to be largely disregarded by European historians, who saw it as an insular and largely irrelevant ‘other’ world. Since the 1980s this view has radically changed, bringing recognition of its extensive political, economic and cultural interaction with Europe. Coinciding with this shift, food history has gained recognition as a valid field of academic study, with the result that many Ottoman historians today examine food culture, production, trade and consumption. Long before these developments, however, the Turkish medical historian and physician Süheyl Ünver (1898–1986) became the first scholar to take the study of Ottoman culinary culture seriously. In several articles and two small books on the subject published in 1948 and 1952, he drew attention to various primary sources, such as palace kitchen accounts and an eighteenth-century cookery manuscript. His pioneering work was carried forward by others, and since then Ottoman cuisine has been ‘rediscovered’, as part and parcel of renewed interest in and re-evaluation of the Ottoman past.

When the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923 after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the new state turned its back on the past to pursue goals of modernization and alignment with the West. The Ottoman period was cast as a time of backwardness and conservatism, and traditional culture was often blackened with the same brush. Vocational cookery schools gave precedence to French cuisine, which was seen as superior and properly suited to a modern way of life. As a result, hardly a Turkish dish was to be found on the menus of hotels and upmarket...
restaurants or patisseries, whose cooks had been trained almost exclusively in French cookery techniques. A striking illustration of the official attitude in the early republican era is a book on confectionery entitled *The Turkish Woman’s Book of Confectionery*, published by the State Sugar Factories in 1939, which is filled with French recipes for creams, gateaux, tartelettes, millefeuilles, savarins and petits fours. By 1966, however, the tide was turning, and in the new edition of this book all but fifteen of the French recipes were replaced by Turkish ones, reflecting the fact that despite three decades of efforts to promote French food, Turkish people continued to cook and enjoy traditional food at home.

In 1981 a symposium on historical and regional cuisines was organized by the Ministry of Culture, and this was followed up by a series of international conferences and exhibitions of food-related artefacts at two museums. Over the next decades academic and popular books and articles on Ottoman cuisine were published in ever-increasing numbers. Transcriptions of primary sources, including archival material, manuscripts and cookery books, have been particularly significant because Ottoman Turkish, like Persian, was written in Arabic script. Replacement of the Ottoman script by the new Latin-based Turkish script in 1928 meant that from this time on few people were able to read earlier sources.

The importance attached to food culture by the Ottomans means that there is a wealth of primary material in sources of many kinds, including descriptions of royal celebrations, court records, endowment deeds, kitchen accounts, lists of fixed retail prices, medical books, poetry, folklore and miniature paintings. Although cookery books were rare until the nineteenth century, recipes and lists of ingredients scattered in diverse sources help to make up for this lack. Other valuable primary sources are descriptions of meals and food customs in reports and memoirs by foreign diplomats and travellers – keeping in mind that these can be coloured by prejudice or misunderstanding and should not be taken at face value, but need careful evaluation. European interest in the Ottoman Empire, particularly from the sixteenth century onwards, led to a thirst for such accounts, which often include details not found in local sources but whose unfamiliarity caught the attention of foreigners.

Books on regional cookery and culinary culture published in large numbers over the last few decades have also made significant contributions to the study of Ottoman cuisine by providing information about traditional dishes, preservation techniques and foodways that are mentioned in Ottoman-period written sources but have disappeared in major cities. These, together with publications about the cuisines of neighbouring countries that were once part of the Ottoman Empire, throw light on both the extent to which foodways were shared and regional differences across the empire.

Ottoman cuisine has often been viewed from a narrow perspective as the sophisticated cookery of the court and wealthy classes. While this is no doubt important, there are many other angles to be considered. This book takes a broad look at Ottoman culinary culture, beginning with an overview of the roots of Ottoman cuisine and its development over six centuries, and continuing thematically with chapters focusing on aspects including food trade, food laws, military food, restaurants and etiquette. The aim has been to hold up a mirror to life in this large and complex empire through its food culture.

Very few historical recipes have been included, and then only to illustrate points in the text, so readers
interested in cooking Ottoman food must look elsewhere. One of the best sources is a collection of recipes compiled and adapted for the modern cook by Marianna Yerasimos. When it comes to recreating authentic Ottoman dishes, there are some practical obstacles. Today no one can afford ambergris to flavour sherbet and it would be hard to find sufficient quantities of violets to make jam. The copper pans which make such a difference to the finished flavour of dishes have disappeared from most kitchens, partly because they require regular tinning. Cooking over a charcoal fire is impossible in a modern kitchen and is now largely restricted to a few kebab restaurants and to picnic barbecues.

Restaurants claiming to offer Ottoman cuisine rarely do so in reality. Some attempt to cash in on the popular demand for ‘Ottoman’ cuisine and have no qualms about describing a dish such as baked aubergines with melted cheese on top as ‘palace-style’. Even conscientious restaurants admit to using thirteenth-century Abbasid recipes on the shaky assumption that since they were translated into Turkish in the fifteenth century they must have been adopted unchanged into the Ottoman culinary repertoire of the time. Cooks, meanwhile, tend to see creative reworking as an essential part of their job and rarely attempt to produce authentic versions of Ottoman dishes. Traditional dishes that have changed little since Ottoman times, like vegetable stews, stuffed vegetables, böreks (layered pastries) and manti (stuffed dumplings in a garlic and yoghurt sauce), are more likely to be found in modest local restaurants. Istanbul’s muhallebicis, or pudding shops, still serve the diverse milk puddings of the Ottoman era and innumerable baklavacıs sell baklava and other sweet pastries. Yet to taste the hot baklava with a cheese filling recorded in Ottoman cookery books, you must visit Urfa, Amasya or Yalvaç, where it survives as a homemade speciality. The hollow lollipops in the form of cockerels once widely sold by street vendors survive in just two towns today, while at the other end of the scale döner kebab has lived to become one of the world’s most popular fast foods.

Some Ottoman food customs are also alive and well. Semolina helva and doughnuts soaked in syrup are still distributed to mourners following funerals; families continue to make aşure on the tenth of Muharrem and güllaç in Ramazan (Ramadan); and itinerant vendors of simit and boza still cry their wares in city streets. Not all is lost by any means.
The Ottoman Empire began life as a small principality established in what is now north-west Turkey in 1299 or 1300. It took its name from the founder Osman, one of numerous Turkish marcher-lords who asserted their independence from the Seljuk Turks during the second half of the thirteenth century. The Seljuks were among the many Turkish tribal groups from Central Asia that over a long period migrated westwards across the Eurasian steppes in the course of successive conquests. The Seljuks first conquered Iran and then moved into Anatolia, defeating the Byzantines at Malazgirt in 1071 and establishing a sultanate whose first capital was İznik, near Constantinople, superseded later by Konya in central Anatolia. When the Ilkhanid Mongols invaded Anatolia in 1242–3, making the Seljuk rulers their vassals, the weakened state gradually split into principalities.

During its first century the Ottoman Empire expanded rapidly into lands held by the Byzantines, Turkish principalities, the Ilkhanids and Memluks in Anatolia; Byzantine, Serbian and Bulgarian territory in Thrace and the Balkans; and Aegean islands held by the Genoese and Venetians. The Byzantine emperor John V Palaiologos, along with Serbian and Bulgarian rulers, became a vassal of Murad I in 1371, and by the end of the fourteenth century the Ottoman state was a major power in the region. Sultan Bayezid I’s (r. 1389–1402) defeat by Timur and the years of civil war brought the Ottomans to the brink of extinction, but after they were reunited by Mehmed I (r. 1413–21) lost ground was recovered and expansion began again. Constantinople was a strategically crucial goal since it controlled the Bosphorus strait linking the Black Sea to the Mediterranean via the Marmara Sea. Bayezid I had already besieged the city in the late fifteenth century and Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1451–81) finally conquered Constantinople from the Byzantines in 1453. In the sixteenth century, under Selim I (r. 1512–20) and his son Süleyman I (r. 1520–66), the empire reached its greatest extent, encompassing Syria, Egypt, most of Anatolia, the Balkans, Hungary, Iraq and Yemen. From the late seventeenth century onwards the Ottomans lost territory, beginning with Hungary and Transylvania, followed by lands north of the Black Sea and the southern Caucasus in the eighteenth century, the northern Balkans, Algeria and Greece in the nineteenth century, and finally in the early twentieth century all but eastern Thrace and Anatolia, the lands that make up modern Turkey today.

Ottoman cuisine had its roots in Central Asia, Iran, the Middle East and Anatolia, and evolved as
a complex synthesis of these and other foodways as the empire expanded. The Ottomans used luxurious court cuisine as a way of impressing their own subjects and neighbouring states with their wealth and power. In this respect their cuisine was typical of a long line of courtly cuisines established by powerful states and empires going back to the ancient civilizations of Anatolia and the Near East. These had arisen after the advent of farming in the Neolithic period created surpluses of grain, enabling powerful individuals to control food supplies and take possession of land, and leading to the emergence of a ruling class, city states and eventually empires.

Culinary traces of this process that survived into the Ottoman period are the dishes made with whole wheat grains. For the first farmers, survival depended on the regeneration of seed sown in the soil, and their religious beliefs and practices focused on fertility. The sacred significance of boiled wheat grains endured over the millennia, and they became associated with both Christian and Muslim festivals celebrating renewal and rebirth. Orthodox Christians made koliva, consisting of boiled wheat grains coated with nuts, dried fruits, spices and sugar, for Easter, All Souls’ Day and the Feast of the Assumption (15 August), while Armenians made a pudding of wheat grains with dried fruits called anuş abur for Christmas and New Year. Muslims made a similar pudding of wheat grains with various pulses and dried fruits, called aşure, for the tenth day of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic calendar. People of all faiths throughout the region made a porridge of wheat and meat called keşkek or berise on festive occasions, particularly weddings.4

After Neolithic peoples learned to grind grain, bread also became a sacred food and one of the most important offerings to the gods worshipped in the Near East. The Hittites, whose civilization flourished in Anatolia between 1700 and 1190 BC, made nearly 180 different kinds of bread, distinguished by shape, type of cereal and additional ingredients such as honey, sesame seeds, peas, pomegranate and gourd, which are listed in their religious texts.5 The bread rings made by the Hittites remained popular through into Ottoman times, when they were known by the name simit, from the Assyrian word samidu for fine flour. Bread retained its ancient religious significance in Jewish and Christian culture, and it was revered by Muslims, although it did not play any ritualistic role.

Bulgur – wheat that has been boiled, dried and coarsely ground – must also have originated in the Near East, where so many ways of processing and cooking wheat evolved. Yet beyond this assumption about its origin, bulgur’s subsequent history proves evasive. It illustrates how foods can move in mysterious ways and their popularity alter radically over time. This staple of Ottoman and modern Middle Eastern cuisine does not appear in any of the medieval Arabic cookery books, although the technique was in place, as shown by Ibn Sayyar al-Warrāq’s tenth-century recipe for a dried product called kishk made of sour curd and coarsely crushed wheat that had first been boiled and dried.6 The first references to bulgur are in Anatolian Seljuk texts, the earliest being an epic account of events during the conquest of Anatolia in the eleventh century. Here bulgur pilaf is listed among foods served at the wedding feast for the local Turcoman ruler Melik Danişmend and his bride Gülnuş Banu.7 The thirteenth-century poet and Sufi mystic Rumi (known in Turkey as Mevlâna) refers several times to bulgur soup as if it were an everyday dish,8 and in the Ottoman period bulgur was a food widely consumed by all
classes. Mehmed II enjoyed bulgur pilaf cooked with chestnuts,⁹ and both this dish and bulgur pilaf with spinach and meatballs were served at palace banquets in the late seventeenth century.¹⁰ Thereafter, however, bulgur’s popularity among the elite seems to have declined and it became primarily a food for soldiers and the common people. Meanwhile, in Iran it was consumed by the elite up to the sixteenth century,¹¹ but it later disappeared altogether, eclipsed by the more prestigious rice. Bulgur was also known in Mughal India, where in the seventeenth century charity kitchens were known as ‘bulgur houses’ (bulghurhanas),¹² implying that bulgur was a staple for the poorer classes and by inference those of low status. The etymology of the word bulgur remains obscure. Scholars have proposed a derivation from Persian, Turkish or an indigenous Anatolian language, and the food historian Charles Perry tentatively suggests that it might come from the Mongolian bulgharqai (meaning ‘broken or fallen out’).¹³

**Central Asia**

The Central Asian thread of Ottoman cuisine derives from the early history of the Turks as a nomadic people from the Altai Mountains in Inner Asia. They were first recorded under the name Turk (Tu-Ku) by the Chinese in the sixth century and are thought to be descendants of the earlier Huns.¹⁴ The Turks were horsemen and horse breeders who also farmed in fertile pockets of the Asian steppes that were famous for grapes and melons. This was a region of severe winters, scorching summers and hazardous deserts such as the Taklamakan, and the Turkish experience of organizing huge herds of horses and sheep over this inhospitable terrain and their skill as mounted archers are regarded as key factors in the tradition of conquest and state-building that runs through their history, including the Göktürk (552–744), Khazar (c. 650–c. 965), Uighur, Karakhanid, Seljuk, Khwarezm and Timurid empires. Early Turco-Mongol steppe peoples first conquered northern China around 1050 BC and over the centuries exerted a lasting impact on Chinese society, according to some scholars.¹⁵ Central Asian Turks founded the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire in India,¹⁶ and played a part in controlling trade along the Silk Road, providing security for merchants through garrisoned caravanserais called ribat. The Turks themselves also engaged in trade, particularly of livestock, leather, woollen textiles and animal food products.¹⁷

Central Asian cuisine was essentially a pastoral diet based on fat-tailed sheep, which were a source of dairy foods such as yoghurt, butter and clotted cream (kaymak), as well as meat and tail fat – the equivalent of lard in pork-eating cultures. Horse meat was also eaten, although to a lesser extent than sheep, and mares’ milk was fermented to make an alcoholic drink called kımız (kumis). The main grain foods were noodles and paper-thin flatbreads (yufka) rolled out with a long, slender pin and baked on a griddle. Preserved foods were crucial for people on the move and included meat braised in its own juices and fat (kavurma), roasted and ground millet (kavut), dried yoghurt (kurut), clarified butter, dried fruits (chiefly raisins, apricots and melon) and grape molasses (pekmez), which could be used to make a nourishing meal in minutes. Except for horsemeat and kımız, all these foods went on to become central elements of Ottoman cuisine, as did the Central Asian fondness for sour flavours, imparted by ingredients like yoghurt and barberry juice. Dishes with plenty
of liquid also became a distinguishing characteristic of Ottoman cuisine, with its many soups and stews.

One of the most extensive sources for Central Asian Turkish foodways is the eleventh-century dictionary of Turkic dialects by the Karakhanid scholar Mahmud al-Kashgari, who dedicated the work to the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadî (r. 1075–94). Probably his intention was to explain Turkish language and customs to the Abbasids, who were by then vassals of the Seljuk Turks. This dictionary records a wide range of foods, including herbs, vegetables, fruits and nuts – some cultivated, such as carrots, aubergines (eggplants) and cucumbers, and others gathered from the wild, like barberries and mustard – and terms for a variety of cooking techniques (spit-roasting, pit-roasting, frying and steaming), cooking utensils and preservation methods.\(^{18}\)

From early on, Chinese texts provided information about the diet of their nomadic neighbours, whom they regarded as ‘milk drinking barbarians’.\(^{19}\) When a homesick Chinese princess was married off to a Hun ruler in 110–105 BC, the Hun diet of mutton and milk contributed to her misery, as she described in the following poem:

My parents they have wed me,
All helpless and undone,
In a distant alien kingdom,
To the Monarch of Wu-sun.

My dwelling’s vast and dreary,
Deck’d with felt in place of silk;
My daily food is flesh meat,
Accompanied with milk.

My mind with thoughts is burden’d,
My heart with grief oppress’d;
Would that I were a yellow stork,
I’d fly back to my nest.\(^{20}\)

Seven centuries later a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim named Xuanzang described a feast given in the tent of the Göktürk ruler Tong Yabgu Khan in the year 630.\(^{21}\) As a vegetarian, Xuanzang did not of course eat the roast meat served, but dined on rice cakes, cream, sugar candy, honey and grapes, accompanied by grape syrup instead of wine. In 647, Tong Yabgu’s successor sent a bunch of the famous mare’s teat grapes grown in the Turfan oasis to the Chinese emperor. So popular did these grapes become that they were...
mentioned in a poem by the Chinese poet Liu Yuxi. Other Turkish introductions into China during the Göktürk period were raisins, grape molasses, watermelons, almonds and grape wine – itself an Iranian introduction into Central Asia. The sweet melons of Central Asia became famous throughout western Asia in the ninth century and were carried westwards into the Mediterranean basin. Neither Persian nor Arabic had a separate term for the sweet melon, and instead applied to it their respective terms for the watermelon (kharbuza and battikh).

Despite the long-standing Chinese aversion to milk, in northern China people became accustomed to milk products, notably during the Northern Wei (386–535) and Tang periods (618–907), which were times of close interaction with the invading Turks. A Chinese treatise on agriculture written in AD 540 includes instructions for preparing such typical Central Asian foods as fermented mare’s milk, yoghurt, dried buttermilk curds and noodles. The seventh-century Chinese emperor T’ai Tsung (Taizong) was fond of curds in his tea, and a fashion arose for all things Turkish, including food, as described by the sinologist Edward H. Schafer:

Enthusiasm for Turkish customs enabled some aristocrats to endure the discomfort of living in a tent, even in the midst of the city. The poet Po Chu-i erected two Turkish tents of sky-blue felt in his courtyard, and entertained guests in them, proud to demonstrate how they furnished protection from the winter wind. The most eminent of such urban tent-dwellers was the unhappy prince Li Ch’eng-ch’ien, son of the great T’ai Tsung, who imitated the Turks in everything: he preferred to speak Turkish rather than Chinese, and erected a complete Turkish camp on the palace grounds, where, dressed like a Khan of the Turks, he sat in front of his tent.
under the wolf’s-head ensign, attended by slaves in Turkish dress, and sliced himself gobbets of boiled mutton with his sword.24

Noodles originated in western Asia but became an important part of the cuisine of Central Asia and may have been introduced from there into northern Chinese cuisine, since the earliest Chinese reference to making noodles is in the abovementioned agricultural treatise of 540, with its marked pastoral nomadic influence. Such dishes could also be regarded as a shared enterprise in what the anthropologist Eugene Anderson describes as ‘a frontier society where Chinese and Altaic people had influenced each other through thousands of years of interaction’25 A Mongol Yuan period Chinese dietary manual, the *Yinshan Zhengyao*, dated to 1330, contains a number of Turkish recipes, including layered pastries made of thinly rolled dough (*pirak* or *parak, börek*), stuffed dumplings (*mantı*), two noodle and yoghurt dishes (*salma* and *tutmaç*) and millet beer (*boza*).26 A Chinese encyclopaedia from the same era also includes recipes of Turkish origin for starch wafers (*güllaç*), *börek, tutmaç* and *kavurma*,27 all of which lived on in Ottoman cuisine.

The dissemination of Turkic languages and loanwords today, from northwestern China to eastern Europe, reflects Turkish westward migration over a period of two thousand years and their sphere of cultural influence. Among the most widely dispersed food terms in the pre-Ottoman period were *kiyma* (finely chopped meat) and *kavurma*, which entered Hindi as *keema* and *korma* respectively, and Persian in the forms *qiyma* and *qāvormeh*.28 The Hindi word *achar* for pickles is also of Turkish origin, meaning ‘opens’, as in ‘opening’ the appetite. Hungarian contains a number of Turkish loanwords acquired through contact in the ninth and tenth centuries, including *alma* (*elma, apple*), *gyümölcs* (*yemiş, fruit*) and *büza* (*buğday, wheat*).29

One dish in particular allows us to trace the movement of Turkish peoples in the pre-Ottoman period. This is the abovementioned *tutmaç*, a noodle and yoghurt soup that remained popular in the Ottoman period and is still widespread in Turkish provincial cuisines. Made with various flavourings such as barberry juice and mint, *tutmaç* was carried by the Turks wherever they went, whether as rulers or mercenaries. Legend had it that this popular dish was invented to feed hungry Turkish soldiers in the army of Alexander the Great when they decided to return home; asking for a meal before they departed, they declared, ‘bizi tutma aç’ (don’t keep us hungry), which was supposedly the origin of the word *tutmaç*.30 Although this folk etymology is untenable (*tutmaç* is in fact a conflation of the verb *tutmak*, to knead dough, and *aş*, soup or stew), the legend does serve as a reminder that culinary links between European and Asian peoples are nothing new. *Tutmaç* was described by Mahmud al-Kashgari as ‘a well-known food of the Turks’ and it travelled with them far and wide, cropping up in anecdotes relating to the Seljuk Turks and the sultans of Delhi as well as in medieval cookery books in Chinese, Urdu and Arabic. In the *Yinshan Zhengyao* the noodles are stuffed with minced mutton and served with a sauce of garlic and yoghurt just like the modern Turkish *mantı*. There are several references to *tutmaç* in India during the period of the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1517),31 and a recipe for an Indianized version of *tutmaç*, in which the noodles are flavoured with camphor, musk, rose water, herbs, cardamom, cloves, mace and spikenard, is found in a cookery book written for Ghiyas Shah, the Turkic ruler of the Malwa Sultanate (1392–1531) in what is now Madhya Pradesh.32 In twelfth-century Egypt it was
recorded by Maimonides (1135–1204), who described it as ‘dough cooked like noodles and vermicelli – that which the Persians call tutmâj’. A thirteenth-century tutmaç recipe in a cookery book owned by the Ayyubid ruler Al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyûb of Damascus and Egypt (d. 1249) describes it as rolled dough cut into pieces two fingers in length, boiled in a little water, served with fried meat and eaten with a spoon or a fork. The dish became so popular that it even gets a mention in the *Thousand and One Nights* where it appears in the Arabicized form tutmâjiyâh. In the Ottoman period it was introduced into the Balkans and today survives in Romania by the name tocmâğî.

The flowering of pilaf as a distinct and diverse genre of dishes seems to have begun in Central Asia, where ‘rice prepared in several ways’ was served at a banquet given in Uzbekistan in 1404 by the Turco-Mongol emperor Timur (r. 1370–1405). Of the more than sixty varieties of pilaf being made in Iran by the end of the sixteenth century, a number bore eastern Turkish names. Rice pilaf of various kinds became an important feature of Ottoman cuisine, although never dominating to the degree it did in Iran. One seventeenth-century Ottoman traveller noted with amazement that forty different kinds of pilaf were made in Tabriz, and eleven kinds served at a banquet he attended.

**Iranians and Abbasids**

From the eleventh century to the Mongol invasion of the early thirteenth century, Iran was ruled by three Turkish dynasties, the Ghaznavids, Seljuks and Khwarazmians. This was a time of interaction between Turkish and Iranian cuisines, as illustrated by an anecdote related by the twelfth-century Arab historian Ali ibn al-Athir (1160–1233) about the Seljuk ruler Tuğrul, who ruled Iran between 1037 and 1063. When served a marzipan-filled roll called lawzinaj, Tuğrul is supposed to have commented, ‘This is delicious tutmâç, but it is a pity it has no garlic in it.’ The anecdote was probably invented as a jibe at the culinary unsophistication of the new conqueror, but nevertheless illustrates the culture clash as viewed by the Abbasids, whose own cuisine was the outcome of a process of refinement under Iranian influence following the Arab conquest of Iran in the seventh century. A similar process of refinement left a strong Iranian stamp on Seljuk cuisine, which passed via the Anatolian Seljuks to the Ottomans. Among the numerous Iranian dishes that became integral to Ottoman cuisine were çorba (soup), tarbana (a dried soup mix made of yoghurt and flour or whole wheat grains, sometimes with additional flavourings like herbs), yahni (boiled mutton stew with a variety of other ingredients, such as chickpeas), büryan (pit-roast lamb or kid), köfte (meatballs), kaygana (omelette), zerde (saffron-flavoured rice pudding) and hoşaf (stewed fruit). An Iranian sweetmeat called pashmak became one of the most popular Ottoman sweetmeats. It was made by repeatedly stretching and twisting a ring of pulled honey or sugar in flour roasted in butter, to produce a texture of fine, silky strands. According to an oral tradition related by the inhabitants of the mountain village of Şıhlar near Alanya in southern Turkey, this sweetmeat has been made in their village since it was founded in the thirteenth century by a Sufi sheikh called Pirce Alaaddin. Like Rumi he came from Khorasan (a region straddling eastern Persia and western Afghanistan). During the Ottoman period pashmak acquired a variety of names, including peşmani, keten helva (linen helva), the still current pişmaniye and around a dozen regional names in Anatolia. As well as
entering Ottoman cuisine, this sweetmeat made its way east from Iran to India and China (where it is known as sohan papdi and dragon’s beard respectively), yet inexplicably remained unknown in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire.43

Ottoman cuisine was also extensively influenced by Abbasid foodways, as reflected in dishes such as kalye (fried dishes of meat and vegetables), medfune (stuffed aubergine), narenciye (stew flavoured with bitter orange juice), muballebi (ground rice pudding, sometimes made in a luxury version with shredded chicken breast, still popular in Turkey today by the name tavukgöğünü),44 numerous varieties of helva (the generic Arabic term for sweet confections), murabba (fruit preserves) and kadayıf (griddle cakes soaked in syrup). The word kebab was adopted from Arabic, although roast meat dishes themselves were not new.

One of the Abbasid sweet dishes inherited by the Ottomans was luqma, doughnuts soaked in syrup, known to the Ottomans as lokma. This clearly derives from the earlier Roman globi, which were balls of dough mixed with cheese that were fried and then soaked in honey.45 The Roman type with cheese survived in Ottoman Greek cuisine and became known by the Turkish name peynir lokması, recorded in an eighteenth-century Ottoman cookery manual as a speciality of the island of Mytilene.46

Reciprocal Turkish influence can be traced in medieval Iranian and Arab cuisines, as shown by foods with Turkish names mentioned by the fifteenth-century Iranian poet Bushaq, such as börek, manti, kavut, kıyma and tutmaç,47 or occurring in Arabic cookery books, such as gömeç (a bun cooked by burying in hot ashes), karnıyarık (a type of baklava), kavut and salma. In Arabic the word tutmaç became a culinary term for thinly rolled pastry as well as for the tutmaç noodles themselves.48 Yoghurt was introduced into Arab cuisine at this period, as indicated by the name mast Fârisî, meaning Persian milk.49

Some of these foods may have been introduced to Arab cuisine prior to the Seljuk period by Turkish slave soldiers from Central Asia known as mamluks, who were employed by the Abbasids throughout the Middle East from the ninth century. Those who rose in the ranks were in their turn introduced to the refined cuisine and table manners of the Abbasid elite. Strict dining etiquette prevailed at the Abbasid court and breaches were dealt with severely, as illustrated by the sad end of one Turkish commander employed by Caliph al-Mu’tasim (795–842) who was arrested for washing his hands in sight of the caliph and died in prison in 841.50

In Egypt the mamluks eventually seized power and established the Mamluk Sultanate (1250–1517). They continued to eat many traditional Turkish foods, such as yufka, pekmez, yoğurt, kavurma, kurut, manti, salma and kaymak, and to use Turkish terms such as söklençi.
and şişlik (both meaning meat roasted on skewers), tuturgan (rice) and yürümçik (cheese) rather than their Arabic or Persian equivalents.⁵¹

**Anatolian Seljuks**

The Seljuks began their conquest of Anatolia in 1071 after defeating the Byzantines at the Battle of Manzikert (Malazgirt) northeast of Lake Van, and around 1074 they established the Anatolian Seljuk Sultanate, whose first capital was İznik (Nicaea), southeast of Istanbul. The Seljuk conquest of Anatolia opened the way for waves of Turkish migrants over the next few centuries.

Among foods introduced to Anatolia from the Islamic world during the Seljuk period, and which entered late Byzantine cuisine, were rice, spinach, cucumbers, aubergines, grafted apricots, bitter oranges, lemons, sour cherries, musk melons and what the Byzantines called ‘Saracen melons’, which may have been sweet watermelons.⁵² The Seljuks were expert gardeners who grafted peaches and sweet apricots onto seed-grown apricot trees and grew melons out of season.⁵³ The famous Kameddin apricot was named after the Seljuk statesman Kameddin, vizier to Sultan Alaeddin Keykubat I (r. 1221–37) and a keen gardener.⁵⁴ These apricots grown in the Seljuk capital of Konya and lands to the south along the Mediterranean coast were dried and exported to Syria and Egypt. This trade left its mark in the name kamereddin, which is still used today for apricot leather in the Middle East.⁵⁵

The wedding feast for Melik Danişmend and his bride Gülnuş Banu in the late eleventh century gives a detailed picture of the foodstuffs and dishes typical of the Seljuk period. A thousand sheep, the same number of lambs, five hundred goats, three hundred cattle, one hundred camels and one hundred and fifty horses, as well as ten tonnes of rice, one tonne of butter and large amounts of wheat, wheat starch, chickpeas, onions, dried fruits, almonds and honey, were used in its preparation. These quantities are not surprising in view of the claim that Melik’s entire army of 31,000 men were fed, although they would probably have been served a simpler menu than that prepared for the distinguished guests. Dishes included stuffed and spit-roasted lamb, spit-roasted chicken and pigeon, boiled mutton, büran (a dish of spinach and rice), sausages, meatballs, sheep’s head dressed with garlic and vinegar, three kinds of soup (‘sour flavoured’, chicken and tarhana), keşkek, tutmaç with fried meat, noodles (with minced meat, flavoured with vinegar and honey and sprinkled with almonds), rice pilaf, noodle pilaf, bulgur pilaf, pastries with a minced meat filling, various other pastries and buns, saffron pudding, dried fruit pudding and helva.⁵⁶

**Syrian dried apricot leather still known as kamereddin (kamerü‘l-din) after the 13th-century Seljuk vizier Kameddin.**
Banquets given a century later by Sultan Keykubad included plain and saffron pilaf, pit roasts, diverse spit-roasts (lamb, goose, chicken, pigeon, partridge and quail), boiled mutton, various vegetable dishes (borani and kalye) and sweet dishes such as memuniye (fried balls of cooked rice flour dough sprinkled with rose water, sugar and pistachios). Beverages consisted of perfumed sherbets and kimiz.57

Rumi used cooking as a metaphor for attaining awareness of God, as expressed in one of his most famous lines, ‘I was raw, I cooked, I burned.’58 Many Persian, Arabic and Turkish dishes are mentioned in his works, such as herise (which he uses as a simile for vahdet-i vûcud, or oneness of the universe as God, since this porridge of boiled wheat grains and meat is beaten until the two merge together), kebab, sanbusa (triangular fried pastries), zerde, palude (jelly-like pudding thickened with starch), kadayif, büryan and the inevitable tutmaç. Ayran (buttermilk or diluted yoghurt), a drink associated with lowly peasants and pastoralists, represented the unworldly attitude of a true Sufi: ‘I care nothing for honey so long as my bowl of ayran is before me.’59

Although honey is a metaphor for luxury living, Rumi uses other luxury sweet foods, sugar and helva as symbols of the joy deriving from religious faith, and imparts a particular religious meaning to güleşeker (rose jam), as he explains in the following couplet: ‘Now you have become güleşeker, food of the heart, light of the spirit / By güleşeker I mean our existence by the grace of God.’60 This association of sweet foods with happiness and mystic awareness of God continued in the Ottoman period, when they played a prominent role in celebrations of religious festivals and rites of passage.

**Byzantines**

The first recorded contact between Turks and Byzantines took place in 568, when the Göktürk ruler Ishtemi sent a delegation to the Byzantines to negotiate a trade agreement and military alliance against the Sasanians.61 The Byzantines were weakened by the Seljuk invasion of Anatolia that began in 1071 and the Crusader occupation of Constantinople (1204–61). Alliances shifted frequently during the turbulent late Seljuk and early Ottoman eras, and the Turkish and Byzantine rulers were as often allies as enemies. In the fourteenth century the Ottomans gradually gained control of most remaining Byzantine territory, and by the time of Mehmed II’s conquest of Constantinople, the empire consisted of little more than the city itself and its environs.

Byzantine cuisine had roots in ancient Greek, Roman, Egyptian and indigenous Anatolian cultures, but at the same time was shaped by the rigorous demands of Christian fasts. Examples of foods handed down from antiquity include nut sauces, salads and the fermented fish sauce of antiquity known as garum, which the Byzantines called liquamen. This was still made from chub mackerel livers by Ottoman Greeks into the early twentieth century.62 Twice-baked bread (hardtack or biscuit) called paximadia was an ancient staple food for sailors throughout the eastern Mediterranean region and known variously as pasimata in Italian Venetian dialect, pesmet in Romanian, baksimat in Arabic and peksimet in Turkish. The fragrant thyme honey of Athens, which had been highly regarded since antiquity, maintained its reputation during the Byzantine and subsequent Ottoman periods.63 Another survival was the Roman custom of roasting a whole animal and then placing live birds or animals inside the carcass to astonish and entertain guests,
which continued at Byzantine feasts and reappeared as a spectacle at Ottoman celebrations.\textsuperscript{64}

In many other ways, however, Byzantine cuisine differed strikingly from Ottoman and earlier Islamic cuisines. Pork rather than mutton was the preferred meat, and an even more profound difference was the absence of any meat at all in the diet during Orthodox Christian fasting periods, which in all lasted around six months. Dairy products and eggs were also forbidden and fish was allowed only on a few particular fasting days. Consequently the Byzantines ate a far greater amount of fish, both fresh and dried, than their Muslim counterparts. Dishes served at feasts given by the Byzantine general Nestor, recounted in an early Seljuk period epic, included roast pork, stewed pork, cured pork, beef tripe, fresh and dried fish (probably the dried Chalcalburnus tarichi of Lake Van), crab, crayfish, caviar, snails, truffles, and numerous vegetable dishes such as pickled cabbage, cabbage soup, fried spinach, broad beans and lentils.\textsuperscript{65}

Byzantine culinary influence on the Ottomans is seen in the emphasis on vegetable dishes and, especially in Istanbul, the popularity of fish, although most Muslims continued to avoid crustaceans and molluscs. The eighteenth-century Ottoman historian Ahmed

Hardtack (peksimet from the Greek paximadia) made in a village in southwestern Turkey.
Crabs are stewed with olive oil, lemon, parsley and mint. It is strengthening and particularly suited to those who drink alcohol. In Istanbul the name for this unclean food is *papaz yahnisi* [priest’s stew] or *pulâki*. Infidels prepare such seafood in their own way for their Lenten fasts.\(^{66}\)

Greek loan words in Ottoman Turkish include the names for many types of sea fish, dried mackerel (*çiroz*), seafood such as octopus, cos lettuce, cabbage, leek, chestnut and *pide* (thin, circular leavened bread).\(^{67}\) The custom of baking *pide* with toppings such as cheese or gourd may have been inherited from Byzantine cuisine.\(^{68}\) Salads, tripe soup and Lenten vegetable dishes cooked with olive oil all became popular features of Ottoman cuisine. The term *pulâki* or *pilaki* (from the Greek *plakíon*) for a stone or earthenware cooking tray gave its name to a class of vegetable and fish dishes cooked in this utensil. A typical example is a dish of anchovies cooked in a *pilaki* in Trabzon, recorded in a seventeenth-century Ottoman source.

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**Anchovy Pilaki**

First gut the anchovies; then thread ten each onto reeds. Finely chop parsley, celeriac, onion and leek, mix with cinnamon and black pepper, and arrange the anchovies and chopped vegetables in alternate layers in a pan that they call *pilaki*, made from stone. Pour the delicious olive oil of Trabzon over the top and cook over a hot fire for one hour until golden bright. He who eats it will be as radiant as light.\(^{69}\)
Two

Historical Development, 1299–1922


drew on the rich and diverse culinary heritages of Central Asia, Iran, the Middle East and Anatolia, and was influenced by the local cuisines of the peoples absorbed into the expanding empire. Allowing for regional differences deriving from geographical factors, Ottoman Muslims, Christians and Jews throughout Ottoman territory essentially came to share a common cuisine, divided mainly by the dietary restrictions of their respective faiths. By the sixteenth century this synthesis of many cultures was evolving into a distinct Ottoman identity that was to stamp foodways throughout the lands under Ottoman rule, creating what the Austrian Iranologist Bert Fragner has described as the ‘Ottoman culinary empire’.1

Fostering agriculture and trade were primary concerns of the Ottomans, as principal sources of revenue and the foundation of the empire’s economy.2 These drove its expansionist policy, which aimed to gain control of fertile agrarian regions and trade routes.3 The early Ottoman focus on agriculture was symbolized by a copper vessel filled with wheat at the head of the catafalque of Sultan Murad I (r. 1362–89) in Bursa, and a plough suspended at its foot.4 The Turcoman nomads, who were such an asset in conquering new regions, became a liability as soon as it was time for life to return to normal. The vast herds of the nomads destroyed crops while on the move from summer to winter pastures, depriving peasants of their livelihood and causing losses in tax revenues for the state. Their habit of raiding caravans also disrupted trade. Efforts to persuade nomads to settle down and become farmers continued throughout the Ottoman period. They and other groups, including dervishes and former slaves, were offered incentives such as land, tools, seed and attractive taxation rates to take up agriculture.5

Trade was encouraged in towns by building a market in every town that was conquered, as well as mosques, charity kitchens and public baths.6 This intensive building programme meant that during the first century the Ottomans developed their own distinctive style of architecture.7 Whether the same was true of their cuisine is hard to say, since there are hardly any records of what they ate at this early period. An account of the month-long wedding celebrations for Murad I’s son Bayezid and his bride Sultan Hatun8 in 1378 is short on details about the food prepared for the daily banquets. We are told only that ‘dishes of many kinds’ were served, including roast meat, and that mutton and sugar loaves were consumed in large quantities. The fact that ‘even menial servants came to expect roast oxen’ suggests that throughout the

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Ottoman period beef was regarded as an inferior meat, fit only for the humbler classes. The banquets presumably met standards of magnificence at royal courts of the time, because the guests included rulers of other Turkish principalities, and an envoy was even sent to Egypt with an invitation for the Memluk sultan. This guest list reflects burgeoning Ottoman power and ambitions.

Ibn Battûta’s descriptions of the foodways he encountered in other Turkish principalities in Anatolia in the early fourteenth century can be taken as a fairly reliable picture of what the early Ottomans were eating. He remarked on the delicious food, the variety of dishes, sweetmeats and fruits, and the generous hospitality. In several towns he was entertained by the abi brotherhoods that were part Sufi order and part trade guild. In Antalya ‘they prepared a banquet for us in a garden belonging to one of them,’ and in Denizli he and his companions were served ‘a great banquet with sweetmeats and quantities of fruit’, followed by a recitation of the Qur’an and then singing and dancing.

Under the Ottomans the tradition of feeding others, particularly the needy, became a central tenet of state policy. The first Ottoman ruler, Osman (r. 1299–1324), gave meals and clothing to the poor and alms to widows once a month, as well as building charity kitchens called imarets where the poor were fed daily. This established the image of Ottoman rulers as caring, paternal figures and providers of sustenance for their subjects, whatever their faith. After conquering İzni from the Byzantines in 1331, Osman’s son Orhan built an imaret in the city and personally distributed the first food to needy Christian inhabitants. This imaret was still going strong when John Covel, chaplain to the British embassy in Istanbul between 1670 and 1679, visited it in 1675. In his diary he recorded that every Friday (in particular) is made ready good store of churba (or porridge) and pelaw and the like for all sorts of poor that will come thither. By 1397 there were eight imarets in the city of Bursa, where Johann Schiltberger reported that ‘poor people are received, whether they be Christians, infidels or Jews.’

Ottoman sultans and statesmen continued this tradition, founding imarets in towns and cities throughout the empire. When Murad II (1421–51) built a new imaret just outside the Ottoman capital city of Edirne in eastern Thrace in 1436, he followed Orhan’s example by himself serving meals on the first day. By admitting people of all faiths and offering a predictable range of dishes, imarets served as an ‘Ottomanizing mechanism’, in the words of historian Amy Singer, and contributed to a shared Ottoman identity.

From the start, imarets were not aimed solely at assisting the poor but also other segments of society. The oldest surviving Ottoman document, an endowment deed dated 1324 for an imaret founded by Orhan at Mektece in northwest Anatolia, instructs the trustee to ‘expend what is in the interests of the traveling dervishes, the poor, strangers and mendicants, and those in search of knowledge’, demonstrating that imarets were part of a broad social, religious and educational agenda.

Written sources for Ottoman cuisine steadily increase from the turn of the fifteenth century, showing that the elite in the provinces and court circles enjoyed a wide range of dishes of Iranian, Arab and Turkish origin. For the first half of the century these sources include medical books, a series of poems about food written by the mystic poet Kaygusuz Abdal, scion of a local landowning family in southern Anatolia, and over seventy recipes recorded by Muhammed bin
Mahmud Şirvânî, court physician to Murad II.⁰⁹ A syncretization process between Turkish, Abbasid and Iranian cooking was already under way, as illustrated by Şirvânî’s recipe for the Turkish dish *salma*, whose ingredients include chickpeas, almonds and saffron as well as the traditional noodles, meat, yoghurt, garlic and mint.ⁱ¹ Iranian and Arab dishes were similarly adapted to Ottoman tastes, as in the case of an Iranian stew called *zirbaj* made of mutton, chickpeas, spices, honey and rose water, which in the fifteenth-century Ottoman version was a pudding in which dried fruits had been substituted for meat and chickpeas, and the spices omitted. Owing to the tangy flavour imparted by the dried fruits, this became known in Turkish as *ekşi aş* (sour soup).⁲²

Şirvânî’s recipe for *tel kadayıf*, fine strands of batter cooked on a griddle that were then made into a sweet pastry, is the earliest record of this new version of *kadayıf*, which in the medieval Arab world had been griddle cakes very like English crumpets. From the fifteenth century onwards the new *tel kadayıf* began to take over from the traditional type throughout the empire, becoming known in Arabic as *kunâfa*, a term that originally referred to flatbread. Whether *tel kadayıf* started life as an obscure local speciality that never made it into writing, or whether it was an Ottoman invention, may never be known, but it became one of the most popular types of Ottoman sweet pastry, second only to baklava.

Baklava is first mentioned in a poem written by Kaygusuz Abdal in the first half of the fifteenth century.⁶ The single line ‘Two hundred trays of baklava, some with almonds, some with lentils’ is revealing. Specifying such large quantities shows that baklava was already a festive dish, as it continued to be throughout the Ottoman period. The startling information that lentils were used as a filling is confirmed by an early Persian recipe for ‘baklava of Karaman’ (*Baqlâvâ-ye Qaramânî*),⁴ which is filled with lentil purée, and it can hardly be coincidence that Kaygusuz Abdal himself came from the Karaman region of southeastern-central Anatolia.

Meanwhile, the pastoral diet of Turcoman nomads remained unaffected by changes going on in the higher echelons of society. Yoghurt and *yufka* were the main ingredients of a simple meal offered to the French pilgrim Bertrand de la Broquière at a nomad encampment in the mountains of southeast Anatolia in 1432:

> We halted among them; they placed before us one of the table-cloths before-mentioned, in which there remained fragments of bread, cheese, and grapes. They then brought us a dozen of thin cakes of bread, with a large jug of curdled milk, called by them *yogurt*. The cakes are a foot broad, round, and thinner than wafers; they fold them up as grocers do their papers for spices, and eat them filled with the curdled milk.⁵

The conquest of Constantinople from the Byzantines by Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1451–81) in 1453 marked a new phase in Ottoman history and an increase in written sources for its foodways. After the conquest, Mehmed followed earlier Ottoman tradition by embarking on an ambitious building programme, described by the Byzantine historian Kritoboulos:

> He erected baths of appropriate beauty, usefulness, and size. He built also splendid residences, inns, and markets all over the City, and caravansaries, and he planted public gardens. He
brought in plenty of water, and did all he knew how, to give the City ornamentation and beauty as well as what was necessary for practical life. Not only this, but he also peopled the suburbs and the country around, transporting many of the Triballi and Paeonians and Moesians from their homes, bringing some of them by force and settling them in this way. He did this because he believed it wise to people all the outlying region near the City, both because of the fertility of the soil – which is good for sowing and planting, and fertile for all sorts of vegetables and fruits – and more particularly because he wanted to provide for the needs of the City and to settle the country which had become to a great extent uninhabited and without houses, and dangerous to travelers.\(^{26}\)

Mehmed provided new settlers with grain, yokes of oxen and ‘every other necessary supply they needed for the time being, so that they were able to give themselves to agriculture’.\(^{27}\) That with so much else going on Mehmed bothered to plan local supplies of vegetables, fruits and grain for his new capital shows that like his predecessors he saw food provision as one of his primary obligations. He ordered the land around his mosque, on a hilltop site overlooking the Golden Horn, to be planted with ‘trees bearing all sorts of fruit for the delectation and happiness and use of many’, and the terraced gardens surrounding Topkapı Palace were similarly planted with trees ‘producing beautiful fruit’.\(^{28}\)

Hundreds of foodstuffs listed in palace kitchen accounts for Mehmed II’s reign confirm the importance attached to fruit. As well as locally grown fruits, the sultan’s table was supplied with particularly desirable varieties transported from provinces hundreds of kilometres away, wrapped in felt and packed in chests to protect them from bruising. These included quinces from as far away as Burdur in southern Anatolia, apples from Sinop on the Black Sea coast, and grapes from Kargın and Ayaş in north-central Anatolia.\(^{29}\) In winter, fruit leather and a wide range of dried fruits were consumed.\(^{30}\)

The surprising variety of fish and seafood eaten by Mehmed, including eel, sturgeon, prawns (shrimp), caviar and bottarga, reflects increased Byzantine influence following the conquest of Constantinople.\(^{31}\) The locality of Istanbul itself, which was on a major fish migration route through the Bosphorus and provided an abundance of excellent fish throughout the year, also encouraged the eating of fish to an extent and in a variety unequalled elsewhere.

One of the most significant developments of the fifteenth century was the emergence of confectioners as a specialist class of cook at the palace, although a separate confectionery kitchen (helvahane) is not

Street seller of macun, a medicinal paste that became a popular children’s sweet, early 20th century.
Döner kebap cooking on a horizontal spit outdoors, c. 1616. This now famous kebab originated as a picnic food.
recorded until the sixteenth century. This was at a
time when in Europe sugar confectionery was still
the preserve of pharmacists, and Ottoman confection-
ers did not break the traditional link with pharmacy
altogether, continuing to prepare medicinal syrups,
pastes and electuaries. In consequence, new types of
confectionery based on Islamic medicinal preparations
evolved in the fifteenth century. Unpleasant-tasting
active ingredients that had been masked by sugar or
honey were replaced by fruits, flowers and spices to
create sweetmeats such as lohuk, an electuary whose
transformation into a sweetmeat is first recorded in
the first half of the fifteenth century. Lohuk in its
new form was characterized by a smooth, viscous con-
sistency, achieved by stirring without interruption in
one direction to prevent crystallization, hence the later
Turkish name çevirme (turning). It became customary
to serve this to guests, who each took a spoonful –
a custom that explains the still current Greek term
glyko koutaliou (spoon sweet). Another former medi-
cal preparation was crunchy crystallized tablets called
cevarış, which entered the confectionery repertoire in
the mid-fifteenth century. A toffee-like medicinal paste
called macun is first recorded as a sweetmeat in the
seventeenth century, and a variety enjoyed by chil-
dren is still sold on the streets in Turkey today during
Ramazan.

Mutton, lamb and chicken were the preferred meats
of Ottoman cuisine; beef appeared on royal tables
only in cured form. Game birds such as quail, par-
tridge and duck were eaten, although they carried no
particular prestige as an exclusive food of the nobil-
ity as they did in Europe. Pigeons destined for the
kitchens were bred in the palace grounds. Meat was
typically boiled in stews, cooked with pilaf, diced and
added to vegetable dishes, or finely chopped to make
meatballs or filling for börek. Roast meat of any kind
was a luxury, common on the tables of the wealthy but
very much a special occasion dish for others.

Since eating pork was prohibited by Judaism and
Islam, it acquired an association with Christianity
not found in the Christian countries of Europe. A
sixteenth-century Armenian priest named Xač’atur
expressed this in striking terms when he declared, ‘If
we didn’t eat the meat of the pig, then we wouldn’t
be Christian.’ In the sixteenth century, European
diplomats in Istanbul were able to purchase pork
from Greeks and Bulgarians, but in later centuries
tighter restrictions were imposed and bringing pigs
to market in the city was only permitted once a year,
for the spring festival of Hidrellez. Hunting wild
boar in forests near the city was forbidden even to
Christians, and consequently these animals multiplied
to such an extent that in the early nineteenth century a
cull was ordered in which five hundred were killed in
the forests along the Black Sea coast in a single day.
From the 1830s, however, the law was relaxed and pork
became available at shops in Pera, a neighbourhood
north of the Golden Horn with a largely Ottoman
Christian and European population.

What could be called ‘classical’ Ottoman cuisine
started in the sixteenth century, when the political,
economic and cultural self-confidence of the expand-
ing empire reached new heights. The conquest of
Egypt and Syria from the Mamluks in 1517 increased
supplies of sugar, contributing to the further develop-
ment of confectionery, and led to the introduction of
coffee. Soups, vegetable dishes, pickles, pastries, fruit
preserves and sherbets were made in ever increasing
variety. To relish this variety of flavours at a single meal,
the elite adopted the custom of serving many dishes
one by one; diners ate just one or two morsels of each before it was whipped away and replaced by the next. Cooks employed at the Ottoman palace and in wealthy households devoted their skills to pleasing employers who were accustomed to eating the best of everything. Using the finest and most expensive ingredients available in the empire and beyond, including refined sugar from Syria and Egypt, rose water from Edirne, pomegranate syrup from Gallipoli, saffron from eastern Anatolia, musk from Tibet and spices from the East Indies, and with armies of kitchen hands to do labour-intensive tasks, these cooks could concentrate on perfecting familiar dishes and devising new ones. Creating sophisticated variations of ordinary dishes was one of the ways in which Ottoman haute cuisine evolved. An elaborate version of the ancient wheat dish aşure made at the Ottoman palace for Muharrem in 1870 contained eighteen ingredients: dates, raisins, seedless sultanas, currants, pine nuts, roasted hazelnuts, almonds, black-eyed beans, broad (fava) beans, haricot (navy) beans, chickpeas (garbanzo beans), starch, rice flour, clarified butter, husked wheat, sugar, musk and rose water. Simple dishes were turned into masterpieces not just by the use of the best ingredients and luxury flavourings such as musk, but by skilled and lengthy preparation techniques. Hours of patient stirring transformed the starch pudding pelte into lokum (Turkish delight), and eggs with fried onions into a palace dish known as enderun yumurtası (Inner Palace-style eggs), for which the onions were stirred in clarified butter over a low heat for three hours and flavoured with cinnamon. Professional cooks were expected to make baklava that had as many layers as possible, yet was still light enough for a coin dropped from a height to pierce them all and strike the bottom of the tray, a test first described in the seventeenth century. Baklava fillings such as clotted cream, fresh unsalted cheese, puréed beans and melon recorded in the eighteenth century illustrate the experimentation with new flavours taking place in elite kitchens. Böreks also multiplied as yufka were folded, rolled and layered into a variety of shapes, with many different fillings; seventeenth-century sources mention dozens of kinds made in palace circles and regional cuisines. The origins of some are evident from their names, such as Tatar börek (stuffed noodles with yoghurt, almost identical to manti) and Damascus börek, about which all we know is that it was flavoured with sumac. Fillings reflected local preferences, such as börek filled with foxtail lily leaves, recorded in Erzurum, and anchovy börek from the Black Sea city of Trabzon. Foxtail lily leaves gathered in spring before the flowers form are still a favourite vegetable in eastern Turkey today, and the popularity of anchovy dishes in Trabzon is legendary. An entire book devoted to poetry and prose about anchovies was published in 1989, and local jokes and light verse on the subject are recorded as early as the seventeenth century. Spices and aromatics were used with restraint, with black pepper and cinnamon predominating. Sour flavours, including bitter orange juice, lemon juice, sour grapes, sour pomegranate juice, plums, sumac and yoghurt, were a feature of many dishes. The Ottomans made a sharper demarcation between sweet and savoury dishes than did the Abbasids, although the earlier tradition lingered on in dishes such as pilaf with honey or sugar, neck of lamb cooked with grape molasses, and various savoury dishes containing dried fruit. Soups were an important and diverse genre and the many pot-cooked meat and vegetable dishes were served with their own cooking juices, so that the sauce was an inherent part of the dish rather than a separate.
addition. These were cooked slowly over charcoal in round-bottomed copper pans, which due to their shape and high conductivity allowed for even cooking. The nineteenth-century French chef Alexis Soyer wrote admiringly,

The process of the Turkish cookery, though slow, I much approve of, as the succulence and aroma of every kind of food are retained, and it is far superior to our system, everything being cooked or stewed on the top of red-hot ashes laid on slabs of stone or marble. The nineteenth-century French chef Alexis Soyer wrote admiringly,

Vegetable dishes became one of the hallmarks of Ottoman cookery. They were so numerous and so highly regarded that, as one observer commented in the nineteenth century, it was ‘on the preparation of vegetables [that] the Turkish cook expends all his art.’ Vegetable dishes usually included meat, but only as a secondary ingredient to lend richness and enhance the flavours of the vegetables. Stuffed vegetables called dolma (‘filled’) became one of the best-loved and most diverse categories. From just onion and apple in the fifteenth century, dolma were made with vine-leaf, cabbage, aubergine, carrot and baby gourd in the sixteenth century, and a score more are recorded in the following centuries, including borage, okra, watermelon, leek, hazelnut leaf and quince leaf. Pickles were similarly made from every possible fruit and vegetable, both at home and by commercial picklers. Aubergine gradually rose to prominence to become the favourite vegetable of Ottoman cuisine, known by the Turkish name zeytinyağlı (with olive oil) and including meatless dolma called yalancı dolma (mock dolma).

Europeans were shocked by the Ottoman habit of eating raw vegetables and fruits, condemning it as a cause of indigestion, fever, intestinal complaints and even smallpox and plague. The seventeenth-century French traveller Guillaume-Joseph Grelot considered that the ‘great plenty of Fruits, Salads, and among the rest of Cucumbers half ripe, together with their stalks, [was] a dyet very proper to break a French horses belly.’ The association of animals with eating raw vegetables, with the implication that they were unfit for human consumption, echoes the following comment by the sixteenth-century German traveller Hans Dernschwam:

And it can be wondered at, by what these folk are nourished. Because you mainly see fruit, garlic, onions, salad without vinegar and oil, root vegetables and leaf vegetables are all eaten raw like cattle do.

Islamic and Byzantine physicians did not share the prejudice of their Western European counterparts against uncooked fruit and vegetables, nor the medieval idea of a preordained order of creation in which vegetables, because they grew in or near the ground, were intended by God only to feed the lower social orders and animals. Instead, vegetable dishes were highly regarded. Most Ottoman families had gardens where they grew their own vegetables and fruit, and in season market prices were low. Oranges from the Aegean region were cheap enough in sixteenth-century Istanbul to be thrown by crowds at witnesses found guilty of giving false evidence in court. Grapes were
particularly esteemed, as shown by an account of Topkapı Palace gardens by the English clockmaker Thomas Dallam, who in the late sixteenth century spent a month at the palace assembling an organ that had been sent as a gift to Sultan Mehmed III by Queen Elizabeth I:

We passed through very delightful walks and gardens; the walks are, as it were, hedged in with stately cypress trees, planted with an equale distance one from another, betwixt them and behind them, smaller trees that beareth excellent fruit . . . Every by-corner hath some excellent fruite tree or trees growing in them; also there is great abundance of sweet grapes, and of diverse sorts; that men may gather grapes every day in the year. In November, as I sat at dinner, I see them gather grapes upon the vines, and theye brought them to me to eat. For the space of a month I dined every day in the Surrallia, and we had every day grapes after our meat.56

In the Aegean town of Urla, a single ancient vine shading the coffee houses was said to produce 37 different grape varieties, the result of a local custom of grafting new scions onto the original stock.57 The importance attached to horticulture led to grafting becoming a profession in its own right, with a separate guild from that of the professional gardeners.58 Fruit growing was a popular pursuit among the upper classes, who exchanged scions and bred new varieties, such as the Mustafa Bey pear, named after its grower, the seventeenth-century composer Buhurizade Mustafa Itri Efendi.59 Scions of fine varieties were sought after, and sometimes sent long distances by post horse.60 Fruit preserves in syrup became one of the most important sweetmeats from the sixteenth century onwards, demonstrated by the existence of a special kitchen for preserve making called the reçelhane (jam house) at Topkapı Palace.61 Eighteen types, including watermelon, Cornelian cherry, aubergine, green walnut, pear, sour cherry and carrot, were served at a royal circumcision banquet for two of Süleyman’s sons in 1539.62 Seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century sources mention many more preserves, such as green almond, jujube, quince blossom, gourd and medlar. Offering fruit preserves or.lohuk to guests, as chocolates are offered today, had become customary by the mid-seventeenth century, and these were among the gifts presented to wealthy brides. At the wedding of Mehmed IV’s daughter Hatice Sultan in 1675, presents sent to her by the groom included ‘30 mules laden with sugar-plums and sweet-meats.63

Innovations by sixteenth-century confectioners included transparent hard-boiled sugar sweets called akide.64 These became so popular at weddings and other festivities that towards the end of the century a black market sprang up to meet the high demand, pushing sugar prices up. Guild confectioners complained to the court and unauthorized producers were banned.65 Tabine or tahin helvası – essentially nougat mixed with sesame paste, which is the ubiquitous commercial helva of Turkey and the Middle East today – can also be tentatively dated to the sixteenth century, since it is first recorded in the early seventeenth century by an Ottoman author.66 A cheap version of tahin helvası was made with grape molasses instead of sugar and a decoction of Gypsophila (baby’s breath) root instead of egg whites, so that this helva was affordable for people of all classes.67 Eaten with bread it made a convenient snack meal for travellers and
labourers, and for Christians during fasting periods, as described by Pretextat Lecomte: ‘There are certain times of the year at which the helva becomes, so to speak, the only food of the Christian and Armenian population.’

Lokum began to evolve in the seventeenth century when the religious scholar, poet and gourmet Nevizade Atai (1583–1635) made a new version of the starch pudding of Iranian origin called pelte, and presented some in celadon bowls to the chief black eunuch as a gift for Sultan Murad IV (r. 1623–40). Made with the finest Damascus rock sugar, stirred unceasingly for three hours and flavoured with rose water or musk, the new sweetmeat became known as rahatü'l-hulkum (ease to the throat), later corrupted and shortened to lokum. This remained an exclusive speciality of palace confectioners until it was picked up by Istanbul’s commercial confectioners in the late eighteenth century. A regulation was passed in 1795 declaring that ‘rahatü'l-hulkum made in the palace confectionery kitchen for the sultan’ should not be made by confectioners outside the palace, but implementing the ban proved impossible. Lokum was originally flavoured with musk, rose water, almonds and pistachios, followed in the late nineteenth century by mastic, and by a type made in two layers sandwiched together with clotted cream.

New World foods began to enter the cuisine from the sixteenth century, beginning with pumpkin, followed by maize, chilli pepper and the turkey in the seventeenth century; tomatoes, green beans and runner beans in the eighteenth century; and potatoes, courgettes (zucchini) and chocolate in the nineteenth century. With the exception of maize, which quickly became a staple in the regional cuisines of the mountainous Black Sea region, none of these had much impact on Ottoman cuisine until the nineteenth century. Far more important were two African vegetables, okra and the mock tomato (Solanum aethiopicum), that became popular in the seventeenth century. The mock tomato paved the way for the acceptance of bell pepper, which it closely resembles in taste, texture and internal structure, although the shape is more tomato-like.

For people of every class and faith, social life revolved around food and feasting. Offering food and refreshments to guests was an essential part of hospitality, whether at private gatherings of friends at home or celebrations such as weddings and circumcision feasts. Presenting gifts of foodstuffs and cooked dishes to friends, neighbours and the needy, particularly during Ramazan, was a widespread custom at all levels of society. Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512) was presented with gifts of food that included fresh fish, quails, pintails and strawberries. Famous local delicacies were commonly sent to the sultan and his ministers from all over Anatolia, examples including the dried green figs of Köşk, honey from Ladik, quince paste from Amasya, pears from Beypazarı and cheese from Çorlu. White cherries were sent from the Crimea and exotic fruit confections from Egypt. An eighteenth-century recipe for a sweet pastry explains that it will keep for up to twenty days and so can be ‘sent to friends in other parts of the country’, showing that it was nothing unusual to send homemade delicacies over long distances.

Hospitality and gift-giving meant that foods circulated widely, contributing to a shared culinary experience. Another factor in this process was the centralized administrative system, by which state officials such as judges and army officers were posted to provincial towns and cities. They introduced dishes from
Maize was at first given the Latin name *Turcicum frumentum*, ‘Turkish wheat’, on the mistaken assumption that it been introduced from the Ottoman Empire. Illustration by the botanist Leonhart Fuchs in his *De historia stirpium commentarii insignes* (Basel, 1542).
the capital to local notables with whom they socialized, and brought back to Istanbul local specialities they had enjoyed. Ottoman interest in regional dishes is illustrated by the writings of the seventeenth-century courtier Evliya Çelebi, who listed the famous local foods and dishes of hundreds of towns and cities he visited during a lifetime of travel around the empire from 1640 to the late 1670s. He rarely described these in detail, but one rare exception is what amounts to a recipe for an anchovy dish with leeks made in Trabzon. Interest in regional dishes continued in the eighteenth century, when a cookery manual included recipes for peynir lokması (doughnuts flavoured with cheese and soaked in syrup) as made in Mytilene, börek with a leek filling and a spinach and cheese pie from the Peloponnese, a pie of crépes layered with minced meat from Chios, rabbit stew from Macedonia, a Turcoman nomad dish of melted fresh cheese and flour, a layered aubergine and meat dish from Diyarbakır, and a stuffed aubergine dish from Aleppo. At the end of the nineteenth century an infantry lieutenant called Mahmud Nedim published several regional recipes that he had collected during his postings around the empire, including tripe stew made by Greeks in the Aegean islands, griddle kebab made by nomads, and stuffed bulgur balls made in eastern Anatolia.

Ottoman culinary influence extended beyond the empire’s boundaries, leaving linguistic traces like borek (börrek) and kajmak (kaymak) in Polish, pastrami (pastırma, cured pressed beef) in American English, and kåldolmar (a compound word consisting of the Swedish for cabbage and the Turkish dolma) for stuffed cabbage in Swedish. Kaymak reached Poland during centuries of contact with the Ottomans as alternately allies and enemies, and pastırma was taken to America by Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants from Romania. Dolma is assumed to have been carried to Sweden after King Charles XII of Sweden returned from five years in exile under Ottoman protection. Charles had been defeated by Peter the Great in 1709 and fled to the Ottoman Empire, where he remained until 1714, running up enormous debts to the sultan and private moneylenders. Over the following decade a series of delegations travelled to Stockholm to demand repayment, and a widely held theory is that dolma was introduced by their cooks.

A degree of Ottoman influence on Safavid cuisine is indicated by recipes for baklava in a Persian cookery book written during the reign of Shah Isma’il I (r. 1501–24), and a recipe for dulma-ye kalam (stuffed cabbage) that the author described as ‘cooked by the people of Rum [the Ottomans]’ and ‘not well known’ in Iran, in another Safavid cookbook written in 1594–5.

As a result of long-standing political and trade ties with Venice and the conquest of Hungary in the mid-sixteenth century, Ottoman foodways influenced Central and Western Europe. One of the earliest recorded examples is risotto turcesco (Turkish-style rice pudding), flavoured with cinnamon or rose water, which was served in tarts at a banquet in Ferrara for Ercole II d’Este and his new French bride in 1529, and subsequently as an independent dish at banquets prepared by Bartolomeo Scappi, chef to Pope Pius V (r. 1566–72). Ottoman drinks of sweetened fruit juice, called sherbet, spread to Italy (where they were known as sorbetto) in the sixteenth century, and from there the fashion spread to France and England. Coffee and coffee houses followed the same route in the seventeenth century. Fruit and flower preserves, which had expanded into a distinct class of confectionery by the early sixteenth century, may have played a part in the
similar upsurge in their popularity in Europe, which began in Italy around that time. In support of this surmise is an early fifteenth-century Turkish recipe for candied citrus peel, which is almost identical to a recipe given by Michel de Nostredame (Nostradamus) in his book on confectionery published over a century later in 1552.

The hot, sweetened Ottoman drink known as *salep* made from ground orchid root became popular in seventeenth-century France and England by the name *saloop* or *salup*. It was sold in the streets, as described by a character in the play *The Perplexed Lovers* (1712), who declares, ‘Salup, what is that Salup? I have often seen this Fellow sauntering about Streets, and cou’d not imagine what he sold.’ By the 1730s there were ‘saloop-houses’ as well as street stalls in London.

Nougat introduced to Hungary by the Ottomans became known as *törökmez* (Turkish honey), and from there passed to Austria by the name *Türkischer honig*. Baklava also spread to Hungary, where a local version evolved that was published under the name ‘Hungarian tarts’ in Marx Rumpolt’s *Ein New Kochbuch* (1581), inspiring the Austrian *Apfelstrudel* (apple strudel). Rumpolt’s book includes several recipes described as ‘Turkish’, including for *şiş kebap* and pilaf, as well as the clearly Ottoman stuffed gourd.

The Ottomans introduced rice cultivation to the Balkans in the fourteenth century, and probably sweet melons to Italy in the late fifteenth century. In the sixteenth century they introduced many varieties of fruit, flowers and herbs into Hungary, which became the intermediary for fruits such as the grafted apricot, carried into Western Europe. The Turkish word *kayısı* for the grafted as opposed to the seed-propagated apricot has no equivalent in other languages, which either make no distinction or have adopted the Turkish term (*kaisi* in Persian, *kajszi* in Hungarian, *kajsija* in Bulgarian, *caisa* in Romanian, *kajsija* in Croatian and *kaji* in Albanian). Gardening became fashionable as a pastime for the Hungarian nobility, who sought to adopt every innovation that they saw or heard of in Turkish gardens. Seventeenth-century names for the watermelon – Turkish gourd or ‘Turkie Coocomber’ in English, and *turquin* in French – reflect the Ottoman role in introducing sweet watermelon varieties into Europe.

The Ottoman Empire consequently acquired a reputation as a source of exotic new foods, and some of those introduced from America were initially assumed to come from Turkey. This explains names like Turkey cock for the turkey; Turkish gourd (*zucche Turchesche, Türkisch cucumer*) for the pumpkin; Turkish wheat for maize (*granturco* in Italian, *blé de Turquie* in French and *türkisch Korn* in German), whose first Latin name, coined by the French botanist Johannes Ruellius in 1536, was *Frumentum turcicum*; and Turkish beans for *Phaseolus* species. The Turkish beans (*Tureks-boonen*) that the Dutch took to North America in the seventeenth century may have been black-eyed beans (*Vigna unguiculata*, Turkish *börülce*), whose fresh green pods were tender and edible – as suggested by Adriaen van der Donck’s (1618–1655) comparison of beans introduced by the Dutch to North America, and Native American species:

The Turkish beans which our people have introduced there grow wonderfully; they fill out remarkably well, and are much cultivated. Before the arrival of the Netherlanders, the Indians raised beans of various kinds and colours, but generally too coarse to be eaten green.
Fat-tailed sheep were introduced by the Ottomans to Hungary\textsuperscript{100} and from there were taken to Germany in the sixteenth century. These were the same sheep that had already been admired for their exquisite flavour by the Egyptian geographer al-\textsuperscript{\textquoteleft}Umari in the 1330s.\textsuperscript{101} An illustration of a \textit{Türkischen Schaf} precedes Rumpolt’s thirteen mutton recipes, one of which is for \textit{şiş kebap}, showing that the ‘Turkish sheep’ were accompanied by Turkish methods for cooking them:

Take mutton from the hind leg and cut it in pieces the size of an egg. Then cut onions nicely small, mingle with salt and rub the meat with clean hands. Stick it on a skewer and roast it quickly so that it stays juicy. Thus the Turks cook their roasts with onions and garlic. This food makes people strong and healthy. It is also good food for a soldier in the field.\textsuperscript{102}

From the eighteenth century, as the Ottoman Empire’s fortunes waned, it increasingly looked to Western Europe as the model to follow in order to regain lost commercial, political and military ground. This was accompanied by rising interest in European culture, manifested most visibly in Rococo-style architectural decoration. In the culinary sphere an early example of European influence is an entry reading ‘eggs for pasta makers’ in one of Grand Vizier Ibrahim Paşa’s kitchen account books, dated 1723.\textsuperscript{103} These (presumably Italian) pasta makers marked the first step in the introduction of Italian-style pasta into Ottoman cuisine. By the end of the eighteenth century the term \textit{makarna} (macaroni) had entered the Turkish language and dried pasta in various shapes made in Cyprus, Venice and Crete was on sale in Istanbul, where it was a winter dish cooked in ‘the poorest homes’.\textsuperscript{104} Cheap exports had been made possible by mass production using machinery, encouraging the spread of dried pasta throughout Europe and America.\textsuperscript{105} A pasta factory was established in Paris in the middle of the century, and in the 1830s the Ottomans followed suit with a factory established at Selimiye Barracks to supply the army.\textsuperscript{106} Jelly (\textit{elmasiye}), tea drinking and acquisitions of European tableware by the elite are further signs of European influence, particularly in the second half of the century.

In the nineteenth century, emulating European cuisine became part and parcel of a political agenda aimed at catching up with developments in Europe. Having crushed the reactionary janissary corps in 1826, Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808–39) embarked on a programme of wide-ranging changes in the army, government administration, the judiciary and education. Mahmud underscored the Ottoman commitment to Europeanization by cultural innovations, such as establishing a European-style palace orchestra directed by the Italian composer Giuseppe Donizetti and abandoning traditional costume for the fez, trousers and frock coat. From this moment on, in the words of Ottoman
historian Caroline Finkel, ‘Cultural displays in the western idiom became all the rage’ in elite circles.107

Dining offered opportunities for such display and French cuisine became de rigeur for formal dinners at which foreigners were present, so that by the time George Howard, 7th Earl of Carlisle, visited Turkey in 1853 it had become difficult for foreigners eager to eat a Turkish-style meal to find anyone willing to indulge them. Only through his acquaintance with Dr Humphry Sandwith, who had lived in Turkey for many years and was on familiar terms with many Turkish dignitaries, was the earl able to obtain an invitation to ‘a genuine Turkish dinner’, given by royal physician İsmail Pasha. The earl thought the fare itself very good, consisting in large proportion of vegetables, pastry, and condiments, but exhibiting a degree of resource and variety not unworthy of study by the unadventurous cookery of Britain.108

Ironically, a fresh wave of European interest in Ottoman cuisine coincided with the period of rising Ottoman Westernization. Drawn by the legendary reputation of Ottoman confectionery, the Bavarian confectioner Friedrich Unger visited Istanbul in 1835 while serving as chief confectioner to German-born King Otto of Greece.109 During his stay he observed confectioners at work, visited the palace confectionery kitchen and was invited to dinners in grand houses.

He published the results of his investigations in 1838, including recipes for lokum, which by then was earning an international reputation. Foreign visitors began taking boxfuls back home and exports of ‘lumps of delight’ to England began in 1860. French and English confectioners attempted to imitate lokum, but their efforts were ‘very different’ from the real thing.110

As for handling, it must be very skilful and very meticulous. It is in that which lies all the secret, and it should not be assumed that this is a minor matter, which is why no one in Europe has ever succeeded in imitating locoum.111

Unger also gave recipes for lohuk, and this soft sweetmeat was imitated with greater success, making a sudden and unexplained appearance in France by the name fondant, from the French fondre, to melt, in the 1860s.112 Unger may himself have introduced lohuk to European confectioners, or they perhaps read his book, in which he assured his readers that it could be made ‘with the greatest of ease’.

The French chef Alexis Soyer, who was sent to Istanbul by the British government during the Crimean War to improve the diet of British soldiers at the front and in the hospital run by Florence Nightingale, was as keen as Unger to explore Ottoman cookery. Yet when he attended a banquet at Dolmabahçe Palace on 18 July 1856, he was disappointed to find it composed entirely of French dishes, and not particularly well cooked, either. However, he too found other opportunities to taste Ottoman cuisine at the palace and in private homes, and in a letter to The Times wrote, ‘They have many dishes which are indeed worthy of the table of the greatest epicure . . . in fact, all their principle dishes might, with the best advantage, be adopted and Frenchised and Anglicised.’113 Soyer intended to include recipes for Ottoman dishes in a new book, but died in 1858 before he was able to complete the project, and a creditor destroyed all his papers. The first Turkish cookery book in English was published in 1864 by Türabî Efendi, following the enthusiastic response to a banquet composed entirely of Ottoman dishes given by the Viceroy of Egypt Mehmed Sa‘id.
Pasha on his yacht at Woolwich. The guests included ‘some of England’s fairest ladies and greatest statesmen’, who ‘were unanimous in their approval of the Turkish cuisine’.114

A similar overt attempt to introduce Ottoman cuisine to Europeans was a banquet given for French embassy officials in a marquee in the gardens of Topkapı Palace on 22 September 1856. This not only consisted entirely of Ottoman dishes but was even served in the traditional manner, with diners seated on cushions around low dining trays. The only concession to European eating habits was a fork placed before each of the foreign guests.115

Behind closed doors classical Ottoman cuisine remained alive and well throughout the nineteenth century. Inventive cookery continued, producing new dishes that are still popular today, including imam bayıldı (‘the imam fainted’, a meatless aubergine dish with olive oil), hünkâr beğendi (stewed lamb served on a bed of puréed aubergine), ekmek kadayıf (a kind of treacle pudding eaten with clotted cream) and kazandibi, a caramelized version of tavukgöğüsü (milk pudding with shredded chicken breast).

The real blow to Ottoman cuisine came in the early twentieth century, as a result first of the Balkan Wars, followed by the First World War and the Turkish War of Independence. During these years of turbulence formerly wealthy families could no longer afford to maintain the well-staffed kitchens that had been repositories of culinary knowledge and skills passed down from master to apprentice for centuries. Cooks found themselves out of work or drafted into the army. Even the palace kitchens were severely affected when eight hundred palace cooks were dismissed following the deposition of Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1909.

Sophisticated elite cuisine suffered most from these upheavals and the cookery inherited by the Turkish Republic in 1923 was predominantly that of the middle classes. As one cookery book author wrote in 1922, ‘the food we eat should not empty our purses and fill our stomachs; on the contrary it should be healthy and made at little cost. Heavy dishes that require laborious preparation are generally those without any essential benefit.’116 Admirable as this attitude might be, and appropriate for a new era when most women would have to do their own cooking, the disappearance of Ottoman high cuisine was still cause for regret.

Palace cooks marching with ladles and pans in protest at their dismissal in 1909.
OTTOMAN DAILY LIFE was regulated by seasonal rhythms of daylight and darkness. People of all classes rose at dawn and retired to bed early. Some people ate a little food at daybreak, but the first proper meal of the day was known as kuşluk taamı and eaten between 8 a.m. and 11 a.m., depending on the season. The evening meal was eaten shortly before sundown, about two hours after the afternoon prayers. Mealtimes changed during Ramazan, when the main meal of iftar was served at nightfall and a supper called sabur before dawn.

Seventeenth-century foreign visitors to the Ottoman Empire complained about the early hour of palace banquets, which were served at eight or nine o’clock in the morning.¹ Mouradja d’Ohsson, an Ottoman Armenian author writing in the late eighteenth century, equated the Ottoman meal taken on waking with breakfast (déjeûner), the morning meal with dinner (dîner) and the evening meal with supper (souper), although the times of these would not have matched their equivalents for the European leisured classes, who over time tended to eat meals much later than the working classes. When the young Englishwoman Julia Pardoe was invited to what she called ‘breakfast’ in the harem of the Reis Efendi (a government minister comparable to the secretary of state, second only to the grand vizier) in 1836, she was asked to go at six o’clock in the morning, although the meal was not served until an hour or so afterwards.² Following a substantial early morning meal people went to work and did not stop to eat again until it was time to go home for the evening meal.³

Breakfast, if eaten at all, was a snack or light meal originally called safrabastirmalık or safralık, terms deriving from traditional medicine meaning a small amount of food eaten to neutralize yellow bile.⁴ Following the advent of coffee drinking, breakfast became known as kahvaltı (literally ‘below coffee’, in the sense of food eaten after coffee) and could consist simply of a spoonful of jam.⁵ Breakfast at the palace during the reign of Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512) was eaten immediately after the morning prayers and consisted of honey, clotted cream and cheese.⁶ In the late nineteenth century, breakfast at the palace was similar but more varied, including fruit and flower preserves, butter, clotted cream, eggs, honey, pickles, bread, bread rings flavoured with mastic and various pastries.⁷ Preserves were a luxury item that many of the elite enjoyed for breakfast, such as violet jam sprinkled with lemon juice and eaten with fresh whey cheese.⁸ In the seventeenth century breakfast given by the khan of Bitlis in eastern Anatolia consisted of
several kinds of fruit preserve, olives, honey, pastries, soup and sherbet; while a grand breakfast given by the Crimean Tatar ruler Mehmed Giray Khan at Akkerman on the northwestern Black Sea coast for the Ottoman general Melek Ahmed Paşa consisted of diverse soups, stewed fruits and seventy different fruit and flower preserves in porcelain dishes, followed by coffee, sherbet and – unusually for the period – tea.9

In summertime yoghurt, accompanied by cucumbers and melons, was a popular breakfast food among all classes.10 In winter street vendors sold various hot beverages that working people drank for breakfast. The most popular types were made of ground orchid root (*salep*), starch (*sıcak palude*) or mahaleb, cooked with milk, sweetened with honey or sugar and served sprinkled with ginger, cinnamon or rose water. These were carried in large copper jugs and kept hot over portable braziers.11 In 1838 Friedrich Unger, chief confectioner to Otto of Greece, wrote this description of the *salep* vendors of Greece and Turkey:

These appear early at dawn, as the lower classes often enjoy this drink for breakfast, and they carry a tin pitcher with a double bottom containing hot coals in order to keep the *saleb* warm. Around the waist they wear a wide leather belt, to which a narrow, crescent shaped wooden container is attached, in which they stand their cups and a can of ground ginger.12

The morning meal commonly consisted of soup, as in the case of rice soup with meat served at the charity kitchen founded in 1496 by Bayezid II in the northern Anatolian city of Amasya.13 In 1555 the German traveller Hans Dernschwam observed, ‘As soon as they rise in the morning they eat a soup made of wheat called *czorba*, into which they dip bread.’14 Rice soup cooked with the juices dripping from meat roasting in a *tandır* (tandoor, a large earthenware jar set into the ground with an air duct in the base) is still a favourite early morning meal in Turkish towns such as Tire in western Anatolia and Gaziantep and Bitlis in the east.

Main meals eaten by wealthy Ottomans consisted of numerous hot courses served one by one,15 a practice that originated in Persia and was adopted not only by the Ottomans but by the Umayyads, according to the author of a thirteenth-century Andalusian cookery book:
Many of the great figures and their companions order that the separate dishes be placed on each table before the diners, one after another; and by my life, this is more beautiful than putting an uneaten mound all on the table, and it is more elegant, better-bred, and modern; this has been the practice of the people of al-Andalus and the West, of their rulers, great figures, and men of merit from the days of ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and the Banu Umayya to the present.16

In addition, side dishes such as salads, pickles, caviar, cured mullet roe (bottarga) and olives, along with bread, were placed on the table at the beginning of the meal and left there until the end for diners to help themselves as they fancied between the hot courses.17

In the 1570s the German physician and botanist Leonhart Rauwolff described ‘little by-dishes’ of colewort, cauliflowers, carrots, turnips and green beans (probably at this period fresh black-eyed peas in their pods rather than American Phaseolus species).18

The recipe given below for a side dish made with bottarga was published by Türâbi Efendi, secretary to the khedive of Egypt, in 1864. For the benefit of his English readers he explained that it could be served at any meal as an appetizer.

An anonymous Spaniard who was enslaved by the Ottomans in the 1550s and employed in the household of High Admiral Sinan Paşa described two banquets given by Sinan Paşa for the naval commander Turgut Reis (Dragut, 1485–1565). They were as splendid as any in Spain, he commented, with foods including ‘all kinds of poultry, fritters, goats, rabbits and lambs’.19

Meals of forty or fifty courses eaten by the Turkish ambassador Yirmisekiz Mehmed Çelebi and his retinue at Versailles in 1721 were described by a French government official named Le Dran:

### Balik Yimurtassi Tereturu

Procure a pound of botargo (a kind of fish-eggs), and pound it well in a stone mortar; then add a teaspoonful of the best olive oil, the same of lemon-juice, and pound it again; add another teaspoonful of oil and lemon-juice, and beat it up well, and continue in this way until you bring it to the consistency of a very thick cream; then pour it in a dish or plate, ornament the top with some skinned pistachios or almonds, and serve. In Turkey it is served at breakfast and at luncheon, as also in the middle of the dinner, to sharpen the appetite.20
They make many different kinds of stews and even more kinds of flaky pastry . . . They never eat roast meat, except for brochettes of lamb. They eat a lot of rice and in almost all their dishes they put spices and saffron in addition to honey and butter. They eat a wide variety of salads made of different kinds of greens. Only one dish at a time is placed on the table; it is then replaced by another and so on, up to the number of 40 or 50 in the same meal. This is not the case with the salads, which are served at the beginning and remain on the table till the end.21

As the American naval physician James Ellsworth de Kay remarked regretfully after a forty-course dinner with the Ottoman commander of the port in 1832, ‘many of them was so exquisite, that we should have been pleased with an opportunity of discussing them as a whole meal. They were all new to us, and many of them exceedingly savoury.’22

Sweet dishes were interspersed with savoury ones in a way that Europeans began to find extraordinary in the nineteenth century after the adoption of service à la Russe, with its strict order of courses.23 In October 1848, while travelling in Albania, the English painter and poet Edward Lear was invited to dinner by Osman Paşa, governor of Skodra. His account shows how the Ottoman arrangement of courses clashed with contemporary European concepts of dining:

I counted up thirty-seven dishes, served, as is the custom in Turkey, one by one in succession, and then I grew tired of reckoning (supposing that perhaps the feast was going on all day) though I think there were twelve or fourteen more. But nothing was so surprising as the strange jumble of irrelevant food offered: lamb, honey, fish, fruit; baked, boiled, stewed, fried; vegetable, animal; fresh, salt, pickled; solid; oil, pepper; fluid; sweet, sour; hot, cold – in strange variety, though the ingredients were often very good. Nor was there any order in the course according to European notions – the richest pastry came immediately after dressed fish and was succeeded by beef, honey, and cakes; pears and peaches; crabs, ham, boiled mutton, chocolate cakes, garlic, and fowl; cheese, rice, soup, strawberries, salmon-trout, and cauliflowers – it was the very chaos of a dinner!24

Soups were an important category of Ottoman cuisine, and often two or even three different kinds were served at multi-course meals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.25 As well as traditional yoghurt soups with wheat or noodles, a large number were made with vegetables, and some with fruits like apricots or bitter oranges. They rose in number from around twenty kinds recorded in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to several score in the sixteenth century.26 Sadly there are no contemporary recipes for these, although we know that the ingredients of chicken soup made for a palace banquet in 1539 included rice, eggs, almonds and lemon juice.27 Tarhana, a dried yoghurt soup mix, was widely consumed by all classes of society. This was prepared in summer by mixing yoghurt with boiled cracked wheat or flour, sometimes with the addition of herbs, and pressing the mixture into various shapes or crumbling it and then drying. When needed, the dried tarhana was cooked with water and sometimes additional ingredients like tulum cheese, clotted cream, eggs or croutons.28 In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the palace stores
were supplied with large quantities of tarhana prepared in the city of Bursa southeast of Istanbul, from Edirne in eastern Thrace and even as far away as Adana in southeastern Anatolia.29 Although tarhana soup and bulgur pilaf were enjoyed at all levels of society, they epitomized the simple life, as expressed in these lines by the seventeenth-century poet Hevayi: ‘Hevayi eats tarhana soup in the morning / And pilaf made only from bulgur in the evening.’30

Customarily, Ottoman meals ended with rice pilaf, often served with yoghurt and accompanied by fruit compote (hoşaf) made from dried fruits or dissolved fruit leather. An Ottoman dervish remarked in his account of Ramazan meals at his Sufi lodge in the
year 1906 that without pilaf the meal did not seem to be over.\footnote{31}

One aspect of Ottoman cuisine that surprised foreigners was the fact that no cups or glasses were placed on the table, since it was not usual to drink anything with meals. A diner who felt thirsty either requested a cup of water or sherbet from a servant, or rose from the table to fill a cup of water for himself.

While most foreign visitors were unable to describe more than a few of the dishes served at Turkish banquets because of their unfamiliarity, one rare exception is the detailed menu ‘showing exactly how I was entertained by a noble Turk in Constantinople’ by Friedrich Unger. Unger added some notes on the ingredients of each dish and commented that ‘the great variety and the originality of the Turkish table will not be uninteresting for the reader.’\footnote{32} Another detailed menu, for a private banquet given by the Ottoman general Selim Paşa in 1855, was recorded by Alexis Soyer.\footnote{33} As professional cooks, these two men were in a better position than most to understand Ottoman cookery, as well as interested enough to ask the names of dishes they were served and record their ingredients.

Mary Walker, an English artist who earned a living painting portraits of Ottoman women, arrived in Istanbul shortly after the Crimean War and remained there for nearly thirty years. She moved in elite circles and became familiar with their members’ daily lives in a way that casual travellers never could. The following is her description of a typical dinner at the house of an upper-class Ottoman family in the second half of the nineteenth century:

Our dinner-table at A— Pasha’s was presided over by his sister-in-law, Besmé Hanum, an elderly woman, very amiable and attentive to her guests. I am placed beside her; my friend, the eldest daughter of the family, a niece, a young bride, the elder wife, and a Turkish visitor, complete the circle. Zeheira Hanum keeps order amongst the children at a second dinner-table which has been set up within a short distance.
There is no tablecloth, but everything is neatly arranged upon the polished metal. Before each guest is a piece of ordinary bread – a flap of unleavened dough slightly baked and looking like mottled leather – and two spoons, one of them in box or horn, and the other, more delicate, in tortoiseshell, the handle ornamented with coral and inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Sometimes these spoons have a little crooked branch of coral at the tip to avert the evil eye. Each person is provided with . . . condiments, such as caviar, olives, salted and dried mutton, cheese, or pickle . . . Very little is taken from each dish, as their number and variety are infinite, but each one is tasted, and little excursions are made between whiles amongst the saucers – a pinch of salad from one, a preserved fruit from another, then a morsel torn as delicately as possible from the centre dish of fowl, taking in passing a dip into the curdled milk or a flavour of pickle or red pepper; then back again to the middle of the table, which exhibits probably by this time a mound of luscious pastry. Vegetables form an important part of the Turkish culinary system; you may frequently count a dozen varieties at the same time, besides many herbs and plants of which we have no knowledge on our Western tables. They use, according to the season, marshmallow leaves, cucumbers, vine leaves, cabbage, or even the half-open bud of the gourd or melon, to form the dolmas stuffed with rice and chopped meat, which never fail to make their appearance at every repast. In serving a dinner, it is considered the right thing to alternate the sweet and the savoury. 

In the evenings, especially when visitors called, light refreshments called yatsılık, usually consisting of fresh or dried fruits and nuts, were eaten, accompanied in winter by drinks such as boza (thick, sweet millet beer) or salep.

At celebrations like weddings, to which large numbers of guests were invited, the menu was often limited to three or four dishes. These were placed simultaneously on plates on long, rectangular dining mats – a practice still found at weddings in some provincial areas of Turkey. At feasts of this kind or when wealthy dignitaries kept open house for the evening meal during Ramazan, the guests were sometimes too numerous to be seated all at once and they ate by turn. The Austrian ambassador Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq gave a detailed account of such a meal in the mid-sixteenth century:

The Pashas are in the habit of giving a dinner to all who wish to come, no one being excluded . . . Those who attend it are, however, almost all neighbours, clients, acquaintances and friends. An oblong leather coverlet closely crowded with dishes is spread on the ground over a rug, and provides room for a large number of guests. The Pasha himself sits at the top of the table, with the men of higher rank round him; then come the guests of lower station in a long line, until no more room remains. More stand behind (for the table will not hold them all at once), and when those who have obtained seats have satisfied their hunger, which does not take long (for they eat with great moderation and without talking), and have concluded their meal with a draught of water sweetened with honey or sugar, they salute their host and depart. Their places are
then taken by some of those who stand waiting, who are succeeded by others, until soon a large number of guests have been fed at the same table, the servants meanwhile busily removing and washing the plates and dishes and supplying clean ones.\textsuperscript{36}

A similar relay system for large numbers of guests was observed by Mary Walker, when she was a guest at a circumcision feast given by a wealthy Istanbul family in the nineteenth century. In this case, everyone was seated around circular trays:

The numerous company could not, of course, be accommodated at one time. The custom of eating from a dish placed in the centre makes a round table indispensable, and it must not be so large as to prevent a person from reaching the middle of it with ease; consequently, it is difficult to seat more than six or eight people together at the festive board. Several tables are therefore spread in the great hall, and the guests must be served in relays, the most honoured passing first in order.\textsuperscript{37}

Food served at feasts in honour of royal circumcisions varied according to the rank of the guests. At the circumcision of the future Mehmed III in 1582, guests of high rank such as ambassadors and statesmen were served fifteen courses, and guests of middle rank nine courses. Long dining mats were laid for those of the lesser ranks, who ate by turns, and the servants finished off what remained. Ingredients were also dictated by social status, as in the case of sherbet, which for the grander guests was made with sugar and for lesser guests with honey.\textsuperscript{38}

When a public banquet was held at the circumcision festivities for the sons of Sultan Ahmed III in 1720, people of all ages flocked from every part of Istanbul and its suburbs, until the Archery Field was ‘like the Day of Judgment’. Thousands of trays of food, including pilaf and \textit{zerde}, were laid on the ground over the field.\textsuperscript{39} A banquet for women was served separately in the Archery Lodge, so that ‘all the women could remove their veils and enjoy their meal freely as if they were in their own homes, and wander with their friends.’\textsuperscript{40}

As well as weddings and circumcisions, many other occasions were marked by feasts. When negotiating a peace settlement with the Ottomans, the Kurdish rebel governor Abdal Khan of Bitlis gave a great feast at Hasankanef for thousands of his own soldiers, Ottoman soldiers and Kurdish notables, at which ‘many thousand platters of diverse dishes’ were served on the grassy meadow.\textsuperscript{41} Sporting events could also conclude with feasts, as in the case of a great banquet given by the losing team to the winners of a \textit{çevgan} (polo) match in 1655.\textsuperscript{42}

Feasts given to soldiers and the general populace were often of the type known as \textit{yağma} (plunder), for which hundreds of plates of food were laid out on the ground of a city square or other open area. At a signal the crowd rushed over and grabbed whatever they could. These ‘scramble feasts’ were entertaining spectacles for the audience of notables. At the 1720 royal circumcision celebrations, the \textit{yağma} for the janissaries consisted of two hundred boiled sheep, three hundred roasted sheep and 4,500 dishes of pilaf over which \textit{zerde} had been poured, accompanied by two loaves of bread to each dish. A live pigeon was concealed inside each roasted sheep and they enlivened the event by flying out:
When the signal was given the waiting janissaries raced to the food like untethered lions or hungry wolves, and as they pulled the roast sheep apart the pigeons were released as if from traps and began to fly around over the square where the celebrations were taking place.43

Private social life consisted principally of gatherings at home with family, friends and neighbours. A diary kept by the Sufi and cleric Seyyid Hasan between 1660 and 1664 gives considerable space to accounts of winter supper parties with friends and acquaintances. Generally speaking, around ten people were invited to these meals, but if there were more they were divided between two tables. Lists of the dishes served showed that the number of courses varied from six to 24, that savoury dishes were interspersed with sweet, and that the last dish served was usually fruit compote. Seyyid Hasan made a point of specifying in whose house he ate the first lamb of the season.44

Informal evening gatherings in Aleppo in the second half of the eighteenth century were described by Alexander Russell, an English physician who lived in the city from around 1742 to 1752:

They frequently have company at supper, or make familiar visits after it, but seldom sit later than ten o’clock: this is meant of people of rank, for others sup at home, and are rarely seen in the street after evening prayer. At these nocturnal assemblies they smoke incessantly, drink coffee two or three times, and in the winter are regaled with Kunafy,45 or other sweet pastry. Several circumstances render these assemblies more entertaining than those of the forenoon; they are not so often intruded upon by business, the company is more select, the sherbet and perfume are omitted, and the air of the whole is less formal.46

Women led separate but similar social lives, visiting one another and inviting their friends to dinner parties. Mrs Ramsay, wife of the British archaeologist William Ramsay, was one of eleven guests invited to a many-course dinner given by a wealthy woman in the town of Şuhut in central Anatolia in the early 1880s.47 One of the principal dishes at this meal was a whole stuffed roasted kid, a festive dish associated with special occasions and symbolizing the hosts’ esteem for their guests. This could be made either with lamb or kid, and the stuffing of rice mixed with almonds or pistachios, and currants or raisins.

Social gatherings hosted in turn by a group of male friends were known by names like sıra gecesi (by turn night) or sıra sohbeti (by turn conversation) and can be traced back to an eleventh-century Central Asian custom known as sugdıç.48 These were mainly held during the winter months and were popular in all Ottoman cities and towns. They were held in the evenings, usually after dinner, and the guests entertained one another by reciting poems and anecdotes, asking riddles, singing songs and playing parlour games. Refreshments included roasted maize, boza and salep, and often freshly made helva, in which case they were known as helva sohbeti (helva conversation). At these helva parties the person chosen to be the next host was informed by his friends placing a ball of helva in front of him. This custom gets figurative mention in an ode to winter by the sixteenth-century poet Cinânî (d. 1595): ‘At New Year they play with a ball and polo stick / Just like a helva ball held in a bent finger.”49
Banquet for distinguished guests at the circumcision celebrations for Sultan Ahmed III's sons in 1720.
Laying out dishes of rice and zerde for a yagma (plunder) feast at a royal circumcision celebration in 1582.
Eating helva on such occasions was a symbol of friendly conversation, as expressed by the sixteenth-century scholar Mustafa Ali when he said, ‘every gathering should be flavoured with salt, and every conversation sweetened with sugar.’ The type of helva most often made at these parties was keten helva, with its thistledown texture of fine strands. This helva was reserved for special occasions because of the skill and time required to make it, and the complicated preparation formed part of the entertainment, as described by the writer Musahipzâde Celâl (1868–1959):

The main type of helva made at these parties was keten helva. A brightly tinned copper tray large enough to seat eight or ten people around it was brought out and a huge ring of boiled [and pulled] sugar as thick as two wrists was placed on it. Sieved flour [roasted with butter] was heaped in the centre. Experts at making the helva rolled up their sleeves and washed their hands and arms with soap and hot water. They took their places around the tray and recited a prayer to Pir Selmanı Pâk. Then they began to turn the [ring of] hot boiled sugar from right to left, frequently dipping their hands into the flour in the centre. The guests watched as they played music and sang. The boiled sugar was folded over and over again to the accompaniment of folk songs and jokes until it turned into strands of keten helva, which was then distributed in handfuls to the guests. Minstrels played as they recited epic legends and songs. Games such as the cup and tura were played, and riddles and stories were told.

Cabbage pickle was traditionally served as a contrast to the sweetness of the helva, and in a tongue-in-cheek verse eulogy of cabbage by Sultan Selim III (r. 1789–1807) he declares that no helva party is complete without it:

With the arrival of winter the cabbage doth emerge
Unafraid of cold, a noble vegetable the cabbage.
In shape and size like the mace of King Keykavus,
Its leaves like giant rose petals nourish us.
Unlike okra threaded on a thousand threads,
the cabbage
May be compared to a lion riding in a carriage.
With joy and pleasure it is a perfect marriage
No helva party is complete without a cabbage.
İlhami\(^{55}\) sings its worth and many praises
My dear cabbage, dear cabbage, dear cabbage.

Wealthy hosts sometimes hired musicians, male dancers, mimics and comedians to entertain their guests and provided substantial meals rather than light refreshments. In seventeenth-century Belgrade these
meals could consist of forty or fifty hot dishes, ten types of sweetmeat and sweet pastries and ten types of fruit compote. In summer, social gatherings took the form of picnics and garden parties.

For the urban and rural poor meat was a rare luxury. Even nomadic pastoralists like the Turcomans and Kurds ate very little meat, despite their large herds of sheep and goats. Animals were rarely slaughtered except for special occasions such as weddings or circumcisions, during Ramazan or to honour visiting strangers. Staple foods were bulgur, dried noodles, flat bread baked on a griddle, yoghurt, vegetables, wild greens, pulses, grape molasses, fruit and honey, and cooked dishes consisted principally of soup, bulgur pilaf, vegetable stews and simple desserts such as pekmez mixed with tahin and eaten with bread (still a favourite quick dessert today) and helva made with flour and pekmez. In the heat of summer their diet consisted overwhelmingly of refreshing foods like watermelons, cucumbers and yoghurt:

As to the cucumbers, they commonly eat them without taking off any thing of the rinde, after which they go and drink a glass of water. In all Asia it is the ordinary sustenance of the meaner sort of people, for the space of three or four months; the whole family lives upon them, and when a child asks for something to eat, whereas in our European countries they would give him bread, in the Levant they bring him only a cucumber, which he eats raw as it comes out of the garden. Laborious persons, and such as are in a manner tired with working, such as camel-drivers and those who are entrusted with the care of the horses and mules in the caravans, make a kind of sallad of their cucumbers, not much unlike the mash which we would give our horses. When they are come to the lodging place where the caravan is to make a stay, they take a large basin, which they almost fill with water, and having put some sour milk [yoghurt] into it, they cut a great number of cucumbers into great slices, and so make a kind of mash of them.
Four

Etiquette

The earliest Turkish text referring to rules of etiquette is Kutadgu Bilig (Knowledge Befitting a Ruler), written in Uighur Turkish in 1070. The author was Yusuf Has Haci, an official at the Karakhanid court in Central Asia. He includes timeless pieces of advice, such as ‘do not slouch,’ ‘do not take large mouthfuls,’ ‘do not blow on hot food,’ ‘do not lean over the table’ and, ‘Reach out for the food and eat with pleasure and desire, that the mistress of the house may see you and be pleased.’ Yusuf Has Haci was following in the footsteps of earlier Sasanian and Abbasid writers on good government and proper courtly behaviour. One of the most famous books of this kind was the Persian Qabusnama, written in 1082 by the Ziyarid ruler Kai Ka’us (Keikavus), which was translated into Turkish six times between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Etiquette was taken very seriously in Ottoman culture. It was based on principles such as hospitality, showing respect for one’s elders and betters, not causing awkwardness by coarse behaviour or discussing unsuitable subjects at table, and not displaying greed. Hospitality rituals were complex and nuanced, especially in government circles, where they could have political implications. Rules of protocol prescribed who was given precedence at banquets and who ate with whom. Guests were seated in order of rank, as described by Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq: “The Pasha himself sits at the top of the table, with the men of higher rank round him; then come the guests of lower station.” Honoured guests were seated to the left of the host, supposedly because this place was next to his heart.

Servants tended to judge the status of guests by the quality of their clothing and treat them accordingly. Although this was not surprising in a society with strict dress codes, the emphasis on outward appearance was criticized in one of many traditional stories about a minor cleric named Nasreddin Hoca. These humorous stories were frequently a vehicle for criticism of human nature and society, as in this example: Nasreddin was invited to a wedding feast, but although the grand guests were politely ushered to places at the table, no one took any notice of him. The next time he was invited to a wedding, he borrowed a fur-lined kaftan and this time he was shown to a place at the table and served before anyone else. Addressing his kaftan, he commanded it to eat. When the astonished guests asked what he meant, Nasreddin replied that nowadays respect was shown only to the wealthy, not the poor.

Although rank determined precedence at table, no one was excluded on grounds of class. Europeans
remarked on the way in which hospitality was offered
to all, regardless of their status. The Venezuelan
general Francisco de Miranda was surprised that the Ottoman
captain of the ship on which he sailed to Istanbul in
1786 invited passengers of all stations in life to his
table, ‘whether they are negroes or aghas.’ In the
nineteenth century a British tutor at the court of the khedive
remarked on the way in which hospitality was offered
referred deprecatingly to ‘the curious sort of democracy
about an oriental court’. This was motivated not by
democratic principles but by the belief that only merit
and fate made one man a slave, another a statesman.
There was no Ottoman aristocracy and apart from
the royal family no one had a right to social position
by birth alone.

Polite table manners included waiting for the host,
hostess or most distinguished guest to begin eating,
taking small bites, eating slowly, not staring into anyone’s
face or at the morsel they were eating, not frowning, not
commenting on or criticizing the food, offering choice
morsels to other diners, not eating greedily from the
best dishes, leaving some of each dish for the servants,
and not rising too soon from the table and so giving
the host the impression one had not enjoyed the meal.

The custom of encouraging honoured guests to eat
by offering them morsels from some of the dishes was
noted by many travellers, who in the nineteenth cen-
tury were shocked by it. Edward Lear wrote that ‘the
Pasha twice or thrice helped me himself’ while dining
at the home of Osman Paşa, governor of Skodra, in
1848. This was a common convention throughout
society, as described by the British writer and traveller
James Silk Buckingham when he attended a Kurdish
wedding feast in 1827:

When the master of the feast came, I was seated as
the ‘stranger guest’ immediately beside him; and

The practice of serving main dishes one by one
and taking only one or two morsels from each at
many-course meals put unforewarned foreign guests
in a difficult position. When Mrs William Ramsay
attended a grand dinner given by a lady in the town
of Şuhut, she ate her fill of the first four courses ‘with
a recklessness born of ignorance’, and when baklava
was served assumed the meal was over. But this was
succeeded by dolma, roast kid, chicken, vegetables and
more desserts ‘in hideous succession, till I lost count
of them at last. Daylight died out, lamps were lit, and
still the dreadful feast went on,’ she recalled.

In his book on dining etiquette, the sixteenth-
century scholar Mustafa Ali advised hosts to adjust
the number and elaborateness of the dishes to suit
the occasion and the rank of the guest, and to avoid
penny-pinching and display generosity without going
to the extreme of wastefulness or giving grand ban-
quets for no good reason.

At grand banquets guests sometimes took some of
the food home for their wives and children to enjoy, as
noted by Busbecq in the sixteenth century:

The Turks, however, are accustomed rather to
carry off for themselves some dainty from a richly
furnished feast; but this is hardly ever done
except by friends and those who have wives and children at home. My guests used often to carry home from my table napkins full of dainty titbits, and were not afraid of soiling their silk robes with drops of gravy, although cleanliness is a matter of the greatest importance in their eyes.\[14\]

This custom was not confined to the Ottomans, since at a banquet given by the Venetian ambassador in Istanbul in 1640, the Polish diplomat Zbigniew Lubieniecki observed that the Italian guests filled their pockets with leftovers to take home.\[15\] This was a tradition that went back to the ancient Romans\[16\] and was probably adopted by the Ottomans from the Byzantines.

Among the pieces of advice given by court goldsmith Derviş Mehmed Zilli to his son Evliya Çelebi in 1630 was, ‘My son, do not eat without saying grace, nor without performing ablutions.’\[17\] Before beginning to eat, diners spoke the grace, *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim* (in the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful), and after finishing said *Selahmetullah* or *Çok şükür Yarabbi* (thanks be to God). Reverence for bread as a sacred food meant that it was bad manners to wipe one’s fingers on bread, to place bones or pips on top of it (instead, these had to be placed on the table) or to let even a crumb drop on the floor.\[18\] Water was held in similar regard, and when one of the diners drank water during a meal, the others wished them health with the words *afiyetler ola* (may it give you health) or *ab-ı hayat ola* (may it be as the water of life).\[19\]

Cleanliness was an important aspect of both Islamic worship and table manners. The hands and mouth had to be washed before and after meals, beginning before the meal with the youngest present so as not to keep the elder diners waiting, and vice versa when the meal was over.\[20\] If there was a fountain in the room,
diners could wash their own hands there, or a servant would pour water from a ewer into a basin covered by a pierced lid, so that the dirty water ran through the holes out of sight. In wealthy households hand soap was perfumed with musk and floral oils, and sometimes decoratively coloured. Mouradja d’Ohsson gave the following description of the hand-washing ritual in the eighteenth century:

No one ever sits down at table without washing the hands, nor leaves without cleaning his beard and moustache with soap lather. This is a species of ablution which all are obliged to perform, not only for cleanliness, but also by religious law, which, as one has seen already, imposes this duty on all Moslems. Therefore, before as after the dinner, the servants of the house cause the master and all the guests to wash their hands. The one presents a sumptuous towel, a peschkir, which is lain over the knees; another advances, holding in the left hand a basin of silver, silver gilt or tinned copper, a leyenn, and pours water over the right hand with a ewer of the same metal, an ibrik; a third stands at one side with a towel embroidered around, which he presents at the moment when the person completes his ablutions.

Toothpicks used to clean the teeth after meals were made by spoon makers from materials such as tortoiseshell, bone, horn, and various types of wood including olive and mastic.

Eating with the fingers had its own rules of etiquette. ‘Do not plunge your fingers too far into the dish, nor place them in your mouth. Obey the sunnah and do not disgust those at table,’ urged Kınalızade Ali Efendi in the mid-sixteenth century. Etiquette also demanded that diners help themselves to a dish only from the side directly in front of them, ensuring no one touched food that would be eaten by another. After being invited to dinner at the home of Hekim İsmail Paşa, physician to Sultan Abdülmejid, in 1853, George Howard, the Earl of Carlisle, wrote:

We all helped ourselves with our right hands, except that just for the soup we had wooden spoons: this is not quite so offensive as it sounds, since they hardly take more than one or two mouthfuls in each dish from the part immediately opposite them, so the hands do not mingle in the platter.

Until the Italian custom of using forks gradually spread northwards, Europeans too had eaten with their fingers. Like the Ottomans and other Muslims, the polite way of doing this was to use only three fingers, as described by Erasmus in 1530: ‘In good society one does not put both hands into the dish. It is more refined to use only three fingers of the hand. This is one of the marks of distinction between the upper and lower classes.’ Where manners diverged sharply at this time was in the European use of knives as well as fingers at table. Knives were used for cutting and spearing food, and Europeans complained about their absence at Ottoman meals. In Ottoman etiquette, on the other hand, using a knife at table was frowned upon and food was prepared so that none was needed. Meat and vegetables were cut up into small pieces or, in the case of whole roast lamb or birds, were so well cooked that pieces could easily be torn away with the fingers.

In the nineteenth century, after high-class Europeans everywhere had become thoroughly used to
forks, foreign visitors to the Ottoman Empire turned their critical attention from the lack of knives to the lack of forks and the custom of eating with the fingers. Not all were unsympathetic, however. When the Baronne Durand de Fontmagne attended a traditional Ottoman banquet at Topkapi Palace in 1856, in deference to their hosts she and her companions declined to use the forks provided. ‘We reminded ourselves that our ancestors, even our most elegant and beautiful princesses, had formerly eaten with their hands,’ she explained later. Alexis Soyer noted that one advantage of eating with the fingers was that it allowed diners to dip bread into the juices of dishes:

After several trials, I must admit that it has some peculiar advantages; their sauces being of a thin-nish nature, require to be absorbed with a piece of bread in order to partake of them, which could not be performed equally well with a knife or fork.31

In her cookery book dated 1827, Maria Eliza Rundell displayed an open-mindedness unusual for the period when she not only reminded her readers that Muslims wash their hands frequently but declared that food tasted better when eaten with the fingers:

The true amateur of good living knows how much higher flavoured meats are from the hand than in any other mode. We, from prejudice, go into other countries in the proud superiority of our own customs and manners; and as the vulgar first attract our notice, we generally mistake their manners for those of the country. Were one of our fashionables to go down into one of our remote counties, and see a boor stuff a large wooden or horn spoon, full of some coarse food, into his wide open mouth, with his eyes shut, it were odds if he ever again ate with a spoon; declaring, perhaps, that pretty tapering fingers were expressly made to feed man more delicately.32

The Ottoman elite began to use forks in the nineteenth century, but this self-conscious adoption of European manners did not come easily. When the British cavalry officer Frederick Burnaby ate with an Armenian merchant in Arapgir in 1876, knives and forks were placed on the table, but an Ottoman official who was among the guests declined to use them on the grounds that his own fingers were cleaner: ‘Which do you like the best, to eat with a knife and fork, or with your fingers?’ enquired Burnaby. ‘With my fingers,’ replied the official. ‘It is so much cleaner,’ he continued. ‘I first wash my hands, and then put them into the dish; but I do not clean my own fork – that is the duty of the servant, who, perhaps, is an idle fellow. Besides this, who knows how many dirty mouths this fork has been stuck into before I put it in mine?’ Nor did people feel comfortable sitting on chairs. The calligrapher Mehmed Şevki Efendi (1829–1887) was typical of his generation in continuing to eat seated on cushions around a dining tray until the end of his life,34 and in rural areas this mode of eating is still often preferred. From the second half of the nineteenth century popular entertainers and satirical writers poked fun at the slavish imitation of European manners, even coining the word zuıppe to describe such imitators. Awkward attempts to use forks were a fertile source of comedy, which meant that people who failed to adopt European manners were as much a laughing stock as those who succeeded.35

The centuries-old way of eating had been tried and
condemned by contemporary opinion makers, and the result was a no-win situation. There is pathos in one writer's description of elderly women who, when their children were not at home to interfere, ate in the old manner because they enjoyed their food more that way.  

Talking during meals was frowned upon, as expressed by the Turkish proverb 'Food first, then words' (Evvel taam andan kelam). This was a long-standing rule of Islamic etiquette: 'Do not talk while eating, that is what Islam commands,' wrote Kai Ka'us in 1082. In 1596 the English traveller Fynes Moryson remarked that the Ottomans 'talke not whilst they eate, but silently fall hard to their worke.' When the Swedish ambassador Nicholas Rolamb attended a palace banquet in 1656, he was struck by the total silence of the diners: 'There was such a silence during dinner, that not one word was spoke, nor the least noise perceived.' Conversation was reserved for after the meal, over coffee and pipes, and even then no one felt any obligation to talk. In 1855 when the French historian Jean-Henri Abdolonyme Ubicini was invited to dinner with his friend Osman Bey, the conversation, which had never really livened up, now faded out completely ... Osman seemed lost in deep thought. I looked at the others. The same immobility, the same silence.

Courtesy demanded speaking quietly on all occasions, as noted by the French traveller Aubry de la Motraye in the early eighteenth century:

The most courtly way of speaking among the Turks is in a low Voice ... and I have heard them say in reference to other Nations, that two Franks talking meerly of Trifles, make much more Noise than a hundred Turks in treating about Affairs of Consequence.

RECEIVING A GUEST without offering refreshments was unthinkable. When the Ottoman envoy Kara Mehmed Paşa was given audience by Emperor Leopold I at the Austrian imperial palace in Vienna in 1665, the Ottoman delegation was shocked that no refreshments were offered: 'neither water, nor sherbet, nor coffee nor a morsel of food.'

Refreshments offered to guests comprised sweetmeats, sherbet and, from the late sixteenth century, coffee. Among the Ottoman elite hospitality rituals also included sprinkling rose water over the hands and face, perfuming the beard with incense and offering pipes of tobacco. When Henry Blount visited an Egyptian official in 1634, before any conversation took place he was offered incense, was sprinkled with 'sweet water' (rose water) and presented with coffee and finally sherbet. While watching the celebrations for the marriage of Mehmed IV's daughter Hatice Sultan in Edirne in 1675, the British ambassador Sir John Finch and his party were served lemon sherbet, coffee and sweetmeats.

An Ottoman woman and her guest being served water, sweetmeats and coffee, 1857.
In court circles, officials in charge of protocol, called teşrifatçı, made sure that the right type of refreshments were offered to the right people on all the many different official and ceremonial occasions. From the eighteenth century onwards several manuals on state protocol were written by these officials to guide their subordinates and successors through the intricate maze of court etiquette. In the mid-eighteenth century the young Viscount Charlemont was treated to the full panoply of ceremonial hospitality when he visited the Ottoman minister Naili Efendi:

I found him sitting upon his sofa, and, having been presented, was received with the most cordial, easy, and unaffected politeness. Having first enquired into my name and rank he desired me to sit down by him. He told me that he was happy in the opportunity of seeing me and asked me several questions concerning my travels, as: where I had been, whither I intended to proceed, how I had amused myself, whether I liked the abode of Constantinople, etc. He called for coffee, and his servants presented me with a silver vessel, filled with a sort of perfumed marmalade with a large gold or gilt spoon. Of this marmalade, by the direction of Pisani, I put into my mouth a spoonful, which served instead of sugar to the coffee, which was then brought in. Having drank it, I was going to rise, and to take my leave, but the Reis Efendi desired me to sit still, telling me that he would treat me according to my condition. The servants then served me with iced sherbet, a liquor much used by the Turks and commonly made with liquorice, orange juice, and water, of which when I had tasted, one of them flung out of a silver bottle with a long and very narrow neck rose water upon my hands and habit, with which, having finished to sprinkle me, another servant presented me with a silver urn having its cover pierced full of holes and shaped something like those incense pots which are used in Catholic churches . . . This manner of presenting with sherbet and perfumes is considered by the Turks as the highest compliment they can pay to a guest of distinction whom they desire to honour.

By the late eighteenth century, as the economic situation worsened, the expense of offering refreshments in government offices had become a serious problem. In 1792 an order was issued to ministers and other dignitaries commanding them to cut back on refreshments for visitors, pointing out that presenting sweetmeats and coffee on arrival, and rose water, sherbet and incense on departure, not only involved great expense but necessitated the employment of excessive numbers of servants and interrupted work in the offices. They were commanded to restrict their hospitality to a cup of coffee on arrival, and rose water and incense on departure. Only when foreign ambassadors were given audience with the sultan were hospitality rituals to be carried out in full. Similar restrictions were introduced in the second half of the nineteenth century, when government officials were told that pipes and coffee should no longer be offered to visitors.

Fruit preserves or a soft sweetmeat called lohuk were served to guests on trays, with spoons and glasses of water. By turns the guests took a spoonful of the preserves, drank some water and placed their spoon in the glass. Lady Fanny Blunt, who lived in Istanbul for
twenty years in the late nineteenth century, described the ceremony of presenting sweetmeats in an upper-class Ottoman home:

It is the custom throughout Turkey to offer as refreshment the tatlı [sweet], a rich kind of preserve made from fruits or flowers such as roses, lilies, violets and orange blossom. It is brought in soon after the entrance of a visitor.

The service used for the purpose may be of the most costly or of the simplest description. That used in Turkish harems is always of some precious metal and comprises a salver, two preserve basins, a double spoon basket and a number of goblets and spoons. The edge of the salver, like that used for coffee, is surrounded by a gold embroidered cloth; the slave who offers it does so on bended knee.\textsuperscript{53}
Offering sherbet was kept till last and served as a silent hint that the host or hostess wished the visitor to leave:

The bringing in a large Dish of sherbit [sic] of an excellent flavour, which as soon as the Stranger has drank he takes leave and goes away; for its their Custom never to call for that Liquor, till they grow weary of their Visitor’s Company.54

Foreigners like the seventeenth-century traveller Henry Maundrell admired this tactful means of dismissing unwanted visitors:

By this means you may any time, without offence, deliver yourself from being detained from your affairs by tedious and unseasonable visits, and from being constrained to use that piece of hypocrisy so common in the world of pressing those to stay longer with you whom perhaps in your heart you wish a great way off for having troubled you so long already.55

In government offices, offering incense served the same purpose, and in court circles, sprinkling rose water on the hands of dinner guests signalled that it was time for them to disperse.56

People of all classes offered guests something, whether it be fruit, coffee, sweet cakes or cigarettes, as described by Mrs Ramsay, who visited many local women in Anatolian towns and villages.57 Mark Sykes, the British politician and diplomatic adviser, recalled children bringing cucumbers and watermelons as gifts when he was travelling through Turkish villages in 1913.58

To refuse hospitality was as serious a breach of etiquette as not to offer any, as remarked in 1508 by Martin Baumgarten, a German nobleman who travelled through Egypt and the Levant:

[The people] delight much in hospitality, and reckon it a point of great clownishness and incivility to exact money of strangers for their entertainment; for we were several times invited and entertained by them; being made very welcome when we came, but much despised by them when we refused their invitation.59

Sending gifts of fruit, sweetmeats and garden flowers was a way of expressing congratulations on special
occasions such as births, marriages and religious holidays, and likewise condolences for bereavement and other misfortunes. This custom was so widespread in the seventeenth century that eighty shops in Istanbul sold baskets of fruit and vases of flowers to send as gifts. In 1671 the grand vizier sent the new English ambassador thirty baskets of fruit as a gesture of welcome to Istanbul, and in 1741 forty baskets of fruit and five trays of garden flowers were presented to each of the newly arrived French, Iranian and Russian ambassadors. When the British crown prince Edward and his wife visited Istanbul in April 1869, Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861–76) sent them flowers, fruits and sweetmeats every morning during their two-week stay. Invitations to official banquets were sometimes accompanied by gifts, as when grand vizier Semiz Ali Paşa sent the Austrian ambassador ‘eight large china dishes full of sweetmeats’ in 1561.

When Sultan Abdülhamid’s three-year-old daughter Emine Sultan died of smallpox in 1791, he received one hundred baskets of fruit and 32 baskets of flowers expressing condolences. After a Russian ship was attacked and its flag torn in 1819, the Ottoman government sent gifts of flowers and fruit to the Russian Embassy, and following a major fire in the district of Galata in August 1831 the Foreign Ministry sent fruit, flowers and sweetmeats in Meissen porcelain dishes to foreign ambassadors living in that part of Istanbul.

The correspondence of Pertevniyal Sultan (d. 1883), mother of Sultan Abdülaziz, is full of thank-you letters for gifts of food from well-wishers and tradesmen eager for palace patronage. Fruit was by far the most common gift, but occasionally she was sent preserves, syrups, yoghurt, cheese, pickles and, on one occasion, swordfish. A gift of fruit sent in 1862 included mandarin oranges, then a new and exotic rarity, and Pertevniyal told the giver that she had put some aside for her son.

Sending gifts of food, especially sweet dishes, to friends, neighbours, schoolteachers and university students on special occasions such as Ramazan and Easter, or to women who had just given birth, was a common courtesy. Robert Withers, an Englishman employed at the embassy in Istanbul in the early seventeenth century, recorded that baklava was given as ‘ordinary presents, from one Bashaw to another and from one friend to another’. An eighteenth-century
Turkish cookery book includes two recipes for sweet dishes intended as gifts: one for *tel kadayıf* filled with almonds and the other for a type of helva made with ground rice and starch that Aziz-zade Abdurrahman Efendi of Bursa used to prepare and send as a gift during Ramazan. At Easter, Christian families sent their neighbours hard-boiled eggs that had been dyed red, Easter cakes, or boiled wheat sprinkled with nuts, sugar and spices.
Proverbially, the three virtues that made a great man were ‘a sharp sword, a sweet tongue, and forty tables’ (that is, courage, eloquence and hospitality). Feeding other people, whether guests, travellers or the poor, was prompted by diverse motives: expressing and cementing social relationships, celebrating special occasions whether religious or secular, sympathy for those in need, the desire to win grace in the eyes of God and displaying wealth and power. Another strong impulse behind Ottoman charity was the desire to prevent social unrest, as vividly expressed in the proverb: ‘One eats, the other looks on; that’s when all hell breaks loose.’

Sharing food was an essential precept of Islamic culture. The Qur’an exhorts Muslims to feed the poor, orphans and prisoners (Surah 76:8), and a hadith or tradition of the Prophet asks masters to share food with their servants:

When your servant, whether slave or free man, brings you food, have him sit down at the table with you, because the smell and sight of food will have aroused his appetite. So sit down to eat together, or at least pass him some morsels while you are eating.

Similarly, in Ottoman culture it was important to leave some of every dish for the servants and to offer food to neighbours or bystanders who might be hungry, and the remains of banquets were often distributed to the poor. Any final scraps were thrown out for cats, dogs and birds and it was regarded as bad luck if nothing was left for them. In 1433 the French courtier and pilgrim Bertrand de la Broquière observed, ‘Should a poor person pass by when they are eating, they would invite him to partake of their meal, which is a thing we never do.’ The sixteenth-century Ottoman historian Mustafa Ali wrote in his book on manners that it is proper for the head cook or head storekeeper of a rich man to give food to the poor who come to the door, even without their master’s permission, and that such alms should be given without displaying any scorn or speaking unkindly.

Giving pregnant women foods they fancied was probably based not so much on principles of charity as the widespread belief, common to many cultures, that the child would be born with a defect if the mother were not indulged. This custom was observed in the early eighteenth century by Aubry de la Motraye:

If a poor Woman, big with Child, is going along the Streets, (vail’d according to Custom), and
praises (loud enough to be heard) any Fruits or Deserts that some great Men are sending to the Grand Seignior’s Table, those who carry them never fail to set down their Baskets and Dishes, and invite her to take what she pleases; of which I have my self been Eye-Witness more than once.8

Turkish men of rank seldom dined alone, usually inviting any visitors to eat with them. An anonymous Spaniard who was enslaved by the Ottomans in the sixteenth century later wrote in his memoirs that the table of his master Sinan Paşa was open to everyone and that even a kitchen boy or complete stranger could remove his shoes and sit down to eat without an invitation.9 As a later traveller noted, ‘a man who did not invite some at least of the company present to share his meal, would be looked upon as wanting in good manners and hospitality.’10 Hachik Oscanyan described how a large number of guests managed to seat themselves around a dining tray:

Their tables being accessible to their friends at all times, dinner-parties are never given, except on state occasions; for, hospitality being one of the characteristics of the East, and especially enjoined by the Koran, no one is excluded from their board; and when the number present is so large as not to allow them to sit comfortably, they place themselves side-wise, or in a sort of spoon fashion, as though they were leaning upon one another.11

During Ramazan the poor could count on getting not only free evening meals, but gifts known as diş kirasi (‘tooth hire’) at the houses of local magnates:

Every evening crowds of mendicants assemble before the gates of the palaces and of the richer houses; they are served in turn (a certain number at a time) to an ample meal of pillaw and stewed meat and vegetables, and each individual on leaving receives a silver coin, and frequently some new article of dress.12

‘Tooth hire’ reflected the idea that the host was beholden to his guests rather than the other way around. Complaints by wealthy men about the numbers of people who came to their house to eat during Ramazan were actually a thinly disguised way of boasting. In the late nineteenth century the Department of Protocol attempted to curb this expensive custom by placing notices in the newspapers requesting that civil servants refrain from going uninvited to iftar meals at the homes of government ministers, and specifying that only madrasa students and dervishes do so, but their advice went unheeded.13 A cartoon published during Ramazan in 1914 shows the puppet play character Karagöz dressed as Sherlock Holmes, shadowing a vendor of göllaç wafers to see which households bought them, so he would know where the best free meals were to be had.14

Offering hospitality to passing strangers was traditional in rural areas, and most villages had a small building called a köy odası (village room) or misafir odası (guest room) where travellers could stay and which doubled as a social centre for the men of the village.15 Founders of these charitable endowments made their families responsible for their upkeep in perpetuity. Food for travellers was either provided by the family of the founder or by several families who each contributed something to the meal. Many travellers described food they were offered in Anatolian villages,
giving insight into the cuisine of the rural peasantry; a subject which gets little coverage in other sources. In 1833 the Reverend Francis Arundell and his companions were served pilaf, pekmez mixed with poppy seeds, and cheese in a village in southern Anatolia, and in another village in the Aegean province of Manisa they were served tarhana soup, pilaf, cheese and pekmez with flatbread. When Arundell asked who had supplied the food, he was told, ‘our fare was the contribution of many families: the Trakana soup was supplied by one; the pilau by a second; the petmes by a third; the bread by a fourth – but all were emulous to feed the famished strangers.’ In a village near Troy, a German traveller was welcomed by the headman of the village and fed in the köy odası with a meal of pilaf, mutton, olives, honey and sherbet.

Slaughtering an animal to serve guests was one of the highest marks of hospitality in rural areas. When a chicken, kid or lamb was prepared for guests, the family would usually refuse to eat any of the meat or even to share the meal. This custom was recorded by the British geologist and traveller Warington Wilkinson Smyth when he was invited to a dinner given for the local governor by the head of a Kurdish village near the town of Ergani in Diyarbakır:

The edges of the tray were lined with flat cakes of freshly-baked bread, and in the midst was placed the same dish as we had yesterday partaken of, a large roast lamb, stuffed with rice and almonds and pistachio-nuts. As soon as we had all performed ablutions, our host commenced with his sinewy hands to tear off masses of meat, and to pull out handfuls of the stuffing from the interior, portions of which he laid so that each guest could conveniently reach them; and as he declined to sit down and join us, we all refused to proceed till he formed one of the party . . . We had now fared well on our huge dish, when it was removed, to make way for an iron pan on legs, about two feet in diameter, around which were disposed, hissing hot, dozens of small mutton chops . . . [then] another whole lamb, larger than the first, cooked in a somewhat different manner . . . There was still some attention to be paid to the usual finale, hills of rice and basins of yaoort, of refreshing coolness, and the whole was concluded by addition of white mulberries.

Abusing the social obligation to offer hospitality to strangers was by no means unknown, as illustrated by another folk tale featuring Nasreddin Hoca. One day, after Nasreddin bought an ox, a man turned up at Nasreddin’s house saying he was a relation of the man who had sold the ox, and demanded a bowl of soup. The following week another person came to the door, claiming to live in the neighbouring village to
that where the man who had sold the ox lived, and he also was given a bowl of soup. Finally, a third man came who claimed to be a relative of the man who lived in the neighbouring village to that where the man lived who had sold the ox. This time Nasreddin gave him a bowl of water and a piece of bread. ‘What’s this!’ cried the man. ‘It is the soup of the soup of the soup of the meat of the ox,’ retorted Nasreddin.20

Foreign ambassadors and their retinues were treated as guests of the state and provided with foodstuffs for the duration of their stay. The 64 members of the Austrian embassy sent to Süleyman I by Charles V in 1555 and who remained until 1562 were given monthly provisions of ninety sheep, 150 chickens, large quantities of clarified butter, honey, sugar, onions, vinegar, saffron, black pepper, rice, salt, bread and a daily allowance of 109 litres (12 metras) of wine, as well as barley and straw for their horses. The Austrians sold 26 of the sheep and some of the honey and butter, and used the proceeds to buy fish to eat on Fridays, Saturdays and feast days.21 Baron Wenceslas Wratislaw, who served under a later Austrian ambassador, Frederic Kregwitz, in the 1590s, recorded that the embassy of 61 people were given a daily allowance of a quarter of an ox, two sheep, six fowls, a certain measure of rice, sugar, and honey; forage for the horses, spices, salt, raisins, and wine.22 A century later, following the signing of the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1698, the daily provisions for the Austrian ambassador and his large retinue consisted of three oxen, one calf, ten sheep, forty chickens, three turkeys, ten geese, thirty pigeons, 150 okkas (192 kg) of flour, 10 okkas (13 kg) of vegetables, 1 okka (1.3 kg) of spices, 110 okkas (140 kg) of charcoal and one load of firewood.23 Ottoman statesmen travelling on business through the empire were similarly given food allocations. When the vizier Melek Ahmet Paşa passed through Sivas in central Anatolia in 1649, city governor Murteza Paşa supplied him and his retinue with a daily allocation of one hundred sheep, huge quantities of bread, vegetables, sugar, coffee, musk, ambergris and saffron, as well as giving three banquets in his honour.24

Public kitchens known as imarets, founded by sultans, royal women and state dignitaries as part of mosque complexes, provided meals for staff, schoolchildren, university students, travellers and the needy.25

‘Our door is open to those who enter, our food permissible to those who eat.’ Carved inscription in Arabic on the doors of İmaret Mosque in Karaman founded in 1452.
Charity kitchen built by Mustafa Paşa in Eskişehir in 1525.
Meals consisted mainly of a few simple but filling dishes, such as soup made with rice or wheat and boiled mutton on ordinary days; and pilaf of rice or bulgur with some meat, zerde (saffron-flavoured rice pudding) and zırva (dried fruit pudding) or helva (made with flour, butter and either honey or grape molasses) on Thursday evenings and feast days. Some imarets provided a more elaborate menu for distinguished guests such as scholars, who were served bread rings made of white flour, pastries and ‘delicious dishes’ at the Karamanoğlu İbrahim Bey imaret in southern Anatolia, for example. At the Çandaroğlu İsmail Bey imaret in the province of Kastamonu, guests of this kind were entitled to ‘feasts of diverse dishes’, and if they arrived after the cooked meal was finished they were served ‘honey, walnuts, cheese and things of a similar sort’.

An early account of imaret food was recorded around 1537 by the Hungarian Bartholomew Georgievitz, who was taken into slavery and remained in Turkey for thirteen years during the 1530s and early 1540s:

They have hospitalles or almes houses, called Imareth, builded by the testamentes of their kinges, in whych places meate or foode is geven unto the poore and Pilgrims, but diversely at sondrye places. Ther are whiche geve Rice named Pirrincts Tsorba [rice soup], with flesh: at another place, Bolghdaras [bulgur] whiche is made of wheat, in stead of potage, they adde bread also of a reasonable quantyte: the drincke whiche they distribute is water.

Some imarets doubled as caravanserais, providing lodging as well as basic meals for merchants and travellers. Sultan Mehmed II’s imaret in Istanbul was of this type, as described by the Italian traveller Benedicto Ramberti in 1534:

[The imaret] is like a hostel; in which they lodge any one, of any nation or law, who may wish to enter, and they give him food for three days – honey, rice, meat, bread, and water, and a room in which to sleep. They say that from day to day there are more than a thousand guests from various nations.

In the sixteenth century, Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq stayed in several of these institutions on his journey to Istanbul and observed that even Ottoman statesmen stayed in them when travelling:

No one is refused admittance, whether Christian or Jew, rich or poor; the door is open to all alike. They are used by Pashas and Sanjak-Beys when they travel. I was always given as hospitable a reception as if it were a royal palace . . . It is customary to offer food to all who lodge there; and so, when dinner-time arrived, an attendant used to present himself with an enormous wooden tray as large as a table, in the middle of which was a dish of barley-porridge with a piece of meat in it. Round the dish were rolls of bread and sometimes a piece of honeycomb.

Salomon Schweigger, German Protestant chaplain to the Austrian embassy from 1577 to 1581, regarded imarets as one of the most admirable Ottoman institutions: ‘Such an endowment is more to be esteemed than the columns and statues of the ancient Romans or the pyramids of the Egyptians,’ he wrote, ‘because
all those antiquities are good for nothing but display-
ing art, and are of no benefit either to God or men.”

According to Mustafa Ali, Schweigger’s contem-
porary, poor peasants never got the chance to taste pilaf, zerde or zirva except at an imaret on a Thursday evening. For this reason, he condemned those who built imarets in cities as hypocrites, declaring that this was not real charity. Instead, they should be located in provincial towns or villages, where local people and travellers were truly in need of a satisfying meal.

A late nineteenth-century description of an imaret
in the town of Kavala on the north coast of the Aegean provides some interesting details about the cooking
facilities — as well as reflecting disapproving attitudes towards relief for the poor held by the British in this period:

Adjoining the college is the almshouse, where every morning at five o’clock the poor Mussulmans assemble, each with a platter, to receive their dole of bread and pilaf, and on Thursday mornings [presumably an error for evenings] they get in addition a good meal of meat. The kitchen where all this is cooked is very clean and tidy; huge brazen cauldrons are kept for boiling the rice, and brick ovens for baking the bread. Adjoining the kitchen is the grinding-mill, where blindfold horses toil at turning the old-fashioned grind-
stone . . . This curious system of charity is a great annoyance to the tobacco merchants of Cavalla, for it encourages an immense amount of idleness, and makes the poor very independent.

Imaret endowment deeds and kitchen accounts are valuable sources of information about the food that was distributed. The endowment deed for an imaret in Amasya established in 1496 by Sultan Bayezid II specifies that the four cooks should be skilled at cook-
ing diverse dishes, the finest quality ingredients should be used, and the food should be delicious. Half of the daily allowance of mutton was to be cooked in the rice soup for the morning meal and the other half with bulgur for the evening meal. Each person was to be given a piece of meat weighing 50 dirhems (160 g). Chickpeas, onions and seasonal vegetables like gourds and carrots were to be added to the soup and other dishes. Rice pilaf and zerde were to be served every Thursday evening and every evening during Ramazan, when baklava with saffron was also on the menu. Honoured guests additionally received sheep’s foot stew, pilaf with a piece of meat, some of the juice in which the mutton had been boiled, and fruit. Bread was baked in the imaret oven. The copper cauldrons and pans were to be tinned six times a year. Allocations were as follows: for guests, bread weighing 300 dirhems (960 g), two pieces of meat and two ladlefuls of soup; for university students, bread weighing 200 dirhems (640 g), one piece of meat and one ladleful of soup; and for orphans at the primary school and the poor, bread weighing 100 dirhems (320 g) each, with a bowl of food and piece of meat to be shared between two. When the schoolchildren were taken on their annual outing to the mountain pasture, they were pro-
vided with the same rations to take with them. Guests who arrived too late for the evening meal were each to be given a loaf of bread and 50 dirhems (160 g) of honey, and at the discretion of the director might also receive fruit preserves and pickles.

At Mehmed II’s imaret in Istanbul, completed in 1470, the standard fare of soup, meat and bread was varied by the addition of gourd cooked with sour grape juice, prepared daily for forty days during the gourd
season, and a dish of chard and yoghurt when fresh yoghurt was plentiful, in late summer and autumn. Each person was given a portion of boiled mutton with their soup for morning and evening meals, parsley was always added to the rice soup, and ingredients of the rice and wheat soup included onion, cumin, black pepper, chickpeas and clarified butter.36 Special delicacies reserved for guests to the mosque complex included pickles (aubergine, grape and onion), sheep’s feet and gourd jam cooked with honey, cinnamon and cloves.37 Further details are provided by the scholar Latifi (1491–1582), who ate at this imaret in the early sixteenth century and recorded that the dishes included ‘Damascus style keşkek’, pilaf made with butter, sweet pilaf and zırva.38 Keşkek was also served at an imaret established in 1507 in the province of Çorum, along with tarhana soup and yoghurt soup, and the endowment deed specified that the pilaf be flavoured with black pepper or saffron.39 Endowment deeds written in Arabic for imarets in Syria sometimes included explanatory information about unfamiliar dishes; for example, ‘what the Rum (Anatolians) call yahne [yahni]’ and ‘the sweet dish known as zerd [zerde].’40

Kitchen staff consisted of a head cook and several under-cooks, bakers, and menial staff to carry and wash dishes and pound wheat. At the imaret founded in Mecca by Haseki Gûlûnûş Valide Sultan (d. 1715), the mother of Ahmed II, for example, one head cook, four cooks and a fifth specializing in invalid cookery were employed.41 The head cook of Cavliyye Mosque imaret near Jerusalem told an Ottoman traveller that they served seven thousand dishes of food each day, with rice pudding and pelte (starch pudding made with grape syrup) on Thursday nights. This food was apparently so delicious that local people did not bother to cook meals at home.42 Most imarets took precautions to prevent abuse of this sort by insisting that meals be

The following recipes for imaret dishes are taken from a late Ottoman cookery book.43

**Imaret Soup**

Chop two onions and fry in a spoonful of butter. Add nine ladlefuls of water and two ladlefuls of rice, season with salt and pepper and cook well.

**Zırva**

Cook some wheat starch in plenty of water until it thickens slightly. Add dried raisins, dried figs, pine nuts, and if desired some grape molasses or honey. This dish used to be made for the poor in place of soup during Ramazan.
Cooking food for travellers at a Sufi lodge on the pilgrimage route north of Aleppo, 1587.
eaten in the refectory and not taken home unless the recipients were blind, paralysed or sick. As recession eroded revenues in the nineteenth century, imarets could not always afford to provide daily meals as they had done in the past. Students at universities in Istanbul received nothing but bread daily, with a meal of pilaf, zerde and zırva given on Thursday evenings. The rest of the time they had to cook their own food on charcoal braziers in their rooms. On religious feast days, local people sometimes helped by sending them gifts of food or charcoal.

Sufi lodges or tekkes also functioned like imarets, providing bread and soup for travellers and the poor on ordinary days and helva on religious holidays. At the lodge of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli in Cairo, the dervishes not only served guests with meals of fine white bread, herise and pilaf, but afterwards entertained their visitors with witty conversation and humorous verses about eating and drinking by mystic poets. In 1848 Edward Lear stayed the night at a Sufi lodge near Larissa endowed by Hasan Bey, where around ninety poor travellers passing through the Tempe Gorge were given bread and soup each day. Some tekkes were famed for their excellent cooks and, if Evliyâ Çelebi’s figures are to be believed, had kitchens equipped with thousands of dishes and cooking pans. Christian monasteries likewise provided food for pilgrims and visitors. In the seventeenth century a monastery on Mount Sinai employed over a hundred cooks, who provided ‘food of any kind you wished.’

New settlements sometimes grew up around Sufi lodges or mosque complexes with imarets, since these provided the core of basic physical infrastructure and services needed for a new Muslim community. As late as the second half of the nineteenth century, refugees fleeing from war-torn territories often chose to settle close to Sufi lodges because they provided food and clothing for the poor.

Private individuals frequently made small endowments for a wide range of charitable purposes. Examples include meals, fruit, annual feasts and new clothes for poor schoolchildren and orphans; food for the poor of a particular neighbourhood on feast days; roadside drinking-water fountains; and meals for prisoners or sailors. Hatice Turhan Valide Sultan (d. 1683), mother of Mehmed IV, endowed funds for taking schoolchildren on summer outings, buying rice, onions and firewood for the poor in Ramazan, and hiring camels to carry drinking water for pilgrims to Mecca. In 1912 a resident of Ödemiş, a town in western Anatolia, made an endowment for weekly deliveries of snow to inmates of the local prison to cool their water during periods of hot weather. Others left money to bakers or butchers for feeding dogs, cats or storks. Count Bonneval (1675–1747), a French army officer who converted to Islam and contributed to Ottoman military reform in the 1730s, admired Ottoman generosity towards the poor but regarded endowments for feeding animals and birds as ‘a very mistaken kind of charity.’
When Turkish poets competed in lauding Mehmed II following the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, a simple folk musician was singled out by the sultan for the following couplet: ‘My regal Sultan may your morning be auspicious / May you eat honey and cream, and walk through meadows.’ The sultan’s courtiers were astonished that this piece of doggerel should be found worthy of remark and asked why he had chosen it. ‘Because he is more sincere than any of the others,’ explained Mehmed; ‘The poor fellow has eaten nothing more delicious in his life than clotted cream and honey, and thinks that a meadow is the most beautiful place. He knows no else, that he should find me worthy of better.’

From palace kitchen accounts dating from his reign we know that Mehmed did indeed fare better, consuming a wide range of roasted meats, fish, vegetable dishes, pilafs, noodles, salads, pickles, soups, sweet pastries, stewed fruits and sherbets. Occasional notes about dishes for which particular ingredients were purchased compensate a little for the lack of recipes. Thus we know, for example, that he ate soup made with apricots, börek with a chicken filling, fried aubergines with yoghurt and eggs, fish cooked with onion and garlic and kadayif made with milk.

Foodstuffs of the finest quality were purchased for the palace from all over the empire: saffron, barberry syrup and honey from the Balkans; pickled capers, pomegranate syrup and pine nuts from Anatolia; rock candy and pistachios from Syria; dates and coffee from the Middle East; sugar and rice from Egypt and distilled citrus blossom water and mastic from the Aegean islands. From lands beyond the empire came musk, ambergris, nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, pepper, and preserves of mangos and chebulic myrobalans. Such imported luxuries could not be sold on the open market before the palace had replenished its own stocks. Palace confectioners and pantlers made annual journeys to supervise the production of syrups and extracts in situ, such as pomegranate juice in Gemlik, lime juice in Egypt and lemon juice in Kos. Equal care was taken to ensure that the palace got the best local produce, so okra grown in market gardens around Istanbul was selected for the royal kitchens by a palace official called the bamyacıbaşı (head okra supplier), for example. Flowers used by the confectioners for making syrups and jams were supplied in vast quantities, as shown by single deliveries of 40,000 water lilies from Lake İznilk, southeast of Istanbul, 100 kg of violets from Çatalca, to the west, and 1,154 kg of red rose
petals from Edirne in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Exotic new foods were often tried out early on at the palace, where innovation was highly sought after. The American pumpkin appeared in palace kitchen accounts with the name ‘Egyptian gourd’ in 1555, more than a decade before the same vegetable appeared in an Italian cookery book as ‘Turkish gourd’, both names reflecting widespread misapprehensions about the origin of foods from the New World. Pumpkins became so popular that in 1594 more than a thousand were purchased at Manisa near the Aegean coast for the kitchen of the future Mehmed III. Maize, called ‘Catalonian millet’, did not find similar acceptance at the palace in Istanbul; after a single purchase in 1573 it was never mentioned again.

Another sixteenth-century newcomer, coffee, is not documented at the palace until the seventeenth century. Yet given its popularity in Istanbul from the middle of the sixteenth century, it is unlikely that the sultan and members of the palace elite were not drinking it too. By the 1630s the sultan’s chief coffee maker, the kahvecibaşı, was established as one of the most trusted members of his household staff. Ahmed III’s (r. 1703–30) coffee maker accompanied the sultan wherever he went, carrying his gold coffee pot suspended from a staff, and Mustafa III’s (r. 1757–74) kahvecibaşı, Mustafa Nakşı Efendi, accompanied the sultan on incognito tours around the city to judge the mood of the general public. The prestige attached to coffee at the palace is illustrated by seventeenth-century archive documents recording allowances of coffee to the sultan’s wives and favourites and referring to coffee makers among their suites of female attendants. Young harem girls were trained in the intricacies of coffee preparation by the chief harem coffee maker. The suites of the highest-ranking palace officials, such as the chief black eunuch, also began to include a coffee maker. Mustafa II’s (r. 1695–1703) favourite concubine was allocated a monthly allowance of 30 okkas (38.5 kg) of coffee in 1696, inviting speculation about how elite harem women managed to consume such a large quantity. They must have served it to the harem women who visited them in their apartments, and possibly the sultan himself. It is also likely that their highest-ranking attendants either drank coffee with their mistresses or were presented with some as gifts. Records of sugar for coffee supplied for the sultan and harem women and the presence of sugar canisters among the coffee paraphernalia used
by the sultan’s coffee makers shows that, in contrast to the general Ottoman habit, coffee at the palace was often sweetened.\textsuperscript{20}

Game such as duck, partridge, grouse, quail, gazelle and deer was provided by royal hunters or shot during the sultan’s hunting expeditions, so rarely appears in palace kitchen accounts.\textsuperscript{21} Venison supplied by janissary hunters in the Istrıranca Mountains west of Istanbul was made into \textit{pastırma} for the sultan’s table.\textsuperscript{22} Although game was appreciated from a gastronomic point of view, its consumption was negligible in comparison to meat from domesticated animals. It had no particular associations with royalty and the aristocracy as in Europe, and doubts about whether game birds and animals had been killed in accordance with canonical law made the Ottoman attitude to game equivocal.\textsuperscript{23} Other objections to hunting and hawking were voiced by Mustafa Ali, who condemned viziers who wasted time hunting when they ought to be attending to state affairs, and declared that anyone but sultans and princes who practised it as a sport should be chained up in an asylum or abandoned on a deserted island.\textsuperscript{24}

There is plenty of evidence to show that fish was enjoyed and eaten in considerable quantities at the palace, although fish was more a distinguishing feature of Istanbul cuisine than Ottoman cuisine as a whole. Turbot, swordfish, bluefish and mullet were among the sea fishes most popular at the palace,\textsuperscript{25} and the sultans sometimes ate freshwater fish, in particular large trout caught in mountain streams near Bursa.\textsuperscript{26} As already discussed in Chapter Two, Mehmed II appears to have eaten more fish than his forebears, and his successors followed his example. Selim II (r. 1566–74) enjoyed eating freshly caught fish when he made excursions along the shores of the Bosphorus.\textsuperscript{27} Palace fishermen were employed to catch fish for the sultan daily in the Bosphorus strait and Marmara Sea.\textsuperscript{28} Mahmud II (r. 1808–39) became a keen angler and enjoyed fishing through a trapdoor in the floor of a room that overhung the Bosphorus at Beşiktaş Palace,\textsuperscript{29} and there was a similar trapdoor for fishing at the palace of his cousin the princess Beyhan Sultan (1765–1824).\textsuperscript{30}

Packed snow and ice for chilling water and sherbet was collected by nomadic Turcomans in the mountains near Bursa, wrapped in black felt and carried on muleback to ice houses on the coast. There it was stored until summer arrived and then transported to the palace by boat. Snow was also collected in Istanbul when there was sufficiently heavy snowfall. Thousands

Cooks at work in the palace kitchens, early 17th century.
of janissary soldiers, palace gardeners and galley slaves were sent out with picks and shovels to fill the ice houses, ice pits and even stream beds with snow, which was then stamped down until it was rock hard. Once the palace was supplied, the remainder was sold on the open market, bringing in large revenues for the privy purse.

Royal estates were a major source of foodstuffs eaten at the palace. Sultan Selim I established a dairy farm north of Istanbul following his conquest of Egypt in 1517, stocking it with thousands of Egyptian piebald and dappled cattle that were said to be of enormous size and to produce 50–60 litres of milk a day. Other royal dairy farms along the Kağıthane river that flowed into the Golden Horn supplied butter, cheese and water buffalo milk, which was used to make yoghurt consumed at the palace. A royal vinegar factory produced vinegar made from roses, barberries, dates, apples and Muscat grapes grown in the factory’s own vineyards on the north shore of the Golden Horn. The more than sixty royal estates around Istanbul supplied fruits and vegetables. Thousands of gardeners were employed, some specializing in growing early and out-of-season vegetables. As in the case of ice, surpluses of fruit and vegetables were sold in the city, generating revenues for the sultan’s privy purse that averaged 40,000 ducats annually in the sixteenth century. An early seventeenth-century account of this practice is given by the Englishman Robert Withers:

The Grand Seignor, nor any of his women, or servants in the Seraglio, cannot want for fruit, there being at every time of year . . . all sorts of fruits, brought thither, besides what comes from the King’s own gardens (which are many, and near the city) every morning in great abundance, and excellent good; especially figs, grapes, peaches, and Caoons [kavun, melon]; the gardeners selling the remainder at a place which is called yemish bazar, that is, the fruit-market in Constantinople, where only the King’s fruit is sold, and bring the money weekly to the Bustangee Bashaw, who afterwards gives it to his Majesty; and it is called jebbe akchesee, that is, the King’s pocket-money . . . Now this fruit being sold, the buyers of it do commonly send it to some great personages; for it is extraordinary good, and so artificially piled up in baskets by the Bustangees, that, for the beauty of it, it oftentimes proves more acceptable than a gift of greater price.

Gifts of fine fruits and other foodstuffs were sent to the sultan from far and wide, such as quince jelly from Amasya in northern Anatolia, pastırma from Kayseri in central Anatolia, and sturgeon from Büyükçekmece Lagoon, around 50 kilometres west of Istanbul. Parmesan cheese was presented by the Venetian bailo in Istanbul:

The Bailiffe of Venice, residing at the Port, causeth a great quantity of Parmasant Cheese to bee brought for the Grand Seigneur, his Sultan’s and Basha’s; they are pleased in the taste, and the Feast would not be acceptable if this meate were wanting.

One of the nine main kitchens at Topkapi Palace was reserved for the sultan, but from the sixteenth century his food was mainly prepared in a small kitchen in the Third Court called the kuşbane, staffed by twelve of the most expert palace cooks, a kebab cook and a
baker. Kebabs were prepared in a separate kitchen further away so that the sultan was not disturbed by smoke from grilling and roasting meat.

One of the few descriptions of the cooking and serving utensils in the palace kitchens was included in a report written by the Venetian bailo Ottavio Bon around 1607:

The kitchen utensils are a sight to see, because the pots, cauldrons, and other necessary things are so huge and nearly all of copper that of things of this kind it would be impossible to see any more beautiful or better kept. The service of dishes is of copper tinned over, and kept in such continual good repair and so spotless that it is an amazing sight to behold. There is an enormous quantity of them, and they are a very considerable expense to the Porte, and especially because the kitchens provide food for so many both within and without, particularly on the four days of the Public Divan.

Some of the principal officers of the sultan’s private household, higher-ranking black eunuchs and female officers of the harem were also good cooks and prided themselves on the preparation of special dishes and desserts for the sultan’s table. These include spatchcocked chicken kebab prepared by Naim Efendi, superintendent of protocol in the mid-eighteenth century, and tel kadayıf with clotted cream and rose water made by Beşir Ağa for Sultan Mahmud I (r. 1730–54). During the reign of Mahmud II, the steward of the Privy Treasury and second keeper of the royal wardrobe were both renowned for their cooking and sometimes prepared meals for the sultan. One of the delicacies prepared in the harem was Circassian-style chicken with walnut sauce, probably reflecting the fact that by the nineteenth century...
century most of the slave girls in the palace harem were of Circassian origin. One of the most famous of such specialities made for the sultan was the **enderun yumurtası** (eggs cooked on a bed of caramelized onions) mentioned in Chapter Two. When this deceptively simple dish was served to German staff officers at Topkapı Palace during the First World War, they asked if it was made with caviar, and the Ottoman officer accompanying them was equally surprised to be told by palace staff that it contained only onions.

Palace cooks and confectioners almost never wrote down recipes, rare exceptions being two recipes for sweet dishes dated 1604 in a notebook kept sporadically by palace confectioners over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Occasionally they made lists of ingredients, which give some idea of the finished dish. There are examples of this in the aforementioned notebook, and archive documents provide others, such as **börk** with a filling of minced meat, dried apricots, currants, dates, chestnuts and apples made for a diplomatic banquet on 24 November 1649. Braised fish and fish soup were made for the same banquet, with grey mullet, onions, black pepper and other unspecified spices, parsley, saffron, vinegar, olive oil, clarified butter, honey, sugar and almonds. A handful of recipes for palace dishes are recorded in a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century manuscript cookery book, which includes a palace-style salad made with cos lettuce, redbud blossom, quince blossom and various herbs. A palace dessert of dates filled with pistachio nuts and clotted cream is described by an English officer who served in the Ottoman navy in the nineteenth century.

Palace cookery set the standard for Ottoman haute cuisine outside the palace. State officials emulated palace traditions in their own households, making them familiar in wider elite circles. Girls in the royal harem who were not selected as royal concubines usually left to marry after several years' service, and as far as their means and skill allowed must have continued to cook the palace-style food to which they were accustomed. Confirmation of this is given by the Turkish novelist Selim İleri (b. 1949), who recalls as a child eating palace-style dishes prepared by an elderly neighbour who had served in the palace harem. Palace specialities like ‘palace-style buns’ and ‘palace-style sugared almonds’ made by city bakers and confectioners in the seventeenth century suggest that palace staff may have shared secrets of their trade with fellow professionals outside the palace.

Outside influence on palace cuisine was not lacking, either. There was a long-standing tradition of presenting delicacies to the sultan, one example being Nevizade Atai’s **pelte** described in Chapter Two. In the late eighteenth century şeyhülislam (chief jurisconsult) Mehmed Efendi, who was renowned for the excellence of the food prepared by his cooks, sometimes sent dishes to Sultan Abdülhamid I, and when Mahmud II visited royal lodges or parks on the shores of the Bosphorus, grand houses in the vicinity would send dishes prepared in their own kitchens. Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861–76) liked to order kebab from a famous kebab house next to Eyüp Mosque on the Golden Horn when he visited his country lodge in the vicinity, and the master chef prepared and delivered the kebab himself, takeaway style.

A still popular dish called **hünkar beğendi** (‘the ruler was pleased’), consisting of stewed meat on a bed of aubergine purée, was said by one late Ottoman writer...
to be the invention of a black African cook in the palace harem kitchen during the reign of Abdülaziz. However, a recipe for an almost identical dish published in 1844 suggests a different origin. Here it is described as a speciality of ‘Catholic cooks’, presumably meaning Italian and French cooks employed to prepare European food at the palace and grand Ottoman households of the period. Looked at in this light, the dish could be interpreted as a fusion of a European vegetable purée with meat cooked in the Ottoman fashion, possibly devised by a European cook working in an Ottoman milieu. The name hünkar beğendi implies that the dish was served to the sultan, but whatever the truth of the matter, the dish became famous enough to find its way into a French book of recipes ‘from all countries’ (Cuisine de tous les pays) in 1868.

EARLY OTTOMAN SULTANS ate meals with their statesmen or any courtiers who happened to be present, until Mehmed’s father Murad II (r. 1421–51) limited the number to ten and stopped eating in public at formal banquets. At a banquet given by Murad for an envoy of the Duke of Milan in 1433, an eyewitness remarked that the sultan ate nothing and was told that ‘he never takes any thing in public, and there are very few persons who can boast of having heard him speak, or of having seen him eat or drink.’ This appears to have been a political decision aimed at creating a remote and awe-inspiring persona, since in private Murad II was a pleasure-loving man who appreciated good wine, food and music. His son Mehmed II took the precedent set by his father a step further, stating in his code of dynastic law drawn up towards the end of his reign, ‘It is my ruling that I shall eat with no one except members of my own family. My ancestors ate with their ministers, but I have abolished the custom.’

During the sixteenth century the sultans even abandoned the custom of eating with male members of their own family, a change that Mustafa Ali attributed to Selim I, who acceded to the throne after years living in fear of being murdered by one of his four older brothers.

From Mehmed II’s reign onwards, the grand vizier acted as host in the sultan’s place at official banquets. After giving audience to Frederic Kregwitz, ambassador of Rudolf II of Austro-Hungary, Sultan Murad III (r. 1574–95) retired to a private chamber nearby to eat while the public banquet was held in the Council Chamber. The ambassador’s secretary, Baron Wenceslas Wratislaw, could not see the sultan himself, but he did see how he was served:

Before they gave us anything to eat, we saw how the Turkish emperor is served. First came about 200 cup-bearers, or servers, dressed almost uniformly in red silk dresses, and with caps on their heads like those of the janissaries, except that about a span above the head they were embroidered with gold. These having placed
themselves in a row from the kitchen to the Sultan’s apartment, first did fitting reverence to all by an inclination of the head, and then stood close to each other, just as if they had been painted figures. When it was dinner time, the superintendent of the kitchen brought from the cook a porcelain dish, and another covered dish, handed it to the waiter nearest him, he to a third, and so on till it came to the one who stood nearest to the Emperor’s apartment. There, again, stood other chamberlains, and one handed it to another, till the viands were carried very quickly, and without the slightest noise or clatter, to the Emperor’s table.⁷⁴

Eating alone or out of sight was not confined to the Ottoman sultans. The English king Henry viii always dined in solitary splendour and his daughter Elizabeth i never ate in public.⁷⁵ In the unofficial sphere the sultans attended social events such as weddings, helva parties and feasts given by statesmen and palace dignitaries, and the torch-lit garden parties that became fashionable during the reign of Ahmed iii.⁷⁶ But even at such events the sultans ate apart. The historian Peçevi records that at the wedding of Süleyman i’s sister Hatice Sultan and grand vizier Makbul İbrahim Paşa in 1524, the sultan ate at a separate table and was served by his own attendants.⁷⁷ During hunting expeditions, Mehmed iv (r. 1648–87) retired to his tent to eat meals.⁷⁸

Not until Sultan Abdülaziz’s state visits to France, England and Austria in 1867 did the custom of eating apart and not attending official banquets begin to give way under pressure to conform to European norms. Abdülaziz attended banquets given in his honour in Europe,⁷⁹ and after his return to Istanbul gave two banquets for Prince Napoléon during the latter’s visit in July 1868.⁸⁰ A banquet given for the Prince and Princess of Wales during their visit to Istanbul in April 1869 was supposedly the first time any sultan had dined at the same table as his ministers, who according to one of the guests never ventured to speak at all, while the sultan spoke little, although he ‘seemed in good humour’.⁸¹

Sultan Abdülhamid ii (r. 1876–1909) was not so at ease with European manners as his uncle Abdülaziz, and coped with the situation by greeting his guests before dinner, leaving them to be entertained by his son, nephews and state ministers, and returning for conversation when the meal was over.⁸² When he did feel obliged to attend diplomatic dinners in person, the question of talk at table remained problematic, as shown by an account of one given for the British ambassador on 4 June 1893:

[One of the guests,] not knowing the Turkish etiquette, began to talk French to his neighbours, but received such very short answers that he too relapsed into silence. The Sultan, who had evidently seen this, beckoned to Munir Pasha, who whispered something to the Ministers of War and Marine, and they began to talk to M. M. [Max Müller] very pleasantly, and were encouraged by a look from the Sultan not to mind committing such a breach of etiquette.⁸³

An account of a dinner given on 22 June 1881 for the British ambassador Lord Dufferin suggests that playing music may have been used as a tactful way of reconciling European expectations of talking at table with palace etiquette by discouraging conversation:
The Sultan had with him two boys, his son and his nephew. He sat at the head of the table, and with rather a large space left between him and his neighbours . . . The Sultan would say something to Münir Pasha, he would salaam and repeated in French to D. [Lord Dufferin, British ambassador], whose reply was conveyed to the Sultan with the same submissive air. No one else at the table spoke, but, happily, beautiful music was played all the time.84

Listening to music while eating meals was an old tradition among the sultans that continued through to the end of the empire. Ensembles of instrumentalists and singers performed in an adjoining room or outside garden pavilions when the sultan ate outdoors, so preserving his privacy at the table.85 When they accompanied the sultan on excursions, they played outside his tent during meals.86

**Scores of Dishes and Desserts** were prepared for each of the sultan’s meals, and brought to the table one at a time, but he rarely tasted all of them.87 Murad III frequently sent an untouched dish from his own table to one of his wives, jesters, mutes or physicians as a mark of favour.88 This custom seems to have continued into the seventeenth century, when Mehmed IV is known to have sent a dish of roast quail to the table of the grand vizier during a feast following a hunting expedition at Karacabey in northwest Anatolia.89 Murad III’s physician, Domenico Hierosolimitano, recorded that thirty platefuls of each individual dish were prepared in readiness for sending to other people.90 The regular preparation of extra food far in excess of what the sultan himself could eat ensured sufficient food for the officers of the sultan’s privy household, who ate what remained of the sultan’s meals.91 This explains why kitchen registers record such large quantities of ingredients used to prepare dishes for the sultan, such as fifty eggs for an egg dish called çilbir made on 2 May 1651,92 one hundred starch wafers for güllaç, supplied daily during Ramazan in 1816,93 and the ‘six roasted pigeons’ and ‘two or three geese’ that were part of a typical meal served to early seventeenth-century sultans, as related by palace cooks:

His Majesty’s ordinary diet (as I have been told by some of the Aschees) is half a score roasted pigeons in a dish; two or three geese in a dish; lamb, hens, chickens, mutton, and sometimes wild fowl, but very seldom; and he hath the same quantity boiled, almost of every thing, there being very good sauce for every dish, and other ingredients very pleasing to the palate. He hath likewise broths of all sorts; and divers porcelain dishes full of preserves and syrups; and some tarts, and Burécks [böréks] after their fashion made of flesh covered with paste: and having made an end of eating, he drinks one draught of Sherbet.94

Quantities listed for diplomatic banquets are similarly far in excess of what the guests could consume, allowing sufficient food to feed not just the ambassador, his retinue and the Ottoman dignitaries who were their hosts, but the janissary soldiers and palace servants too, who polished off the remains. A meal nominally for twenty or thirty dignitaries would in fact feed several times that number, as shown by allocations of 8 kıyyes (10 kg) of sugar, 18 kıyyes (23 kg) of clarified butter, 44 chickens, 80 kıyyes (103 kg) of mutton, 20 pigeons and 4 keyls (51 kg) of rice for a mid-seventeenth-century banquet.95
In the harem, meals served to the royal wives and princesses were also finished off by their attendants. Each of these women was supplied with twenty loaves of bread per day in the early seventeenth century; calculating a loaf per person at each of two main meals, their households must have consisted of nine people. The valide sultan, mother of the ruling sultan, ran the harem like a parallel court and received a large stipend to pay for the expenses of her extensive suite. Following the death of her mother-in-law, the valide sultan Hafsa Sultan, in 1534, Süleyman I’s wife Hürrem Sultan took control of the harem and began to spend lavishly. When she ran out of money she wrote a letter to Süleyman, who was then away on campaign, asking for more. The letter opened with grandiloquent expressions of adoration and a love poem bemoaning their separation, after which she explained that she had spent all her funds on kitchen expenses. Since she and her staff would have been provided with meals from the palace kitchens, this expenditure must represent extra delicacies for herself, guests and favoured attendants. Guests would normally have been restricted to other harem women, since royal women almost never received visitors from outside the harem. But Hürrem was powerful enough to ignore convention. In 1542 she received an Italian woman, whose description of her visit regrettably includes no details about the ‘refreshments’ that were served:

The Khasseki, who is a stout but beautiful young woman, sat upon silk cushions striped with silver, near a latticed window overlooking the sea. Numerous slave women, glittering with precious stones, attended upon her, holding fans, pipes for smoking, and many objects of value. When we had selected from these, the great lady, who rose to receive me, extended her hand and kissed me on the brow, and made me sit at the edge of the divan on which she reclined. She asked many questions concerning our country, and our religion, of which she knew nothing whatever, and which I answered as modestly and as discreetly as I could. I was surprised to notice, when I had finished my narrative, that the room was...
full of women, who, impelled by curiosity, had come to see me, and to hear what I had to say. The Khasseki-Sultan now entertained me with an exhibition of dancing girls and music, which was very delectable. When the dancing and music were over, refreshments were served upon trays of solid gold sparkling with diamonds.99

Although visitors were rarely admitted to the imperial harem, married princesses living in their own palaces and former wives of deceased sultans who had remarried were not under similar constraint. In March 1718 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, wife of the British ambassador Sir Edward Wortley Montagu, was invited to dinner with Afife Kadın, a favourite of the late Mustafa II, who had married again after Mustafa was deposed. We can assume this meal was served in the same manner as in the royal harem:

She gave me a dinner of fifty dishes of meat, which (after their fashion) were placed on the table but one at a time, and was extremely tedious. But the magnificence of her table answered very well to that of her dress. The knives were of gold, and the hafts set with diamonds.100 But the piece of luxury which grieved my eyes was the table cloth and napkins, which were all TIFFANY embroidered with silk and gold, in the finest manner, in natural flowers. It was with the utmost regret that I made use of these costly napkins, which were as finely wrought as the finest handkerchiefs that ever came out of this country. You may be sure that they were entirely spoiled before dinner was over. The sherbet (which is the liquor they drink at meals) was served in china bowls; but the cover and salvers massy gold. After dinner, water was brought in gold basins, and towels of the same kind with the napkins, which I very unwillingly wiped my hands upon, and coffee was served in china with gold holders. The Sultana seemed in a very good humour, and talked to me with the utmost civility. I did not omit this opportunity of learning all that I possibly could of the Seraglio, which is so entirely unknown amongst us.101
Another detailed account of a harem meal is found in the memoirs of an upper-class Ottoman woman, the composer and poet Leyla Saz (1850–1936). She was the daughter of İsmail Paşa, royal physician to Sultan Abdülmecid (r. 1839–61), and as a child stayed for long periods in the palace harem as a companion to the princesses. The dinner she describes was given by Mahmud II’s daughter Adile Sultan at her waterfront palace in 1855. Like the sultans, Ottoman princesses ate alone or with family members, and the part of hostess was played by Adile Sultan’s highest-ranking attendant. Side dishes of salad, caviar, bottarga, olives and cheese were placed on the silver dining tray, together with salt, pepper and cinnamon shakers and a crystal jar of lemon juice. Hot dishes were placed one by one on a low silver stand in the centre of the tray. Fine muslin napkins were arranged at each place, with gold soup and pilaf spoons and cedar wood hoşaf spoons whose handles were embellished with coral and small diamonds. Long, gold-embroidered napkins were placed over the guests’ knees. After coffee had been served they were escorted into the presence of Adile and music was played by nine female musicians.

We know that in the late nineteenth century Abdülhamid II frequently invited his wife Müşfika Hanım to eat with him, and in view of his conservative character it seems likely that this was a practice common in earlier centuries. Members of the royal family entertained one another in their apartments in the harem, or in the case of married princesses in their own homes outside the palace. Hatice Sultan (c. 1660–1743) gave frequent banquets in her own palaces for her brothers Mustafa II and Ahmed III during their reigns, and in 1789 the eleven-year-old princess Esma Sultan gave a banquet for her brothers, the future Mustafa IV and Mahmud II. Each royal woman had a kitchenette in her private apartment, where refreshments consisting of coffee, sherbet, fruit and sweetmeats could be prepared when receiving the sultan or other visitors.

One archive document dated 1799 records daily allocations of butter, rice, meat and firewood to Sultan Selim III’s favourite consorts, Demhoş and Tahiye: evidence that they or their attendants cooked pilaf and other hot dishes.

When military campaigns, hunting expeditions or summer excursions took the sultans away from the city, they were accompanied by a baggage train of cooks, food supplies and utensils. During Süleyman I’s campaigns his suite included cooks, pantlers, sherbet makers and table attendants, and his gold and silver tableware was carried in leather chests. Murad IV (r. 1623–40), however, disdained palace pomp while on campaign, preferring to live and eat like his soldiers. He was even known to sleep on the bare ground, using his saddle as a pillow.

During the hot summer months, the sultans sometimes spent weeks away from the city, either in one of their summer palaces or camping in the countryside. When the young Mehmed (the future Mehmed III) was serving as governor of Manisa, near the Aegean coast, between 1584 and 1595, he moved to the mountains for the summer, accompanied by his court of two thousand people, including cooks and scullions, so their encampment must have resembled a canvas city. Mehmed IV enjoyed excursions to vineyards and cherry orchards on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus during the cherry season and would sometimes stay there for weeks on end with his children.

Hunting with bows and arrows and birds of prey was a favourite pastime of the sultans until the end of the seventeenth century, and these expeditions were rounded off by feasts. The wide variety of foodstuffs
consumed on these occasions shows what lavish meals palace cooks were expected to produce even when camping. Provisions for Mehmed II's three-week hunting expedition to Lake Terkos, west of Istanbul, in the late summer of 1471 included large quantities of fresh fruit, nuts, spices, yoghurt, cheese, caviar, pickles, lentils, bulgur, flour and sugar, and kitchen equipment included spits for roasting meat and sixteen cauldrons for making helva.114 A century later, provisions for Selim II's hunting expeditions between May 1573 and April 1574 included twenty varieties of fruit, sixteen varieties of vegetables and herbs, 3,171 chickens, 21,150 lemons and 1,150 starch wafers.115 During royal hunting expeditions palace cooks spit-roasted game birds and deer, baked bread and prepared elaborate banquets of savoury and sweet dishes.116

Hunting feasts and private social gatherings like helva parties would almost certainly have involved the drinking of wine or raki (arak) for those Ottoman sultans who indulged in alcohol. There was a long tradition of wine drinking among the Muslim ruling classes. The eleventh-century Persian Ziyarid ruler Kai Ka‘us voiced a pragmatic approach to alcohol, declaring that it is preferable not to drink at all since that is the will of God Almighty, and the people respect an abstinent ruler, but since young people never listen to what others say, they should at least drink in moderation, and avoid drinking in the mornings and on Fridays.117 The Ottoman sultans varied considerably in their drinking habits, a few notoriously drinking heavily and a few not at all. Sultan Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402) was the first to be accused of excessive drinking by his contemporaries.118 Anecdote has it that Bayezid was shamed into repentance by his son-in-law Emir Sultan, who when asked to admire the sultan's new mosque in Bursa declared with heavy irony that 'a drinking house should be built at each corner so that my sultan can come and enjoy himself here with his friends.'119 His grandson Murad II banished an Arab cleric for admonishing him not to drink, and on one occasion the same sultan and his ministers were supposedly too intoxicated to give an audience to the Spanish envoy Sir Benedict de Fourlino.120 Although Süleyman I did not drink in later life, early on in his
reign he and his grand vizier İbrahim Paşa drank wine during visits to the garden of the palace scribe and cut-paper artist Efşancı Mehmed (d. 1534), a keen gardener who bred new varieties of flowers and fruit.121 His grandson Murad III was abstemious, perhaps put off by his father Selim II’s excessive drinking.122 The last sultans to acquire a reputation for hard drinking were Murad IV and his nephew Mehmed IV in the mid- to late seventeenth century. Mehmed was so obsessed by hunting that his neglect of state affairs eventually led to his dethronement, and statesmen were unwilling to consider his two sons Mustafa and Ahmed as his successors because they were accustomed to ride with their father ‘like unbridled lions, to eat and drink with him and to make war and music.’123

Estimates of the numbers who ate regularly at the palace are 3,000 in 1490, 8,000 in 1573 and 11,000 in 1660.129 Not all palace employees were provided with cooked meals, however. Some of the menial staff, including doorknobs, gardeners, boatmen, stable boys, kitchen boys and wood choppers, were given rations and cooked for themselves in their quarters.130 As the palace population rose, annual consumption of mutton and lamb (the preferred meats) rose from over 16,000 head for all four Istanbul palaces in the late fifteenth century, to between 100,000 and 180,000 in the seventeenth century.131 Chickens were another major item, with 1,200,000 being supplied each year by villages near Istanbul in the seventeenth century, in addition to those raised by palace poulterers (perhaps for the sultan’s own table).132 Food consumption at the palace remained high through the first decade of the twentieth century, when a palace official described the palace kitchens as ‘a frightful monster swollen with the awfulness of a mountain’ and the ‘palace gullet’ as ‘a dreadful abyss, opening its mouth with a hunger never satisfied, ready to swallow everything, awaiting waves of food like a never-ending river to flow into its depths.’133 The situation was exacerbated by the fact that theft of kitchen supplies was endemic. In the seventeenth century an Ottoman writer likened the palace kitchen staff to ‘pantry mice who carry off figs and grapes.’134

On special occasions, such as royal circumcisions, temporary cooks were hired to help prepare feasts. Sixty extra cooks were hired for the circumcision of Sultan Ahmed III’s sons in 1720,135 and three hundred for the circumcision of the sons of Mehmed IV in 1675.136 Of the 1,200 cooks who prepared the banquets for the circumcision of Sultan Abdülmecid’s sons in 1858, a considerable proportion were hired for

THE MONUMENTAL PALACE KITCHENS, with their ten pairs of domes and tall chimneys, are one of the most striking features of the Topkapı Palace skyline.124 As well as the nine main kitchens and confectionery kitchen there were four bakeries and a ‘rose house’ (gülhanec) where rose water and preserves were made from roses grown in the palace gardens.125 Not only cooks, confectioners and bakers, but an army of other employees were on the payroll of the palace kitchens, including pantlers, waiters, yoghurt makers, poulterers, butchers, sebzeci (who cleaned and prepared vegetables), wheat pounders (to remove the husks from wheat grains), water carriers, herbalists, candle makers, ice collectors and tanners.126 According to one contemporary source, their number totalled over four thousand in the first half of the seventeenth century.127 The whole organization was so immense that, as one contemporary Ottoman writer put it, ‘even Aristotle would have found it mind-boggling.’128
the occasion. As many as half a million people were fed over several days and weeks during such celebrations.\textsuperscript{137} During Ramazan, when large quantities of baklava were prepared, local women were paid to roll out the extra \textit{yufka} required in their own homes and these were collected by porters, whose fees are recorded in the palace registers.\textsuperscript{138}

Pages who trained at the palace schools and showed promise started on the career ladder as apprentices in palace departments, including the kitchens and inner pantry,\textsuperscript{139} where they were taught how to prepare syrups, fruit preserves and electuaries for the sultan,\textsuperscript{140} and how to lay his table.\textsuperscript{141} Cooking was as much a part of training in the Inner Palace as calligraphy, poetry, music, literature and martial arts.\textsuperscript{142} Palace cooks who accompanied the sultan on campaign famously turned the course of the Battle of Keresztez against the Austrians in 1596 by attacking the enemy with frying pans, cleavers, ladles, tongs and firewood. The Austrian helmets that they took back as trophies hung on the walls of the kitchen courtyard at Topkapı Palace until 1928, when the palace was turned into a museum.\textsuperscript{143} Some cooks, pantlers and particularly the \textit{çeşnigir}s who served at the sultan’s table rose to high rank in the Ottoman government, such as Grand Vizier Arnavut Tavaşi Hadım Sinan Paşa, who had served as chief \textit{çeşnigir} to Süleyman I, and the famous grand vizier Köprülü Mehmed Paşa, who trained as a confectioner when he was a page in the palace school.\textsuperscript{144}

In October 1908 palace cooks supported the conservative faction that opposed the reinstatement of constitutional government and parliamentary elections,\textsuperscript{145} and consequently eight hundred cooks at Yıldız Palace were dismissed at the end of March 1909, just a month before the sultan himself was deposed on 27 April 1909. With the departure of Sultan Abdülhamid II into exile in Salonika and the enthronement of Mehmed V, the palace kitchens were reduced to a shadow of their former glory.\textsuperscript{146}

\textbf{Low-ranking inhabitants} of the palace did not eat luxuriously. According to a mid-seventeenth-century account, the three hundred or so pages in the palace school ate a plain diet of soup, boiled mutton and bread, which was delivered in large cauldrons to the door of their hall in the Third Court.\textsuperscript{147} However, kitchen accounts reveal that their meals were not as dull as all that. Lists of ingredients supplied for the pages in the fifteenth and early seventeenth centuries include cheese, chickpeas, dried fruits and nuts, and flavourings such as saffron. The presence of \textit{yufka} on the lists shows that they also ate \textit{börek}.\textsuperscript{148} They did indeed eat a lot of soup, but of diverse kinds, flavoured with ingredients such as yoghurt, parsley, plums, gourd, cucumber and unripe grapes.\textsuperscript{149} Pages ate their meals in groups of ten around each dining tray, under the supervision of an official, who held a wooden spoon with a large handle to hit any boy who squabbled or misbehaved.\textsuperscript{150}

Bread was a key indicator of an individual’s status in the palace hierarchy. Three qualities of bread were made in the royal bakery, the finest white bread being reserved for the sultan himself and the royal women, thin loaves of white bread called \textit{fodula} for higher-ranking staff and brown loaves for the lower orders.\textsuperscript{151} In the seventeenth century the sultan’s bread was described as ‘very pure and delicate’ wheat bread of three or four sorts, which he ate while still warm from the oven. The loaves were each ‘as big as three of our penny loaves in London, but very light, and spungy [sic], and easy of digestion’.\textsuperscript{152} This was probably the ‘Viennese bread’ recorded in seventeenth-century
palace kitchen accounts as being baked for the sultan, and similar to the well-risen white bread rolls that went by the same name in France and England. As part of an effort to cut kitchen expenses in 1876, it was decided to distribute loaf bread to the harem women instead of *fodula*. An elderly bed-ridden harem woman, horrified at seeing the bread that was brought in, cried out, ‘Has the House of Osman expired?’ and fainted. The sultan’s mother was called and she commanded that the decision be reversed.

Other status indicators included rice, sugar and spices, which were consumed wholly or largely by those of highest rank. For example, chicken soup made for the ministers contained cinnamon and ginger, while these ingredients were absent from that made for the clerical staff. Similarly, *zerde* for the latter group was made with honey instead of sugar.

For janissary soldiers, finishing off food served at diplomatic banquets was a rare opportunity to taste high-status foods. After the twenty-course mid-morning banquet given to the Polish ambassador and his retinue in 1640, the soldiers rushed in to eat what was left. No doubt this was the reason for providing excessive quantities of bread, as noted by the sixteenth-century English historian Richard Knolles, who wrote that a ‘great store of bread, as if they had been to feed three hundred persons’, was placed on the table at a palace banquet held in 1567.

Many accounts have survived of palace banquets served to foreign ambassadors. Yet most of these are sketchy with respect to the actual food that was served, repetitively listing roasted and boiled meats, pilaf and sherbet, then trailing off with phrases like ‘yet many more.’ A typical example is a description of a palace banquet held for the English ambassador William Harborne on 24 April 1583:

Mutton boiled and rosted, Rice diversly dressed, Fritters of the finest fashion, and dishes daintily dight with pritty pappe, with infinite others, I know not how to expresse them. We had also rosted Hennes with sundry sorts of fowles to me unknown.

Embassy chaplain Dr John Covel did a somewhat better job when describing the food served at a banquet for the British ambassador Lord John Finch in the 1670s: ‘little flat loafes of bread (like pancakes)’ were placed on each table, along with side dishes consisting...
of pickled capers, olives, samphire and parsley. The banquet comprised twenty courses, served one by one, beginning with roast chicken and roast pigeon, and followed by kibobs (kebab), several sorts of Dolmah, which is minced meat stuffed into pieces of gourds, or gobbeted in vine leaves or the like, and so boyld,’ ‘several Cherbaus [çorba] pottages made of rice, wheat etc., some sweet, some savoury,’ Pelo, rice boiled with pieces of a hen,’ Rice gelyed, a perfect fool in a platter’, ‘another slip slop of Dates and pine kernells,’ a great baked pye in a platter, with puff paste above and minced beaten meat, wel season’d underneath,’ a puff paste pudding in a platter, plain; another, sweeten’d with honey’. Halfway through, they drank ‘excellent Lemmon shertbert’.

A palace feast held on 20 May 1836 to celebrate the circumcision of Mahmud II’s young sons was briefly described by the young German army officer Helmuth von Moltke. The celebrations were held outdoors in the valley of Kağıthane at the end of the Golden Horn, and the banquet began with roast lamb stuffed with rice and currants, a dish particularly associated with festive occasions:

The diplomatic corps was invited. Since this was an entirely Turkish festivity, we were given a truely Turkish banquet. Naturally there were no forks, knives or wine. The first dish was roast lamb stuffed with rice and currants. Everyone broke off a piece and dug into the pilaf with their fingers. Afterwards came helva, a pudding made with flour and honey, then roast again, pudding again, each dish, whether hot, cold, sour or sweet, being of individual excellence; but their combination was strange for a European stomach to comprehend and there was no wine. Ice cream was served in the middle of the dinner. Finally we insisted on being given the pilaf which invariably marks the end of a meal. After that a dish of hosaf, or stewed fruit, was placed on the great round tray on which we were eating, and spooned empty.

When the Empress Eugénie paid a state visit to Istanbul in October 1869, it was felt inappropriate to serve her in the Turkish manner or even to include much Turkish food in the three banquets given in her honour. The main banquet menu thus consisted of 23 French and six Turkish dishes, served on a valuable dinner service purchased specially from Paris. A French chef was hired for the occasion, and the fifty waiters were dressed in European-style liveries in red and blue with gold embroidery.

Until around 1500, the sultans’ meals were served in traditional fashion on a red leather mat spread on the floor. Circular metal dining trays, placed over the mat, are first recorded in 1530, when the Slovenian interpreter Benedict Curipeschitz described Austrian envoys and Ottoman dignitaries eating around ‘silver tables’. For a long time these were reserved for the elite, the lesser-ranking palace staff continuing to dine around leather mats on the floor. At diplomatic banquets the same distinction was made, with the ambassador, his highest-ranking staff and Ottoman dignitaries served on dining trays, while their retinues were served on mats. Similar distinctions of rank were reflected in the materials of which dishes were made. In the fifteenth century, Mehmed II and the military judge ate from gold dishes, the viziers from silver and the soldiers from copper. But even gold and silver were eclipsed by Chinese porcelain and celadon ware, imported in large quantities via the Silk Road.
The collection of over 10,000 pieces of Chinese porcelain, mainly tableware, at Topkapı Palace today represents only a fraction of what was purchased over the centuries, but is nonetheless the largest collection outside China. The preference for porcelain over gold and silver was partly due to the Prophet Muhammad’s prohibition on eating and drinking from vessels made of silver (extrapolated later to include gold). While some of the sultans are known to have eaten from gold dishes, many avoided it on religious grounds, particularly during Ramazan. When Bayezid II decided to use gold and silver dishes and dining trays, he atoned for this violation of religious principle by using them to give banquets to the poor for three days running. Süleyman I gave a banquet on gold dishes to a Persian envoy and his retinue early on in his reign, but in later life are only from celadon and porcelain, except when on campaign, when gold and silver ware was more practical to transport than breakable china. Locally produced İznik ware was used in large quantities at the palace, but was always regarded as second best to porcelain and virtually none remains in Topkapı Palace today.

In 1574 a catastrophic fire, started by fat dripping from spit-roasting meat, destroyed not only the palace kitchens but a building called the ‘china chamber’ (oda-yı çini), where porcelain tableware was stored. This resulted in a leap in demand for İznik vessels to replace the lost China ware, until in the seventeenth century increased imports of Chinese porcelain made up for the losses. Members of the royal family and palace officials acquired immense quantities. At her marriage in 1675 the trousseau of Hatice Sultan, daughter of Sultan Mehmed IV, contained 311 pieces of porcelain, and she acquired so many afterwards that by the time of her death in 1743 she owned 2,303 pieces. The probate inventory for the black eunuch Küçük Beşir Ağa drawn up in 1752 lists nearly two thousand pieces of Chinese porcelain, including 838 plates, 559 bowls and 115 coffee cups.

Until the nineteenth century the only cutlery used by the sultan were spoons, which were made of materials
such as ebony, sandalwood, tortoiseshell, ivory and mother-of-pearl and often studded with coral or precious stones.\textsuperscript{181} Forks were still unusual enough in 1867 for Leyla Saz to remark on their use at a dinner given by Pertevniyal Valide Sultan in the harem of Dolmabahçe Palace. This dinner was eaten in otherwise traditional fashion, seated on cushions around silver dining trays on low stands.\textsuperscript{182} Palace women continued to find forks clumsy and chairs uncomfortable, and the Western-style dining rooms in the apartments of the royal women at Yıldız Palace were used rarely, except on formal occasions.\textsuperscript{183}

Strict precautions were taken to prevent theft of precious golden and jewelled tableware. The official who checked them out of the treasury was held responsible if they were lost or damaged and charged for replacements and repairs.\textsuperscript{184} The pilfering of copper tableware and kitchen vessels was also rife, as shown by a document dated 1576 commanding that vessels stamped with the royal \textit{tuğra} be collected up and returned to the palace kitchens.\textsuperscript{185} Losses of copper tableware were particularly serious at feasts and banquets.\textsuperscript{186} In 1790, for example, 496 soup bowls, fifty dining trays and three hundred baklava trays used to serve the janissaries were found to be missing and had to be replaced.\textsuperscript{187}

There were no rooms at the palace used specifically for dining until the nineteenth century. Instead, the sultan ate his meals in whichever part of the palace took his fancy:

\begin{quote}
The Pavillions and stately Chambers which are within it, seeme to have beene built and embellished by the hands of delight and pleasure: For in them the Grand Seigneur eats most commonly, and takes his Recreations.\textsuperscript{188}
\end{quote}

It has been suggested that the Fruit Room at Topkapı Palace, which dates from 1705 and is named after the painted compositions of dishes piled with fruit that cover its walls, was used as a dining room. Although the sultans may well have eaten there occasionally, they would hardly have given up the freedom to enjoy meals in the many diverse rooms and garden pavilions around the palace, each having its distinctive decoration, ambience and view.
Tomb of Mevlana Jalaleddin Rumi's cook, Ateşbaz ı Veli, in Konya.
Cooks were the ‘spiritual benefactors’ of great men, according to the sixteenth-century Ottoman scholar Mustafa Ali:

Of those who serve great men, their cooks are the most long-suffering. Whether travelling or at home, they must busy themselves with the difficult task of cooking food while others relax in comfort. In short, of those who serve the great, the spiritual benefactors are cooks. They must be treated well, even if it means praising them to their faces and complaining about them behind their backs, and tipped abundantly to keep their good favour. Undoubtedly they deserve this more than most. While others are free to contemplate their gardens and enter the paradise of food and drink, they are obliged to remain close to their fireplaces to which they are dedicated.¹

The idea that cooking had a spiritual function was taken even more seriously by Mevlevi and Bektaşi Sufis, for whom the kitchen was a sacred place. Ateşbaz-ı Veli, Rumi’s cook and pupil, was so revered that his tomb became a place of pilgrimage in Konya and the fireplace in Mevlevi lodges was called the ‘hearth of Ateşbaz-ı Veli’.² Rumi’s works abound with metaphors about food expressing mystic concepts, such as ‘cooking the soul,’ meaning to gain awareness of God. The preparation and eating of food in dervish lodges involved meticulous formality and ceremony. Mevlevi novices commenced their training in the kitchens, under the auspices of the aşçi dede, or chief cook, and had to perform a host of menial tasks, including washing dishes, keeping the larder in order, shopping, roasting coffee beans, taking care of kitchen equipment, lighting the fire, laying the tables and tending the vegetable gardens and orchards.³ In the Bektaşi order, the chief cook was second in rank to the dede baba (head dervish) and the cauldron was a sacred symbol.⁴

According to Islamic tradition, Adam was the first cook and patron saint of the guild of cooks. He was also regarded as the first farmer, since after being expelled from Paradise he and Eve were obliged ‘to plant, hoe and swing scythes.’⁵ Islamic thinkers believed wheat to be the forbidden fruit, in the sense of ‘fruit of the earth.’ ‘Two grains of wheat brought trouble upon my father [Adam], who had to leave Paradise,’ explained Rumi.⁶ Some Anatolian Christians evidently shared this interpretation of the Fall, because a fresco in a tenth-century rock church in Cappadocia depicts Adam and Eve being presented with a scythe.⁷ After the Fall, Adam and Eve were obliged not only to grow
their own food instead of gathering the bounty of God in Paradise, but to cook it, which makes sense, since wheat and other cereal grains cannot be digested raw by human beings. The first dish they prepared was wheat soup, known as baba çorbası (soup of the father, that is, Adam, the father of mankind). 8

The place where Adam and Eve were believed to have met after the Fall was Mount Arafat near Mecca, and a small mosque known as the Kitchen of Adam was built on that spot. 9 This building, which was probably one of those demolished by the Wahhabis in the early nineteenth century, 10 is depicted on a tiling panel illustrating the Kaaba and its surroundings that originally adorned Cezerî Kasım Paşa Mosque in Istanbul. 11

Master cooks headed a team of journeymen, apprentices and scullions. 12 Scullions worked for a year or two without pay before being allowed to wear the dark blue apprentice’s apron. Apprentices worked for a further three or four years and if their master was satisfied with their skill were promoted to the rank of journeyman. Journeymen were allowed to wear coloured aprons and were free to work under a different master. When a journeyman was considered ready to be a master, he cooked a meal at the annual three-day picnic of the guild of cooks, and if the other masters judged the meal up to standard he was given a silk apron known as futa, which was the equivalent of a diploma. 13 Dishes known to have been used as ‘master pieces’ included pilaf, yahni, baklava and helva. 14

Guild rules forbade cooks to write cookery books or even keep a notebook. This was partly because only by apprenticeship to a master could real excellence be attained, and partly a means of preventing non-guild members from entering the profession. 15 Wealthy dignitaries employed large numbers of cooks and other kitchen staff. Grand vizier Çandarlı İbrahim Paşa (1429–1499), who was renowned for the delicious food served in his house, employed over 150 people in his kitchen. 16 Cooks in such households included specialists in particular areas of cookery, such as bòrek, pilaf, dolma, kebab, sweet pastries, preserves, ‘fine dishes’ prepared in small quantities, and invalid cookery. 17 This high degree of specialization was a key factor in the creation of Ottoman haute cuisine. Cooks employed by the seventeenth-century statesman and gourmet Defterdarzade Mehmed Paşa included specialists in soup, pastry, kebab, yahni (boiled mutton stew) and desserts. When travelling on state business he was accompanied by forty cooks, who were dressed in white from head to foot, wore gloves and were forbidden to do any work that might soil their hands and clothes, such as saddling their horses or erecting tents. They were reprimanded if a dish was not up to standard and rewarded if they invented a tasty new one. 18

Gifted and inventive cooks were sought after by the palace and wealthy households, and generously remunerated. Palace kitchen records for 1503–4, for example, record that a number of palace cooks and confectioners were presented with gifts of money ranging from 400 to 3,000 akçe. 19 Some palace cooks became wealthy enough to found mosques, such as chief palace confectioner İskender Ağa, who founded a mosque and primary school in Istanbul in 1546; 20 head cook Mehmed Ağa, who founded a small mosque known as Aşçıbaşı Mescidi (Mosque of the Head Cook) in the district of Eyüp in 1591; 21 and another head cook, Süleyman Ağa, who founded a mosque called Aşçıbaşı Camii in his home town of Gülşehir in Cappadocia in 1734. 22 The importance attached to good cooks is illustrated by an incident that took place in the mid-nineteenth century. Retired statesman
Hüsrev Mehmed Paşa (1769–1855) was so alarmed when his cook was called up to the army that he appealed to the commander-in-chief Süleyman Paşa, asking for his exemption from military service, on the grounds that his cook excelled at the sort of invalid cookery a man of his advanced age needed. After consultation with Sultan Abdülmecid, Süleyman Paşa granted the request.23

Wealthy homes had two kitchens, housed in separate buildings in the grounds; one was attached to the harem, the private part of the house, and the other to the selamlık (public apartments), where male guests were received.24 The statesman Fazil Mustafa Paşa (1830–1875) employed several European and 45 Ottoman male cooks (including journeymen and apprentices) in the selamlık kitchen and a similar number of female cooks in the harem kitchen.25 Dishes prepared in the latter were placed in a revolving cupboard separating the harem from the selamlık, so that male servants could not see the women on the other side.26 The harem and selamlık kitchens were often of equal importance in the preparation of banquets, as illustrated by an anecdote about the sheikhulislam (chief jurisconsult) during the reign of Selim III (r. 1789–1807). While checking on preparations in the harem kitchen for a banquet he was giving that evening, he talked to one of the young female cooks and stroked her cheek. When his wife heard about it she stormed into the kitchen, dismissed the girl and threw all the dishes of food onto the floor. The sheikhulislam’s steward appealed to one of the palace chamberlains for help and he related the incident to the sultan, who ordered a replacement banquet to be sent from the palace kitchens.27

The names of very few female cooks employed in harem kitchens are recorded. One is Nuriye, who is mentioned in an eighteenth-century recipe for a baklava-like dessert that she invented in the 1760s and which was named after her. A friend of the family enjoyed it so much that he arranged for Nuriye to teach it to one of his own female cooks, and recorded the recipe.28 Another is Karanfil Kalfa, a black African cook working in the harem kitchen of vizier Mısırlı Fazil Mustafa Paşa in the 1860s whose cookery was more renowned than that of the scores of male cooks he employed.29 Black women cooks were widely employed in Istanbul’s harem kitchens from the eighteenth century onwards,30 and according to one late Ottoman writer they became the main conservers of traditional culinary knowledge. He attributes this to the fact that they were not as strictly isolated from men as were white women servants and so were able to learn their craft from master cooks.31

Every spring black African cooks and other servants gathered for a May Day picnic in parks around the city. As well as traditional Ottoman picnic foods like dolma, helva, roast lamb and pickles, they ate porridge made with okra, hot red chilli pepper, flour and butter, cooked outdoors in cauldrons.32 Okra porridge was so closely identified with black Africans that it became known in Turkish as Arab aşı (Arab food), ‘Arab’ being commonly used in Turkish to refer to black Africans. Okra is native to tropical west Africa33 and was almost certainly spread by black slaves to Egypt (where it is recorded in the thirteenth century), and in the seventeenth century to the Ottoman Empire and the Americas.34 The striking similarity of Arab aşı to the original form of American gumbo provides strong confirmation of their shared origin.35 Interestingly, hot red chilli pepper was an important ingredient in both the Ottoman and North American versions of this okra dish. Hot red chilli pepper native to America was
The Battle of Keresztes, fought against the Habsburgs in 1596. At the lower left, a cook attacks a soldier in armour with a ladle and poker.
possibly at some point substituted in both cases for a hot-flavoured ingredient of African origin. A likely candidate is *Solanum aethiopicum*, the mock tomato, whose fruits can be hot and which spread hand in hand with okra to Ottoman Istanbul. The same pair of plants were taken by African slaves to Brazil, where both okra and mock tomatoes were recorded in the 1640s.36

As well as palaces and private homes, qualified cooks were employed in imaret kitchens and Sufi lodges. Although imaret food mainly consisted of simple dishes for students and the poor, their cooks were also expected to prepare a wider repertoire of sophisticated dishes for distinguished guests.37 The Kadirî order dervish lodge in the Tophane neighbourhood of Istanbul could only afford to employ one chef and an apprentice (the chef’s son) on a regular basis, but during the month of Ramazan in 1906 a temporary cook was employed on Tuesdays, when the dervishes held their ceremonies and more elaborate meals were served.38

Most middle-class families employed a single female cook, who was helped during Ramazan by a hired kitchen hand to cope with extra guests and the greater number of dishes that were served.39 For special occasions like weddings and circumcisions freelance cooks, particularly pastry cooks, were employed,40 and when large quantities of fruit preserves were being made, women who specialized in jam making – known as a *tatlı kaynatıcı* (jam boiler) – were hired by the day.41 Housewives and their cooks had to prepare a daunting range of winter provisions as well as daily fare. These included *tarhana*, dried noodles, dried *yufka*, bulgur, pickles, garlic sausage, clarified butter, clarified sheep’s tail fat, strained salted yoghurt (placed in jars and sealed with a layer of tallow), and dried herbs and vegetables such as aubergines and okra, which were threaded on strings.42

Even women who could afford cooks would traditionally supervise or participate in cooking, especially in the preparation of fruit preserves, pickles and specialities for which they had gained a reputation in their social circle, such as baklava, *dolma* or *börek*.43 Housewives who neglected their culinary duties were the butt of male criticism. One sixteenth-century writer declared that unless women took an interest in their own kitchens their husbands would never enjoy tasty food. Intelligent women, he wrote, should be domesticated and attached to their homes.44 A nineteenth-century writer complained about housewives who...
ordered meals from cook-shops and who spent an excessive amount of time dressing up, visiting and receiving friends, going on picnics and sitting by their windows. Such women set a bad example to their servants and were the cause of their husbands spending their leisure time in restaurants and other public places instead of at home. Another writer complained about idle and frivolous housewives who instead of preparing homemade jam bought it from confectioners’ shops.

Upper-class Ottoman men shared recipes and were sometimes keen cooks themselves, such as the anonymous eighteenth-century judge who compiled a manuscript cookery book. Some of the recipes are attributed to friends and acquaintances, such as şiş kebap as made by Mirzâ, steward of the guild of water engineers in Edirne, and a recipe for pickled fish as made by Nuh Efendi (d. 1707), chief physician to Ahmed III. The author also gives a recipe of his own invention for rabbit kebab. Hacı Tayyib of Salonika’s recipe for quince paste is recorded in another manuscript collection of recipes dating from the mid-nineteenth century. Ahmed Cavid, historian to Selim III, liked to cook, one of his favourite dishes to make being börek with a filling of cheese, dill and parsley. He even tried his hand at using dried ginger root to make preserved ginger ‘as made in Indiá’, when he could not obtain the imported variety. The courtier and traveller Evliya Çelebi relates one dish that he invented after being presented with some New World fruits while visiting Central Europe in the 1660s. From his description, these fruits, which he said had been grown in Amsterdam, seem to have been papaya. By ingeniously cooking the pulp with a little rice, cinnamon and cloves, he created a pudding with ‘a flavour to be found only in heaven’.

While food made in bulk was cooked in cauldrons over wood fires, fine cooking and grilling was done in...
smaller pans over charcoal fires that allowed for precise heat control.52 Spit-roasting, called çevirme (turning), was mainly reserved for chickens and game birds.53 Other meats were roasted in a stone-lined pit oven or in a tandır; a whole sheep or goat would be hung from an iron bar across the mouth, and an earthenware pot placed in the bottom for the fat and juices to drip into. In the seventeenth century the traveller Jean Chardin remarked that by this means the meat ‘roasts equally on all sides without scorching’ and ‘is delicious eating’.54 Thin leavened or unleavened bread was also baked in tandır ovens by slapping the dough against the hot walls, while loaf bread and fodula were baked in brick ovens.

At public feasts celebrating events such as the circumcision of royal princes, cooks prepared food in tents on the festival site. When Ahmed III’s sons were circumcised in 1720, for example, food for thousands of guests was cooked in sixty cauldrons in kitchen tents set up on the archery field overlooking the Golden Horn. None of these tents have survived, but a miniature painting shows that they were made of brown canvas with large apertures in the centre of the roof so that smoke from the cooking fires could escape.

Economic decline in the mid-nineteenth century led to fewer jobs for cooks being available in affluent households and the collapse of the guild system. Master cooks were obliged to accept lower wages in more modest households or to take temporary jobs preparing food for weddings. In this way, the traditional chain whereby apprentices had learned from masters over a period of years gradually broke down. In 1901 the idea of establishing a cookery school to replace the apprenticeship system was discussed but rejected by the Ministry of Education.55 The long period of political upheaval and war throughout the late Ottoman era, beginning with the deposal of Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1909, was disastrous for Ottoman cooks. Many must have been called up and lost their lives, and many more lost their jobs. In 1922, former superintendent of fisheries Ali Rıza Bey mourned the loss of the master cooks who ‘have now disappeared, leaving their places empty’.56

By chance, we know what happened to one of them. In his memoirs the businessman Vehbi Koç (1901–1996) recalls as a young man in 1920 or 1921 spending the night in a guest house in the village of Ecevit, near the Black Sea coast of Anatolia. The food served by their host İsmail Efendi was ‘so delicious that I can still remember the taste today’, he wrote. It turned out that Ismail Efendi was a former palace cook who had returned to his home village.57 We can only speculate about others, but presumably they mostly took jobs in restaurants and a few in the dwindling number of wealthy homes.
Ottoman Turkish boy dressed for his first day of school. Ears of wheat attached to the front of his fez symbolize the wish that this new period of his life should flourish.
Special occasions of all kinds, religious and secular, were commemorated with food. These included religious events and festivals such as Ramazan, Muharrem, the return of pilgrims from Mecca and the anniversary of the birth of Muhammad; the ancient New Year festival of Nevrûz, the promotion of journeymen to master’s rank at guild ceremonies and political events such as military victories; and of course, the milestones of life: birth, circumcision, marriage and death, even the appearance of a child’s first tooth and first day at school.

None of these were complete without food of some kind, particularly sweets, which symbolized happiness and goodwill, and carried sacred connotations, as epitomized by two apocryphal sayings ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad: ‘The love of sweets springs from faith’ and ‘True believers are sweet.’

Sweets and puddings associated with special occasions included zerde, which was served at circumcision feasts and weddings; lokma or irmik helvası (semolina helva) at funerals; sweets in paper cones, distributed at mevlits (memorial ceremonies held forty days after a person’s death); gaziler helvası (warrior’s helva), prepared by soldiers for the souls of their dead comrades following battle; akide, presented as a symbol of loyalty to the sultan by the janissaries on the days they received their three-monthly salaries; baklava for Ramazan; and helva eaten at meals held to patch up quarrels between two friends.

Royal weddings and circumcisions were opportunities to display the wealth and power of the state, forge a sense of shared identity by bringing people of all walks of life together, and sometimes divert public attention away from defeats or disasters, as in the case of the circumcision festivities for Sultan Mehmed II’s sons Bayazid and Mustafa in 1457 following the Ottoman defeat at Belgrade. The most spectacular of all were royal circumcision celebrations, which sometimes lasted for several weeks. They included banquets for statesmen, religious scholars, soldiers, palace officials, foreign ambassadors, ordinary people and the poor, and entertainments such as archery tournaments, horse races, firework displays, tightrope walking, juggling and strongman acts.

The earliest royal circumcision celebration of which we have an account, albeit sketchy, is that for the sons of the third Ottoman sultan, Murad I (r. 1362–89). For a month, food in abundance was served to the poor, the rich and the rabble. Probably these banquets included sweets, as they certainly did in later centuries. When Sultan Süleyman I’s sons Bayezid and Cihangir were circumcised in 1539, the first banquet...
left:
Live foxes, birds and hares emerging from a roast ox at the royal circumcision celebrations of 1582.

right:
Sugar gardens being carried in procession during the circumcision celebrations for the sons of Ahmed III in 1720.
Sugar animals being carried in procession at the circumcision celebrations for the sons of Ahmed III in 1720. At the top are two of the clowns who carried inflated skins daubed with tar to keep the crowds under control.
was composed entirely of 58 different varieties of sweets and puddings. Large sculpted and painted sugar models of gardens, buildings and animals were a feature of such events, paraded through the streets and later broken up and eaten by the crowd. The earliest recorded sculpted sugar ornaments were mosques, castles, pavilions and flower-strewn meadows made by ‘masters using their wonderful arts’ for the circumcision of Mehmed II’s sons in 1457. At the circumcision celebrations for the future Mehmed III in 1582, the hundreds of sugar sculptures included backgammon boards, chess sets, ships, animals of all kinds, gardens with fruit trees, and a castle and two water fountains so large that twenty people were needed to carry each of them.

Sugar sculptures were not confined to royal celebrations. In the 1570s Stephan Gerlach, Lutheran chaplain to the Austrian ambassador David Ungnad, watched a bridal procession for a wealthy couple in which sugar models were carried, and was told that the bride would afterwards give them to her friends:

Those who followed carried perhaps fifty statues made of sugar. At the front were six or seven figures of elephants each ridden by a negro, then came two lions, three horses, four strange sea creatures, a peacock, stork, falcon and other diverse birds, cups, jugs, candlesticks and innumerable other objects, all made of sugar and colourfully painted, so that one might have thought that they were made of wood or some other material . . . After the wedding the bride distributes these sugar works to her friends, giving one a lion, one an elephant, and thereby gratifying them all.

At the circumcision celebrations held in Edirne in 1675 for the sons of Mehmed IV, two hundred confectioners prepared the sugar sculptures and other sweetmeats, while the banquets were prepared by 150 palace cooks and three hundred cooks hired from the provinces. Coffee and sherbet were distributed to the guests by a hundred palace guards. The scale of the feasting is indicated by the fact that 37,000 chickens were consumed, and four thousand wooden dining trays were purchased.

Crowds at these events were kept under control by an ingenious method by which clowns would carry inflated sheep or goat skins smeared with oil and tar, which spoiled people’s best clothes if they came into contact, so forcing them to draw back and open the way for processions and performers. John Covel (1638–1722) observed these at the circumcision of Şehzade Mustafa in May 1674:

To keep the crowd of people in good order, there are men on purpose in all these public meetings appointed, cal’d Tooloonjés, from skins of sheep (cal’d Toooons) blown up full of wind, and all dawb with oil and tar, and in leather jackets besmeared in like manner. The Turkes (who are very spruce and chary of their fine vests) run from these people as from the Devil, who upon occasion will strike them with their toooons, which will break no bones, but onely daub them.

One of the entertainments at sixteenth-century royal circumcision celebrations was spit-roasted oxen or sheep that were cut open to reveal live animals, such as pigeons, foxes, cats, jackals and monkeys, which flew off and escaped, to the delight of the watching
crowd. This was a form of banquet entertainment that went back to the Roman period and continued in Renaissance Europe, where roast wild boar were filled with live thrushes and pies with live birds or frogs. 

An eighteenth-century Ottoman cookery book has a recipe described as ‘an amusing dish for banquets’ in the form of a pie made with a domed crust that left room for a live pigeon or young hen to be hidden inside before serving. At a banquet given during the three-day holiday following Ramazan in the 1670s by the governor of Egypt, some of the dishes were covered with domes of boiled sugar concealing live pigeons, cocks and rabbits wearing small bells that jingled as they escaped.

The earliest account of non-royal circumcision feasts is by Bartholomew Georgevitz, who in the early sixteenth century described a curious dish consisting of a roast ox containing a sheep, a chicken and finally an egg, enclosed one within the other:

At this solemnity have I ben often present, which is done after this manner. First of all their frendes are called together to a bancete, for whom of daynty dishes, ther are sufficient prepared, of all kyndes of fleshe, suche as they may lawfully feede on, and here and ther, (as among the richer sort) is slaine an Oxe, in the which (flean, and his boweles taken out), they enclose a sheepe, in the shepe a henne, and in the henne an egge, all whiche holye together are rosted in honour of that daye. After that at the time of their banketing and feast, the childe is brought fourth to be circumcised.

It was customary to circumcise thousands of boys from poor families at the same time as the sultan’s sons, and to give each a suit of new clothes, sweets to stop them crying and a meal. In 1720 when Sultan Ahmed III’s sons were circumcised, the new clothes presented to the 3,845 other boys who were circumcised with them proved such a temptation that some parents brought along girls instead of boys and rushed off in shame when the surgeon revealed the deception. 

The custom of circumcising poor children alongside royal princes continued into the late Ottoman period. In 1836, at the circumcision of Mahmud II’s sons, 5,261 other boys were circumcised, and all were given a present, new clothes, and a meal of soup, chicken, pilaf, zerde and sherbet. In addition, feasts of pilaf and zerde were provided for schoolchildren.

For ordinary people, a basic marriage or circumcision feast consisted of ‘wedding soup’ (mutton stock thickened with a mixture of flour, egg yolks and lemon juice, with small pieces of mutton), ‘wedding meat’ (mutton marinated in yoghurt and fried with onions), ‘wedding meat’ (mutton marinated in yoghurt and fried with onions), and zerde. Wealthier families served a wider range of dishes, including several kinds of pilaf, roast pigeons, and multiple kinds of dessert and fruit. Sweets were offered to the guests, who knotted some in their handkerchiefs to take back home to family members. The day following the wedding was known as paça günü (sheep’s foot day), because female relatives and friends paying their first visit to the newly wedded bride were served a lunch that included stewed sheep’s feet. The dress worn by the bride for the occasion was called paçalık, in reference to this custom.

Upon the birth of a child, the midwife would rub sugar on the baby’s lips so that it would be sweet-tongued. Guests who came to congratulate the new mother brought gifts of sweets or homemade sweet pastries and were served hot spiced sherbet coloured
with cochineal, a custom that survives today.28 At the birth of royal babies, visitors tossed coins into the cradle before the baby was ceremoniously placed in it for the first time, and were then served sweetmeats and fruit on trays decorated with flowers.29

Starting school was celebrated as a rite of passage, marked by a ceremony at which the child’s parents provided *lokma* for the teacher and pupils.30 At the palace, banquets were held to celebrate the event. When Abdülhamid ı’s sons Mustafa (the future Mustafa ıv) and Süleyman started school on 27 February 1784, the banquet consisted of roast pigeon, fish, pilaf, soup made with dried okra, stewed raisins, *zerde* and other sweet dishes. Schoolchildren and soldiers were served the usual festive dish of pilaf and *zerde*.31 When Sultan Mahmud ıı’s son Abdülmecid started school in 1832, six thousand schoolchildren were among the guests and the entertainments included tightrope walking and firework displays.32 The American naval physician Commodore James Ellsworth de Kay watched the banqueting dishes being carried to the distinguished guests, who were seated in tents:

A long train of splendidly attired servants bore on their heads massy silver trays, loaded with every variety of food. The viands were covered with cloths of gold and silver tissue, and the procession moved solemnly to the various pavilions, to the music of a full military band.33

During the 29 or thirty days of Ramazan, the month of fasting, Ottoman Muslims broke their fast at nightfall with an elaborate meal called *iftar* and ate a simple pre-dawn meal called *sahur*. Relatives and friends traditionally invited one another to *iftar*, and Ottoman dignitaries were expected to keep an open house for this meal. The cost of this liberal hospitality was so high that in the late nineteenth century many were obliged to sell valuables such as jewellery, china and carpets in the bazaar.34 To waken people before *sahur*, drums were
beaten in the streets three hours before daylight, a custom that continues in Turkey today. The drummers were usually neighbourhood watchmen or gypsies, who would serenade their listeners with humorous poems, which were among the most popular Ramazan entertainments for children and adults alike. Often, these poems concluded with a request for a tip.

There was no equivalent to the pre-Lenten carnivals of Europe before Ramazan, which surprised foreigners. Instead, observed Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq in the sixteenth century,

> During the days immediately preceding the period of fast they make no change for the worse in their ordinary mode of life, and allow themselves no special indulgence in eating and good cheer and licence. On the contrary, they prepare themselves for abstinence by reducing their usual allowance of food, for fear that they may not be able to put up with the sudden change.36

In the second half of the seventeenth century, coinciding perhaps significantly with the reopening of coffee houses in Istanbul, some Muslims found a less onerous way of observing the Ramazan fast:

> They turn the Days into Nights, and the Nights into Days; for all day long they sleep, and in the Night-time the Streets and Coffee Houses are full of People, and all fall to Junketing and Reveling as long as the Night lasts.37

Particularly towards the end of Ramadan, coffee houses were venues for all kinds of popular entertainers: ‘Ballad-singers, Fidlers, Puppet-players, and such sort of People who get a Penny by diverting the Coffee-drinkers’.38 ‘Puppet-players’ refers to the shadow puppet plays known as Karagöz, after the main character. These very popular plays incorporated criticism of the authorities and bawdy jokes that in the nineteenth century shocked straight-laced British visitors. Pious Muslims too ‘exceedingly abhor’d’ this light-hearted Ramazan nightlife, and instead spent much of the day ‘in Retirement, Prayer, and reading the Koran’ and attended the late-night teravih prayers at the mosques.40

It was customary to break the fast with a pinch of salt or a glass of water, preferably from the sacred Zemzem well inside the court of the Kaaba in Mecca, followed by a date, which was a food associated with the Prophet Muhammad.41 The first part of the iftar meal consisted of appetizers such as salads, fruit preserves, pressed beef, salt fish, caviar, fruit, Medina dates, olives, Ramazan çöreği (a bun glazed with egg yolk and flavoured with saffron or mastic), thin Ramazan pide and bread rings.42 After an interval, the meal continued

The shadow play character Karagöz is depicted laden with food he has bought for Ramazan in this illustration from 1910. They include packets of starch wafers for making gullac, a jar of the best clarified butter from Aleppo, garlic sausages, flitches of pastırma and jars of jam.
with soup and other hot dishes. During Ramazan, using forks and knives in the European manner was avoided, and even those who had adopted European customs ate in the traditional way, with their fingers and spoons.\

Baklava was associated with Ramazan from at least 1473, when it appears in palace records as a special Ramazan dish. It became customary to present baklava to the janissary soldiers on the fifteenth day of Ramazan, and this event attracted large crowds. Hundreds of trays of baklava – one for every ten soldiers – were baked in the palace kitchens and when all the trays had been collected, the soldiers marched back to their barracks in what was known as the Baklava Procession. This popular annual spectacle attracted large crowds until the abolition of the janissary corps in 1826. Baklava was equally important for ordinary families, as illustrated by an incident related in the memoirs of the novelist Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpinar (1864–1944). When, as a boy of nine, he first fasted – for a single day – neighbours congratulated him by sending a dish of baklava, unaware that he had secretly eaten meatballs, jam and stewed fruit in the kitchen.

Baklava acquired a significance matched by no other sweet dish or sweetmeat. It was eaten not just during Ramazan but on many other special occasions, such as circumcision feasts for the future Mehmed III in 1582, which included ‘Many-layered baklava with refined sugar.’ A nineteenth-century grand vizier was said to have described baklava as ‘the king of sweets,’ and the Turkish novelist Aziz Nesin (1915–1995) recalled how upset his mother was because she could not afford to bake a tray of baklava as a gift for his schoolmistress when he first memorized a surah of the Qur’an at the age of five.
The three-day festival following Ramazan, known as Eid Al-Fitr in Arabic and Oruç Bayramı (Feast of Fasting) in Turkish, became known colloquially as the Şeker Bayram (Sugar Festival) in the eighteenth century. This was an appropriate name for a festival in which sweets came to play such a prominent part. Families sent trays of confectionery, pastries and fruit to friends and neighbours, and the authorities distributed sweets and helva to soldiers, schoolchildren and orphans.

Orthodox Christian fasts were if anything more onerous than Ramazan. While Muslims could eat anything during the night, Ottoman Christians had to abstain from meat, eggs and dairy foods throughout numerous fasting periods totalling more than half the year. Even fish was permitted only on certain fasting days, such as the Assumption and Palm Sunday, although cuttlefish, octopus, caviar, bottarga and snails were permitted. On the Saturday evening before Easter, Greeks ate only salad, and according to the sixteenth-century chaplain Stephen Gerlach, on strict fasting days Armenian Gregorians avoided dried vegetables, in case they contained insects. Greeks abstained from wine on Wednesdays and Fridays, and Armenians on most fast days. During Christian fasts, grocery shops outside the Fish Market Gate of Galata sold cooked chickpeas, broad beans, spinach, fish, and pilaf with mussels. To compensate for foodstuffs that were forbidden during fasts, Christians developed a wide range of meatless and dairy-free fasting dishes, many of which became popular with Muslims. Vegetables cooked with olive oil, nut sauces known as tarator, and pilaf with mussels are among the many notable examples. Guillaume-Joseph Grelot, a French artist who wrote a book about his journey to Istanbul in the late seventeenth century, suggested that strict fasting rules had fired the culinary imagination of Eastern Christians:

Yet is not all this their great devotion any obstruction, but that they can find a way to entertain those that visit them in their Lents, with Ragou’s and dainties no less various than delightful to the Appetite . . . For though they give ye no Wine, yet they supply that defect with Strong-waters [spirits], Coffee, Sherbet, and other made drinks as pleasing. They that scruple to eat Fish, spread their Tables with Oysters, Periwincles, and such other kind of Shel-fish, with Pottages, Caveare, Botargo, and other compositions made of Eggs and Roes of Fish, much more delightful and pleasing to the Palate, than the Fish themselves . . . and if the Armenians will not admit either Oyl or Butter in their Sauces, yet they make use of Almonds, Pistaches, Nuts and other Fruits and Kernells bruised in Morters, which being set over a Chafing-dish, supply the want, and are much better than our Butter.

The Feast of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha) was the other great festival of the Islamic calendar and the season of pilgrimage to Mecca. In 1672 an Ottoman pilgrim estimated that there were around 500,000 pilgrims in Mecca, the wealthiest of whom sacrificed twenty or more rams. The carcasses were collected by the poor of Ta’if, Hejaz, Al’Abbas and Mecca from the pilgrims’ encampments, skinned and the flesh cut into strips, which were laid on rocks to dry. The heat of the sun was so extreme that the meat dried in just two hours and could then be stored for future use. Muslims who sacrificed one or more rams at home gave away most of or all the meat to the poor and university students
living in the neighbourhood, keeping the offal to eat at home.\textsuperscript{65}

On the tenth day of Muharrem, the first month of the lunar calendar, Muslims made aşure.\textsuperscript{66} For Shia and Alevi Muslims this was the day when Hussein had died at Karbala, but Sunni Muslims linked aşure to several different legends, such as the grounding of Noah’s Ark on Mount Jâdi, south of Lake Van.\textsuperscript{67}

Muslims did not associate bread with particular religious rites or festivals as in Judaism and Christianity, but venerated it as the staff of life. The Sufi poet and philosopher Rumi (1207–1273), who lived in the city of Konya during the Selçuk period, described bread’s spiritual importance in the following lines:

\begin{quote}
So long as bread lies on the table it is lifeless, 
But in the human body it is transformed into blithe spirit. 
That bread in the centre of the table cannot live, 
Yet with the water of Paradise the soul does the impossible and transforms bread into spirit.\textsuperscript{68}
\end{quote}

Belief in the sacred nature of bread was reflected in customs observed by Ottoman Muslims. A Spanish writer who spent nearly five years in slavery in the Ottoman Empire in the middle of the sixteenth century related that when Muslims came across a piece of bread dropped in the street, they would kiss it, touch it to their forehead then place it on a wall or some other elevated place for animals and birds to eat.\textsuperscript{69} Another account is given by the eighteenth-century author Mouradgea d’Ohsson (1740–1807) in his monumental work on Ottoman history and culture:

\begin{quote}
Mahométans . . . never speak about it [bread] but with a kind of veneration, as being the most precious of all the heavenly gifts. If they see but a morsel, a crumb, on the floor of the house or in the street, all, even the greatest lords, hasten to pick it up, to touch it to the lips, then to put it in their pocket, or to place it in some spot where it will not be trampled underfoot. Many people never sit down at table without respectfully kissing the piece of bread which is in front of them before commencing their meal.\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

Another ancient concept common to many cultures was that sharing food with another person created a sacred bond of loyalty, summed up by the phrase ‘bread and salt’.\textsuperscript{71} In the early twelfth century, when a Christian warrior invited the Turkish Seljuk general Melik Gazi (d. 1134) to eat with him during an interval in the battle for Sivas, Melik Gazi refused, saying, ‘If I eat with you we will not be able to fight any longer, because I shall be beholden to you.’\textsuperscript{72} During the Ottoman period soldiers took oaths of loyalty over a tray containing bread and salt, a sword and a Qur’an.\textsuperscript{73} The seventeenth-century Ottoman writer Evliya Çelebi relates that when travelling through the southern Peloponnese, he was recognized by a young woman with a child in her arms, who called out, ‘Don’t you remember your long stay in our house eating the salt and bread of my father?’ She explained that she had been captured seven years earlier but refused Evliya Çelebi’s offer to take her home, because she had meanwhile been married to a Greek and had converted to Christianity.\textsuperscript{74}

Conflicts of loyalty could arise if someone had ‘eaten the bread and salt’ of two people who later became enemies. This occurred in the case of an Ottoman soldier named Kara Ali Ağa, who had served first under the Ottoman vizier Melek Ahmet Paşa and then under
the khan of Bitlis. When the khan of Bitlis rebelled, Melek Ahmet Paşa accused Kara Ali Ağa of treachery because he had eaten his bread and salt but not opened the city gates for him. Kara Ali Ağa defended himself by explaining that he had eaten the bread and salt of the khan for twenty years, and Melek Ahmet Paşa pardoned him.75
As the empire grew, so did the populations of major cities and demand for basic foodstuffs. Ensuring their supply at affordable prices became a serious concern, and in the fifteenth century the state introduced a system of fixed prices. Food quality and standards of hygiene in cook-shops were also regulated from 1502, when the first law on the subject was passed. Other regulations followed. In the royal law code of 1522, for example, millers were forbidden to keep hens in their mills (although they were allowed a cockerel to tell the time by). A law passed in 1680 specified that bread should not be undercooked, dark coloured or sour, and that bakers’ sieves had to be of the correct fineness to control the proportion of bran. Sherbet made of grape juice had to be flavoured with musk or rose water, chilled with snow or ice and served in clean bowls. Laws also tackled the adulteration of foodstuffs, forbidding practices such as diluting vinegar or milk with water and adding wheat starch to clotted cream or cheese.

Food prices and standards were controlled by government inspectors called muhtesip, who made daily rounds of the markets and shops. In Istanbul fish were checked for freshness by officials attached to the Department of Fisheries, which also issued licences to fishmongers and set prices. The Dutch traveller Cornelis de Bruijn noted in the second half of the seventeenth century that a customer who thought he had been overcharged 'need only Complain of it to the Judge, and the Merchant will be immediately Fin’d, and over and above will receive several Drubs on the bottom of his Feet.’ This vigilance by the authorities meant that children could do the family shopping without being cheated:

One may safely send a Child into the Market, for these Officers speak to the Children who have bought any thing, they examine what it cost them, they weigh it, and in case they find the Merchant has cheated them either in Price or Weight, they carry the Child back again to the Merchant, and after conviction, they correct him upon the Spot.

As well as fines and corporal punishment, public humiliation was used as a deterrent. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, tradesmen caught using false weights were paraded through the streets mounted backwards on a donkey with a camel bell hung around their necks and uncleaned tripe stuck with crow’s feathers wound around their heads; or with their head through a pillory hung with bells:
They put a man’s neck into a Pillory made of two Boards, weighing an hundred pound weight, which he carries on his shoulders, and with these being hung full of little Bells, he marches up and down the Town, to be laughed at by all that see and know him.  

The sultans sometimes rode out in the city in disguise and purchased staples like bread and meat to see whether justice was being done in the marketplace. Mustafa III (r. 1757–74), in the company of a courtier, used to sample pastries, kebab, roasted chickpeas and blancmange as he rode along, and we can conjecture that he enjoyed the experience of being incognito and tasting ordinary food bought from cook-shops and street vendors.  

Court records include many instances of transgressions of food regulations, such as the sixteenth-century case of a pickle maker in Ankara named Ibrahim Sofu who was found guilty of overpricing his pickled pears; three börek makers named Pervâne, Üveys and Mustafa whose börek was badly made and contained inadequate amounts of filling; a helva maker called Hacı Ahmed whose sales were under weight; and a seller of boiled sheep and cow’s heads named Mahmud whose shop was so filthy ‘that no Muslim was able to enter on account of the smell’.  

Fixed prices were a constant cause of contention between tradesmen and the authorities. In 1879 the bakers of Adana refused to bake any bread for a day after the local council ordered a reduction in the price of bread to reflect a drop in wheat prices. Different groups of tradesmen jealously guarded their monopolies over certain foodstuffs and took one another to court for infringements. Greengrocers complained about grocers who sold vegetables, confectioners about bakers who sold baklava, and the Egypt merchants about unauthorized suppliers of sugar. Fruit-sellers battled among themselves for fruit shipped to Istanbul from distant parts. Evliya Çelebi described how they swarmed on board to seize a share as soon as the ships arrived in harbour; fights broke out so often that eventually the courts refused to hear cases involving fruit-sellers wounded in these fracas.  

Conquering major trading cities, encouraging trade in urban centres and improving the security of trade routes had always been among the main concerns of Ottoman policy. According to the historian Kate Fleet, ‘By 1453 the Ottoman Empire had emerged as one of the great commercial empires of the period, a Mediterranean power with an economy of enormous power and wealth.’ Constantinople had been a desirable objective long before Mehmed II’s conquest, having a strategic location at a point commanding the Bosphorus strait, which links the Black Sea to the Mediterranean via the Marmara Sea and Çanakkale strait, and with the Golden Horn inlet that served as a deep natural harbour capable of
Butcher's shop, 1560.
Inspector of weights and measures carrying scales over his shoulder, mid-17th century.
A retailer pilloried as punishment for using false weights, mid 17th century.
sheltering thousands of ships. The same advantages made the city a major hub of trade from early on. Following the conquest, Mehmed II set about revitalizing the city’s economy, building new markets, customs houses, quays and hans (commercial buildings where merchants conducted business and stored their goods). Following the conquest, Mehmed II set about revitalizing the city’s economy, building new markets, customs houses, quays and hans (commercial buildings where merchants conducted business and stored their goods). Foreign merchants were attracted to the city by trade concessions granted by Mehmed and his successors, low customs duties, cheap ship’s provisions and strict controls on smuggling. As a result, in the words of John Covel, writing in the second half of the seventeenth century, there is no Rarity or pretious commodity whatever, which is brought from either the East or West Indies, or any other place by these, but may be had, if desir’d or wanted, at Constantinople.

One of the empire’s strengths was its self-sufficiency in foodstuffs and other basic commodities, a situation that continued until the end of the eighteenth century. In 1585 the Venetian envoy Gianfrancesco Morosini reported, Egypt was a major source of foodstuffs, notably sugar and rice, and also a hub of trade in luxuries and exotics from Asia that passed through its ports. Each year an Ottoman fleet of seven hundred galleons carrying pilgrims and merchants set sail for Egypt from Istanbul, returning six months later with shipments of sugar, rice, lentils, coffee and other foodstuffs. Not all Ottomans approved of the flourishing trade that enriched the Egypt merchants. Some viewed them as dishonest profiteers and maintained that coffee

Han in Istanbul with a water fountain and shops facing the street on the ground floor, 17th century.
was an unnecessary luxury; that there was no need for Egyptian rice and lentils, which both grew perfectly well in the Ottoman heartlands of Anatolia and the Balkans; and that honey from Athens, Wallachia and Moldavia tasted better and was healthier than Egyptian sugar.²⁹

An oft-repeated misconception is that the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul from the Byzantines in 1453 brought the spice trade to a halt, thereby spurring European voyages of discovery to find an alternative route to India. First, it was not Istanbul but the ports of Egypt, then still ruled by the Mamluks, that were the main Mediterranean outlets for spices from Southeast Asia; second, Spanish and Portuguese navigators were not motivated by any dearth of spices but by the desire to circumvent the Venetians, who largely controlled the supply of spices to Europe via the Mediterranean. In the early part of the sixteenth century the Ottomans wrested control over trade in the Levant and Mediterranean from the Venetians.³⁰ After conquering Egypt in 1517, they expanded the spice trade along the traditional route through the Indian Ocean by means of introducing free market policies (rather than state control as practised by the Mamluks), establishing a new tax regime and installing agents in major ports. The Portuguese tried to wrest the Indian Ocean trade out of Muslim hands by conquering key ports such as Hormuz, blockading the Red Sea and preventing Ottoman middlemen from operating in India.³¹ In response, the Ottomans established both naval and merchant fleets in the Indian Ocean, constructing large numbers of ships at Suez and Basra,³² and in 1531 began to build a canal linking the Gulf of Suez to the Nile in order to reduce transportation costs. Thousands of labourers were employed on the project until it was eventually abandoned.³³ In 1567 the idea of excavating a canal directly through the isthmus of Suez was broached and a team of architects and engineers were sent to survey the area, but the project never got off the ground.³⁴ Despite Portuguese competition, the Ottomans held on to a share of the spice trade during the sixteenth century.³⁵ Meanwhile, the Dutch, followed by the British, moved in and took over the lion’s share of this lucrative trade. As early as 1599 English merchants who purchased spices in Aleppo for forwarding to England began to worry that the Dutch spice ships ‘no doubt will wholye spoyle our trade of Turkie for spicis’.³⁶

Aleppo was a key point on the overland route leading from the port of Basra to the Levant and Anatolia.³⁷ It was linked to the Mediterranean via the port of Iskenderun and by road to Anatolia.³⁸ When Bertrandon de la Brocquière travelled with Ottoman caravans across Anatolia in 1433, he encountered three Genoese merchants who had purchased spices from a caravan for resale in Constantinople, then still in Byzantine hands.³⁹ The main highways along which the caravans travelled were wide and good according to Hans Dernschwam, a retired German merchant who travelled from Istanbul to Bursa and Amasya in the 1550s.⁴⁰ Another German traveller, the botanist Leonhart Rauwolff, visited the port of Basra at the other end of this overland route in 1574. There he counted 25 Ottoman ships loaded with spices and drugs from the East Indies and was told that on the return voyage they carried Ottoman goods such as saffron, kermes, raisins, figs, dates and almonds.⁴¹

Facilities for overland travellers and merchants, including caravanserais, roads, stone bridges, wayside fountains and public lavatories, were often financed by charitable endowments.⁴² Caravanserais, which provided free shelter for caravans on lonely roads, were fortress-like buildings designed to protect merchants
from bandits. In 1588 a palace employee was attacked on his way to purchase quinces from Geyve, east of Istanbul, and in 1768 in the mountains near Bursa Albanian bandits captured a group of men who were collecting snow for the palace, and demanded a ransom of 5,000 piasters. Just as banditry was a perennial problem for overland trade, so piracy was the scourge of Mediterranean trade. Ships bringing sugar, rice, lentils, dates and spices from Egypt had to be prepared to do battle with pirate ships during the voyage. In the autumn of 1576 pirates captured three Ottoman ships carrying sugar, spices and preserves from Egypt, and in 1664 a palace employee named Ahmed was captured by pirates on his way to fetch lemon juice from the island of Kos, and spent seven years as a slave in Malta.

When merchants arrived in cities they rented rooms in commercial buildings called hans, where they would live, conduct business and store their goods. Often these were dedicated to particular goods and named accordingly, such as the Rice Han and Olive Han in Syrian Tripoli; Yoghurt Han, Cheese Han and Grape Han in Aleppo; Salt Han in Gaziantep; Rice Han in Bursa; and Pastırma Sellers’ Han, Butter Sellers’ Han and Caviar Han in Istanbul. Retail food sellers, too, congregated in particular hans or markets, such as the Börek Makers’ Han in Gaziantep and the Kebab Cooks’ Han in Istanbul. Istanbul’s Egyptian Market was occupied by druggists who sold spices and sugar, and the city also had nine fish markets.

Foodstuffs arriving in Istanbul by ship were unloaded at particular quays, such as the Rice Quay, the Fruit Quay and the Fish Quay. While fresh fruit and fish went straight to market, staples such as flour, honey, salt, clarified butter and oil were weighed and valued by customs officials before being taken to wholesale warehouses. Honey merchants alone had three hundred warehouses in Istanbul in the seventeenth century and dealt in honey from Wallachia, Moldavia, Transylvania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Greece and Crete.
Grain was the most strictly controlled commodity. Officials set the price and supervised its distribution to the city’s bakers in order to prevent stockpiling and black-marketing. The downside of this well-intentioned system was that it created a bottleneck by which ships were often kept waiting at anchor, resulting in spoilage of the grain, in turn obliging bakers to buy on the black market and encouraging official corruption. As well as these commercial shipments, the state purchased millions of tons of wheat annually from Thrace for emergency use; it was stored in a granary near the Naval Office on the Golden Horn.51

Encompassing as it did major wheat-growing regions such as Thrace, Anatolia, Wallachia and the Crimea,52 the Ottoman Empire was one of the world’s leading wheat producers until the nineteenth century. As early as the fourteenth century the Ottoman and other Turkish principalities had exported wheat from western Anatolia to Venice and to Venetian-held territories such as Crete, along with rice, barley, sesame seed, dried pulses, dried fruit and cheese.53 The pope gave the Knights Hospitaller special permission to engage in this trade, ‘so long as war materials, such as wood and iron, were not traded in return’.54 Venice was so dependent on Ottoman grain that it signed a disadvantageous peace treaty with the Ottomans in 1539.55

When shortages occurred at home, however, the Ottoman government hurried to ban exports of wheat, since failing to ensure a sufficient supply of bread in Ottoman cities was a sure way to spark public unrest.56 One of the earliest prohibitions on wheat exports was imposed in the late fourteenth century by Bayezid I.57

In the mid-sixteenth century Ottoman naval vessels patrolled the Aegean, trying to stop Venetian and other European ships from secretly loading up with wheat on the Anatolian coast.58

During the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the principal cause of shortages was the influx of Spanish gold from America into Mediterranean markets. Goods of all kinds poured out of the Ottoman Empire
as a result, leading to sharp rises in local market prices and shortages of grain, pulses and dried fruit. An Ottoman ban on exports of figs and raisins hit the English – who were keen consumers of dried fruits – particularly hard, and a trade agreement that was concluded in 1676 included an exemption permitting two shiploads of figs a year to be exported for the kitchen of Charles II.

Luxury Ottoman food exports included saffron, bottarga, caviar, smoked tongue and pistachios. Saffron grown in northern Turkey was regarded as the finest in the world and exported as far afield as Southeast Asia. Bottarga (dried mullet roe) was esteemed above caviar for flavour and fetched high prices in Europe, selling for as much as four crowns a piece in Venice in the sixteenth century. A type of Turkish cheese contained in ‘bladders’ (vessies) that was exported to France in the sixteenth century was described as equal in flavour to Milanese Parmesan and superior to the cheeses of Switzerland and Holland by Olivier de Serres, the French author of a work on agriculture. This was probably tulum cheese, which is matured in sheep skins or dried stomach linings. Pistachios were exported to Europe in large quantities, probably ready shelled, since in the seventeenth century the city of Gaziantep had several pistachio-processing plants, where the nuts were shelled and packed.

Some exports were the result of fashions for Ottoman foodways in Europe; coffee was notably one, as well as concentrates used for making sherbet, which became popular from the sixteenth century onwards. In December 1662 a coffee house called Murat the Great in Exchange Alley in London advertised ‘sherbets made in Turkie of lemons, roses, and violets perfumed’ in the weekly Kingdom’s Intelligencer newspaper, and boxes of sherbet imported through London are recorded for the years 1682–3. France also imported sherbet concentrates in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Exports of salep (orchid root) began in the seventeenth century after the Ottoman hot drink made of this root became popular in France and England. Captain James Cook included 18 kg (40 lb) of salep powder in his ship’s store when he set off on his Pacific voyage in 1768, in the mistaken belief that it was good for scurvy. After lemon juice was recognized as an effective cure for scurvy in the early nineteenth century, bottled lemon juice was exported from the Ottoman Empire.
Exports began to drop and imports to soar in the eighteenth century. Egyptian sugar and Yemen coffee were supplanted by cheaper products grown in the American colonies, and a further blow to the Ottoman economy was dealt by the French Revolution of 1789, which brought a halt to Ottoman trade with France, its main commercial partner. In the nineteenth century the process was accelerated by territorial losses and industrialization in Western Europe. Unable to compete with cheap colonial commodities and mass-produced industrial goods, Ottoman trade and industry went into decline and the empire lost its long-held positive balance of trade with Europe. Free-trade treaties with the European powers made it impossible to pursue a protectionist policy and the Ottomans were obliged to open their doors to a flood of European and American imports. Imported foodstuffs included not just minor items like salted and smoked fish from Scandinavia, bottled sardines from France and cider and rum from the United States, but in the second half of the nineteenth century staples such as wheat from Russia and flour from France. The impact of cheap wheat from Canada and the United States in the 1870s was dramatic. While a Venetian merchant had been able to make a fortune by supplying Ottoman wheat to the British Army in Spain during the Peninsular War (1807–14), less than a century later the Ottomans were importing as much wheat as they exported.

As domestic production of manufactured goods, even the famous Angora woollens, ground to a virtual standstill, the government responded by backing industrialization projects, such as a macaroni factory in the Üsküdar district of Istanbul, and participating in international trade fairs. Over 3,300 samples of Ottoman products were submitted to the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, hundreds of which were foodstuffs: cheeses, pastırma, confectionery, tarhana, distilled and pressed oils, noodles, clarified butter, liquorice root and 42 samples of the best rice varieties grown in Anatolia.
A wide range of eating houses specializing in certain types of dish were to be found in the commercial districts of Ottoman towns and cities. Here ‘all manner of victuals,’ including meat dishes, soups and pilaf, were available, as noted by Leonhart Rauwolff in 1573:

All manner of victuals are cleanly dressed, viz. butchers meat, fowls, and all sorts of sauces, and broths, and soups, where every body buys what he hath a mind to, according to the capacity of his purse. Among the rest nothing is so common as rice, which they boil up to such a stiffness, that it crumbleth. A great many other sorts you shall see in copper basons [sic], upon their shop-boards.1

Cook-shops (aşçı dükkanı) offered five or six different dishes,2 while specialized eating houses served only variations on a single type of dish; for example, the kebabçı served mainly şiş kebab, and the börekçi specialized in layered pastries. Other typical eating house dishes were büryan (a whole or half a sheep or goat baked in a tandır),3 stewed sheep’s head and trotters, tripe soup,4 and herise (a porridge of whole wheat grains cooked with mutton).5 Even stuffed vegetables, salad, rice pudding and stewed fruit were sold in separate shops in the seventeenth century,6 when there were dozens of eating houses in Istanbul specializing in stuffed vegetables (gourd, vine leaf, onion, aubergine and cabbage) and stuffed intestine (fresh sausages), but by the eighteenth century these dishes had been reabsorbed into the ordinary cook-shop repertoire.7

Istanbul’s specialized salad shops survived for longer. They are first mentioned in the seventeenth century and were still around in the early nineteenth century, when Nathanael Burton came across ‘workshops inhabited by sallad-dressers, where, for a penny or halfpenny you can have a dish of dressed sallad, covered with sliced egg, or send your servant with a dish for it’.8 Stewed fruit (hoşaf) was usually served with pilaf at the end of the meal, so it seems likely that customers in nearby cook-shops ordered a bowl of stewed fruit from the hoşaf shops to finish off their meal. The several hundred stewed fruit shops in Istanbul in the mid-seventeenth century made hoşaf from fruits including apricots, wild apricots, prunes, pears, mulberries, raisins, sour cherries, apples, bullaces, peaches and Cornelian cherries.9 In the city of Bursa, an added refinement was rose petals sprinkled over the bowls as they were served.10

Cook-shop dishes were mainly of the pot-cooked variety,11 including soup, vegetable stews,12 stuffed
vegetables, fresh sausages, stewed liver and pilaf. Serving a wider variety of dishes in the same restaurant was impossible because cooks jealously guarded their right to sell certain specialities. Disputes over who had the right to cook and sell what often had to be settled in court. In 1750, for example, cook-shops in the Galata district of Istanbul complained that the tripe shops were making and selling dishes that were their own preserve, and the court warned the tripe shops not to cook anything but soup made with tripe or abomasum (the fourth stomach of ruminant animals). The tripe shops in turn complained about cook-shops serving tripe soup, on which the former had a monopoly.

Whole spit-roasted sheep or lamb was sometimes sold at market days and fairs, and in the sixteenth century was one of the dishes sold in Tahtakale, the commercial heart of Istanbul. Since this required an outdoor space to prepare, cooks bought houses in residential districts to use as workplaces. In 1565 local residents of the Emin Bey neighbourhood in Istanbul lodged a complaint about cooks roasting sheep over ‘numerous fires’ with the intention of selling them in the market. Since all Istanbul’s houses were built of wood, the fear of these catching alight was probably the main reason for the complaint.

One of the oldest and most widespread types of specialized eating house was the kebapçı, which offered şiş kebab served on top of thin leavened bread and köfte kebabı (seasoned minced meat pressed on skewers and grilled). In his description of eating şiş kebab at a Turkish eating house in 1833, the American naval physician James Ellsworth De Kay described how melted butter was poured over the bread, then the cooked meat laid over it, and yoghurt spooned over the top, which is one of the most popular ways of serving döner kebab (but not şiş kebab) today. Although şiş kebab was usually grilled, it could also be cooked by suspending the skewers in a pit oven, which meant they did not need to be turned.

A sixteenth-century miniature painting of a kebab house shows sheep carcasses hanging at the back of the shop, prepared skewers of şiş kebab, other kebab in the process of being grilled, and customers seated on benches at trestle tables. Customers could also buy their own meat from a butcher and take it to the nearest eating house to be made into şiş kebab or baked in a tandır.

For two or three aspers (whereof twenty are near upon a shilling) a butcher will cut off as much mutton (for they divide it not into joynts) as will well satisfie three though hungry: which they carry to the Cooks, who make no more ado, but slicing it into little gobbets, prick it on a prog [spike] of iron, and hang it in a furnace.

Small towns and even some large villages had kebab houses. Francis Arundell, a British chaplain at Smyrna, ate ‘a tempting dish of cabobs hot from the oven’ in a village in western Turkey in 1826, and goat roasted in a pit oven at a kebab house in the town of Yalvaç. In 1830 Adolphus Slade, a British naval captain who later became naval adviser to the Ottoman navy, ate a simple meal at a village kebab house consisting of pilaf, kebab, griddle bread and honey.

The now famous döner kebab, consisting of circular slices of meat interspersed with slices of suet or tail fat, threaded on a rotating spit, began as an outdoor dish prepared for picnics, as it still is in Turkey’s northeastern provinces. The spit was originally horizontal, but in the nineteenth century kebab restaurants in
Istanbul started to use vertical spits, probably as a space-saving measure.

The earliest description of *döner kebab* is by an Ottoman traveller who ate it in the company of Crimean Tatars in 1666, and the first depictions are found in two miniature paintings by an Istanbul artist dating from 1616–20 (see the reproduction of one of these in Chapter Two). These show horizontal *döner kebab* being prepared outdoors. *Döner kebab* had become a common restaurant food in Istanbul by 1800, when the French physician François Pouqueville remarked, 'Foreigners are in accord that this dish is the most delicious in this country, and I perfectly agree with them.'

Clotted cream shop in Istanbul's Covered Bazaar, 1850s.
Some districts of Istanbul were famous for particular dishes: Eyüp for its kebab houses and clotted cream shops, Samatya for its roasted sheep’s heads, and the village of Beykoz on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus for its stewed sheep’s feet, which were served on a layer of bread that soaked up the juice and capped by an omelette. In summer, day trippers returning from a day in the meadows and woods along the Bosphorus would stop in Beykoz to eat this dish in one of the small restaurants encircling the fountain near the waterfront. A surviving example of local specialities in Istanbul is grilled sweetbreads made in restaurants in Sütlüce, on the Golden Horn. Since this was originally the site of one of Istanbul’s main slaughterhouses, restaurants selling offal naturally congregated in the area.

Clotted cream shops (kaymakçı dükkanı) serving clotted cream sprinkled with sugar were establishments unique to Istanbul. They were the forerunners of shops called muhallebici (blancmange shops), which sold all kinds of milk puddings, the most famous being what hippy travellers of the 1960s called the Pudding Shop near the Blue Mosque. In 1573 women were banned from entering clotted cream shops in the district of Eyüp after it was found that the shops were being used for illicit assignations.

Bakers specializing in thinly rolled leavened bread called pide sometimes baked them with toppings made of ingredients supplied by the customers, as is still the case in some cities today. Bakers at the palace were famed for their pide from at least the fifteenth century, when they made it for Sultan Mehmed II with toppings of cheese or gourd, sometimes with eggs broken on top, and sixteenth-century palace records mention a spinach topping.

Regulations regarding the cooked food sold in eating houses provide details about prices, portion size, preparation, ingredients and condiments in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: tripe soup was served with garlic, spices and vinegar; roasted sheep’s head and feet were sprinkled with vinegar, melted butter and spices; thin crusty bread known as kirde was sprinkled with poppy seeds; and rice and chickpea soup was flavoured with lemon juice. We also learn that rice pilaf was served with herise and noodle pilaf with zerde (saffron pudding). The most detailed information is reserved for börek, which had to be made of good-quality flour and brushed with pure butter in the proportion of 1.283 kilograms of butter to 25 kilograms of flour, with a filling in the ratio of 70 dirhems of meat to 10 dirhems of onion, seasoned with black pepper. This filling had to be evenly distributed inside the pastry. Other regulations forbade the boiling of beef before it was roasted in a tandır, and, even worse,
rubbing roast lamb (büryan) with red ochre to lend it a well-cooked appearance.\textsuperscript{40}

Some dishes were sold by weight (such as roast meat, stews, minced-meat kebab and pilaf), some by the number making up a portion (for example, twenty stuffed cabbage leaves or forty cubes of grilled liver), and şiş kebap either by weight or the skewer.\textsuperscript{41} Börek sold by the ‘sheet’ in 1525\textsuperscript{42} must have been the type known today as serpme börek, made of a single sheet of pastry stretched and flung until translucently thin, then folded over the filling like a large envelope before being baked on a griddle or in an oven.

Standards of hygiene for shops selling cooked food were laid down in law from 1502 onwards. Regulations specified that food be cooked in a cleanly manner and served in clean bowls; that vessels be washed with clean water and wiped with a clean cloth; that fresh dish water be used each time; that copper kettles and ladles be regularly tinned;\textsuperscript{43} and that staff wear clean aprons.\textsuperscript{44} Court records referring to cases of cook-shops that were dirty, or that served food that did not contain the correct ingredients in the correct amounts, show that these laws were enforced.\textsuperscript{45} Further confirmation is provided by travellers who remarked on the cleanliness and neatness of Ottoman cook-shops and kebab houses.\textsuperscript{46}

Descriptions of cook-shop food can be found in numerous travel accounts. One of the earliest is by Nicolas de Nicolay, who accompanied the French ambassador to Istanbul in 1551–2. He ate stewed sheep’s feet which ‘in divers shops at Constantinople are set forth to be sold readie sodden and dressed with pilled garlike’, and ‘rice dressed with butter and almonds very savorie and of a good taste’.\textsuperscript{47} Evliya Çelebi described şiş kebap with grilled chestnuts made in Bursa’s kebab houses. The chestnuts were split in half, threaded on skewers and basted with melted fat from the meat as they cooked.\textsuperscript{48} In the eastern city of Urfa kebab house menus included stuffed meatballs (a still popular regional speciality known as kubbe or içli köfte).\textsuperscript{49} John Covel enumerated the foods found in seventeenth-century provincial cook-shops, although
he spoke dismissively of the vegetables and pointed out the lack of whole roasted joints – a typical complaint of Englishmen abroad:

In other townes travaylers find nothing but leekes, garlick, onyons, bread, salt, pickled olives, cabbidge, cowcumbers, melons, and the like, little bits of broyl’d flesse, which they call *Kibob*, but whole joints nowhere, rice, pancakes, and severall kinds of pastery meates.¹⁰

Another traveller complained that the stewed vegetable dishes made with okra, tomatoes and haricot (navy) beans had ‘but little of meat to monstrous deal of vegetable’.¹¹ George Howard, Earl of Carlisle, was one of the few Englishmen to enjoy Ottoman vegetable

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¹⁰ In other towns travelers find nothing but leeks, garlic, onions, bread, salt, pickled olives, cabbage, cucumbers, melons, and the like, little bits of grilled flesh, which they call *Kibob*, but whole joints nowhere, rice, pancakes, and various kinds of pastry meats.

¹¹ Another traveler complained that the stewed vegetable dishes made with okra, tomatoes, and navy beans had ‘but little meat to monstrous deal of vegetable.’ George Howard, Earl of Carlisle, was one of the few Englishmen to enjoy Ottoman vegetable

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*Kebab house in Istanbul, 1582. A cook is grilling kebabs on skewers over the stove.*
dishes, declaring, ‘I think the nation has a decided turn for cookery’ after eating in a cook-shop ‘where different ragouts of meat and vegetables are always ready in large pans.’ 52 The type of restaurant he described is still one of the most common types in Turkey today.

Some typical restaurant dishes were highly regarded, as illustrated by the fact that at feasts celebrating the circumcision of Süleyman I’s sons Cihangir and Bayezid in 1539, ‘market-style börek’ was among the many courses served. 53 ‘Market-style kebab’ was served at a palace banquet for the French empress Eugénie in October 1869. 54 Recipes for this and several other ‘market-style’ dishes are recorded in nineteenth-century Ottoman cookery books. 55

Cook-shops had broad white marble counters that separated the interior from the street. On these the pans of cooked food were laid out and servings arranged on plates. 56 Cooking was done on stoves with fires lit beneath and apertures into which the cooking pans were set, or over hearths containing charcoal fires. 57 Seating consisted of platforms at the back of the shop where customers sat cross-legged on mats around a dining tray, or on stools around little tables in a garden beside the eating house. 58 Some cook-shops did not have their own seating, as in the case of a cook-shop in a han at Burgaz, near Istanbul, where customers sat in the café next door. 59 As in private homes, the food was served in a copper dish placed in the centre of a
wooden or copper tray, and eaten with the fingers (or a spoon in the case of soup), accompanied by bread.\textsuperscript{60}

The modernist architect Le Corbusier described a typical Ottoman cook-shop in the Balkans at which he ate during a journey in 1911:

An entire wall of this square room is made of windows that open onto the street. The ovens lean against it, and the large open bays let out aromas that spread the fame of this tavern over the whole street. Beside the ovens is a big slab of thick marble serving as a sideboard, and on it the provisions are spread out: tomatoes, cucumbers, beans, cantaloupes and watermelons, in short all those cucurbits of which Turks are so fond. We are served a very heavy noodle soup with lemon, then some little stuffed squash, and some badly cooked rice sautéed in oil. As a rule the Turks eat no meat. Limiting themselves to a vegetarian diet, they do not need knives; hence the table knife is unknown. To this very rich menu they always add a few cups of fruit juices, cherry, pear, apple or grape, which they drink with a spoon.\textsuperscript{61}

Some cook-shops catered for Orthodox Christians by varying their dishes to comply with dietary rules during fasting times. Greek fish restaurants located around the main fish market in Istanbul ordinarily served fish fried in butter, sesame oil or linseed oil, grey mullet soup, oysters, scallops, and pilaf with mussels, but in fasting periods replaced fish dishes with broad bean soup, chickpea soup, lentil stew, \textit{epsu misko} (cucumber cooked with vegetable oil and served with slices of stale bread to soak up the juice) and stuffed onions.\textsuperscript{62}

Jews avoided the use of clarified butter, so vendors of pastries such as \textit{gözleme} and \textit{lokma} cooked them with sesame oil for Jewish customers.\textsuperscript{63} Fish restaurants in the Jewish quarter of Kasımpaşa on the Golden Horn served fresh fish, dried sturgeon and dried cod, accompanied by pickles.\textsuperscript{64}

Istanbul’s three hundred tripe restaurants were all run by Ottoman Greeks, probably because many of their customers were tavern-goers who regarded tripe soup flavoured with garlic and vinegar as a sure-fire cure for a hangover. These establishments opened at dawn and as well as hungover drinkers their customers included the poor, for whom tripe soup was a hot,
nourishing and cheap breakfast. In addition to tripe they served soups made from omasum (the third stomach of ruminant animals) and abomasum. The customer would choose which of these they preferred and the meat would then be chopped up, placed in a bowl with some of the stock, and sprinkled with chopped parsley and spices such as pepper, cinnamon and cloves. Customers added their own garlic and vinegar sauce to taste. In Turkish cities today, tripe shops remain open until the early hours of the morning to cater to people going home after a late night out, as well as attract early morning breakfasters.

Ottoman cook-shops were the takeaways of their time. Although they usually included seating for customers, local shopkeepers could order meals to be taken to their shop, and merchants to the han where they were staying. In Urfa, cook-shops would prepare ‘any dishes one might desire’, and the meal could then be eaten in the cook-shop or sent to ‘a coffee-house, a khan, or private dwelling’, recorded one traveller. Şiş kebap was rolled up in flat bread and then wrapped in coarse paper or a vine leaf for customers to take away. ‘For one person who entered the shop, fifty took it away in their hands,’ remarked one observer of an Istanbul kebab house in the 1820s. Théophile Gautier also noticed these bread wraps, which he described as ‘kabobs rolled in a sort of pancake.’ During Ramazan, when it was customary to begin the evening meal with soup, a servant was often sent to buy soup from the local tripe shop.

In the sixteenth century government officials visited cook-shops in disguise to eavesdrop on gossip exchanged by customers, suggesting that these places had a degree of comfort that encouraged people to linger over their meal and chat. We know that not all eating houses were simple, no-frills establishments. The clotted cream and yoghurt shops of Eyüp were ‘ornate’ places, for example, and some at least of Istanbul’s cook-shops emulated upper-class dining long before the arrival of the European-style restaurant: in the seventeenth century they employed a taster who ate a morsel of each dish before setting it down in front of the customer and inviting him to eat. In the early nineteenth century there were eating houses where customers were presented with water, towels and soap to wash their hands and beards after the meal; another refinement typical of private homes.

With the decline of the guild system in the nineteenth century, monopolies were no longer upheld, leaving cook-shops and eating houses free to offer wider menus and so become restaurants in the modern sense. In Istanbul, these new-style eating houses served multi-course meals of the type to be found in wealthy Ottoman homes, probably inspired in part by the rise of the modern restaurant in France, which offered fine dining in imitation of the upper classes. They may also have been responding to demand from the many tourists who began to visit Istanbul at this period. In the 1890s the Italian writer Edmondo de Amicis described eating an Ottoman restaurant meal composed of more than twenty courses, evidently emulating meals eaten by upper-class Ottomans. The same trend can be observed in the provinces, such as at a cook-shop in the town of Karahisar, which in the late nineteenth century served pilaf, kebab, vegetable stews of various kinds, salted fish, ground rice pudding with powdered cinnamon sprinkled on top, yoghurt and various pastries. Another in Amasya served döner kebab as well as pilaf and vegetable stews.

Of the personalities and attitudes of restaurant cooks almost nothing is known, apart from a stray
anecdote about the Armenian cook, restaurateur and hotelier Migirdiç Tokatlıyan, who in the late Ottoman period was famous for his good food but notorious for his bad temper. He decided which dishes to serve his regular customers and is reported on one occasion, when a waiter placed a dish in front of the wrong customer, to have yelled out, ‘Not that numbskull! He won’t appreciate it. Take it to the other one with the face like a pear. Show him what real food is like!’

All manner of cooked foods, snacks, sweets and beverages were sold by itinerant street vendors in Ottoman towns and cities. In the early sixteenth century, Bartholomew Georgevitz recorded that ‘in the stretes are sold divers kindes of meate, requisite for sustenance, with other thinges necessary to live by.’ Some of the most popular street foods were simit (bread rings, sometimes sprinkled with sesame seeds), boiled or grilled maize, roasted chickpeas, roasted chestnuts, yoghurt, ice cream, iced sherbet, diverse types of helva, and sweets for children, such as toffee in various colours and flavours and lollipops in the form of cockerels, flowers or animals. Rice flour blancmange (muhallebi) was elegantly served on patterned china saucers, drizzled with grape molasses, honey or rose water, and eaten with a small triangular spoon. Beverages commonly sold in the streets were chilled water, salep, sherbet and coffee.

Even food for animals could be purchased from street sellers, as described by Baron Wenceslas Wratislaw in the sixteenth century:

It is customary among the Turks to boil and bake paunches, lights, livers and pieces of meat, and carry them in wooden buckets up and down the city, crying out, ‘Kedy et, kedy et!’ i.e. ‘Cat’s meat!’ A kitchen-boy also carries on his shoulders a number of spits, upon which are baked pieces of meat, liver, and spleen, and cries in the streets, ‘Tiuepek et, tiupec et!’ i.e. ‘Dog’s meat!’ Behind him run three-score dogs or more, looking to him to be served. The Turks buy this food, distribute it to the dogs, and throw it to the cats upon the wall; for these superstitious and barbarous people imagine that they obtain especial favour in the eyes of God by giving alms even to irrational cattle, cats, dogs, fish, birds, and other live creatures… Pieces of raw meat are also carried about the city on spits, which the Turks buy and throw up to the kites, which fly about in crowds, and catch them in their claws. We, too, bought some of this meat for fun, and threw it to the kites,
and watched, with great merriment, how they tumbled over one another as they flew to seize the meat.82

Among the best places to see food vendors en masse were public parks,83 where vendors set up stands or wandered around with their wares on trays balanced on their heads.84 At Büyükdere meadow, a coffee maker used an ancient hollow tree as his stall.85 Street vendors also gathered at cemeteries on religious festivals, when people came to pray at family graves. Julia Pardoe described the Armenian cemetery in Istanbul on Easter Monday in 1836:

The kibaub merchants had dug hollows to cook their dainties under the shelter of the tombs — and the smoking booths were amply supplied with seats and counters from the same wide waste of death . . . One long line of diminutive tents formed a temporary street of eating-houses; there were kibaubs, pilaff, fritters, pickled vegetables, soups, rolls stuffed with fine herbs, sausages, fried fish, bread of every quality, and cakes of all dimensions.86

Street vendors attracted custom by calling out poetical descriptions of their wares, such as ‘My beloved sher-bet gives delight to the body and food to the soul,’87 or, ‘My soul! My heart! Come, buy my heaven-made muballebi.’ Sellers of early artichokes described them fancifully as ‘Little lambs! Home-raised, tender milk-drinking lambs!’88 Others recited humorous rhymes as a way of gaining an edge over their competitors, such as the following examples of rhymes composed by a nineteenth-century boza seller named Hacı Zeynel.89
My boza is yellow
Fermented with millet
Old ladies love it
My boza smooth and thick

My boza is fine as bone marrow
My jar has a leak
Four okkas for two piastres
My boza smooth and thick.

Another example is one of the rhymes recited by ice-cream sellers:

My cherry and cream ices
Does no one want to taste them?
Without payment I will give none
To little ladies and adoring gentlemen.90
Eating outdoors in fine weather was regarded as one of the foremost pleasures in life,¹ and all affluent Ottomans had large gardens with pavilions where in summer they could snooze after dinner or entertain their friends.² In the early seventeenth century the English diplomat Robert Withers remarked that for a Turk, 'one bit of meat in a garden shall do him more good (in his opinion) than the best fare that may be elsewhere,'³ and the traveller Fynes Moryson observed that people liked to eat on grass near riverbanks or in gardens 'more frequently than in the house.'⁴ Every town and city had its favourite public parks and beauty spots – known as mesire – in the nearby countryside where people went to picnic. In his ten-volume Book of Travels, the seventeenth-century Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi recorded the most popular mesires around each city he visited. Istanbul had 52 such places, the most renowned being the valleys of Kağıthane at the end of the Golden Horn,⁵ and Göksu, on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus. Trees for shade and a source of drinking water, whether a natural spring or a fountain constructed as a charitable endowment, were essential features of them all.⁶ At the mesire of Pınarbaşı, near Bursa, springs of water poured out of the cliffs, providing water for picnickers to drink after eating kebab.⁷ Summerhouses were often provided in public parks, as noted in the seventeenth century by Sir Henry Blount: 'in the skirts of each Towne, neere some river, or other pleasing prospect there use to be round open Garden-houses, where any may sit and passe time.'⁸ Describing the public parks of Edirne along the banks of the Maritza and Tunca rivers in the early eighteenth century, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote that they were planted with rows of fruit trees, in whose shade people sat and drank coffee in the early evening. She, too, noted the garden pavilions.⁹ Around Aleppo, market gardens and orchards served as parks where picnickers could sit under trees or in summerhouses. In spring these gardens were crowded with people, who as well as bringing food prepared at home, bought lettuces, cucumbers and fruit from the gardeners. Picnickers travelled surprisingly long distances by road to parks such as Taşdelen, a wooded area east of Istanbul that is still a popular picnic place today, named after its famous spring.¹⁰ When going by road, men rode on horseback while wealthy women travelled in decorated canopied wagons drawn by oxen.¹¹ A cheaper form of transportation was donkeys, which women and children rode sitting astride. Side-saddles were unknown and European women seen riding on them were thought to have lost a leg.¹²
Parks were policed by keepers, whose main duties were to make sure women and men did not mingle,\(^{13}\) prevent alcohol consumption,\(^ {14}\) and as sunset approached warn picnickers that it was time to pack up and go home.\(^ {15}\) Numerous regulations were passed to prevent indecorous behaviour in parks,\(^ {16}\) such as one in 1752 obliging women to keep their faces modestly covered.\(^ {17}\) In 1820 a futile attempt was made to forbid women going to public parks altogether,\(^ {18}\) and another ruling in 1836 warned that women should not stay too late.\(^ {19}\) Itinerant vendors were not allowed to approach parties of women, so children acted as go-betweens for their mothers or elder sisters.\(^ {20}\) Yet, even at a distance, teenage boys and girls managed to carry on flirtations, as observed by the Hungarian linguist and Turkologist Ignác Kúnos (1860–1945) in the late nineteenth century. Upon being told by Ahmed Vefik Paşa that parks were good places to hear Turkish folk poetry, Kúnos hired a rowing boat to travel to Göksu one Friday. As the numerous boats converged near the mouth of the river, he heard boys and girls recite improvised rhymes to one another. One boy declared, ‘Look at the moon, look at the star / Look at that girl afar’, to which the girl responded, ‘The moon is too light, I cannot come / But if it goes behind a cloud nothing will stop me.’\(^ {21}\)

Women were particularly keen picnickers, making up parties of friends and taking their children along. Comparing the social lives of Ottoman and American women, the Protestant missionary Mrs E.C.A. Schneider, who lived in Bursa from 1833 until the late 1840s, observed that while American women met in one another’s houses, Ottoman women ‘go to a public bath, to some running stream, or to some shady grove and carry their food with them. It is to them the \textit{summun bonum} of earthly felicity.’\(^ {22}\) Wealthy women in Aleppo sometimes clubbed together to rent a garden for the day, so that they would have it to themselves. Cooks were sent in advance to prepare food for the occasion, and servants took cushions and carpets to cover the divans in the summerhouses.\(^ {23}\) Leyla Saz recalled friends of her mother in Istanbul declaring

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Party of women travelling to a picnic place in an ox cart, mid 19th century.
that they were tired of eating indoors and persuading her to join an outing to Göksu. On the way the children sang folksongs, and having arrived at the park and chosen a picnic place, four servant girls held up large shawls to form an enclosure so that the women could take off their veils to eat. When the destination was a park on the Bosphorus or Golden Horn that could be reached by water, long, narrow rowing boats called kayiks were hired for the day. According to a sixteenth-century document, the daily fee was lower if the rowers were provided with a meal, which in the spring season always included a whole cooked lamb. A cheaper alternative was to travel in one of the large public kayiks, which on holidays made round trips to the park at Beykoz, on the Bosphorus, departing in the morning and returning in the early evening. These took men on Fridays and women on Sundays, when apart from the rowers, the only men allowed on the board were musicians who played the zurna, a woodwind instrument.

Only rich women with cooks at their command could serve freshly roasted lamb at picnics. Cooks and servants were sent ahead to the selected picnic place to roast the lamb, lay mats in a shady spot and hang swings from tree branches. Each of the hostess’s friends contributed a savoury dish or pudding in addition to those provided by the cooks. Alternatively, a lamb could be roasted at home in advance and carried in a large two-layered dinner carrier with walls a centimetre thick and a leather case to keep in the heat. Homemade semolina helva was carried in the second layer of the carrier. Other typical picnic foods were stuffed vine leaves, meatballs, lettuce salad, hard-boiled eggs, börek, yoghurt, salted anchovies, olives, caviar, salad made from çiroz (dried mackerel, grilled, shredded and dressed with oil, vinegar and cress leaves), cucumbers, fruit, cheese, semolina helva and fritters. Most women picnickers prepared dishes of this kind at home the day before and at the picnic place made a salad and cut up fruit. After the meal they made coffee on a small fire of twigs. Poorer women picnicked in a market garden close to home, taking only a mat to spread under a tree and some bread and cheese, which they ate with cos lettuces, cucumbers, mulberries, peaches or other fruit purchased from the gardener.

Trousseaus of wealthy brides always included picnic equipment, such as small bowls for drinking water, tasselled mats to spread on the ground, fans for keeping away flies and several multilayered dinner carriers. When there was a financial crisis in the 1860s and it was decided to melt down palace gold and silverware, Sultan Abdülaziz is said to have asked the grand vizier Keçecizade Fuat Paşa whether even the silver bowls used by the princesses to drink water on excursions were to be taken. ‘Yes, your Majesty,’ the grand vizier replied, ‘If disaster were to befall the country and you were obliged to flee for the interior,
would you want the princesses to drink water at the Fountain of Departure? This was a reference to a seventeenth-century fountain in Kadıköy at which pilgrims used to bid farewell to family and friends before departing on their journey to Mecca.

The first picnics of the year traditionally took place on 6 May, an ancient pagan spring festival known as Hıdrellez celebrated by Christians and Muslims alike. The name Hıdrellez is a combination of Hidr (Arabic for green), a mythological figure related to the Green Man of European folklore, and İlyas (Elias), who is identified with St George in eastern Christian belief. On that day it was permitted to slaughter the first lambs of the year, and the main picnic dish was roast lamb, accompanied by stuffed vine leaves, pilaf made with the chopped lamb’s liver and kidneys, and semolina helva.

Outdoor cooking was mainly the preserve of male parties of picnickers, who dug the fire pit, lit the fire and did their own roasting and grilling, unless they were wealthy enough to employ cooks. A whole lamb was roasted on a wooden or iron spit (çevirme kebap), while the heart, liver and other offal were cut up into small pieces and grilled on skewers. Where there were sufficiently fast-flowing streams, such as at a picnic place near the city of Malatya or at picnic places by the Barada river in Damascus, waterwheels were used to turn spit-roasts.

A particularly magnificent garden banquet held in 1856 by Selim Paşa at his summer home on Küçük Çamlıca Hill, overlooking the Bosphorus, was served in a large marquee. According to Alexis Soyer, who was one of the guests, wine and rakı were drunk before the meal and in accordance with European manners guests were also offered wine with the meal. Forty cooks prepared two sheep and two lambs roasted whole, offal grilled separately on skewers, and 31 other dishes, including stewed and stuffed vegetables, pilaf, savoury pastries and twelve desserts:

The sheep and lambs, dressed up whole, were placed upon the table, and every guest helped himself à la Turque. The meat was pulled from the animal by the Hadji Bachi [ağabaşı, chief cook], with his fingers, in presence of the company, placed in a large dish, and handed round to the gourmets, who also helped themselves with their fingers. The lamb was admirable; an Apicius would have gone to Turkey to dine, had he known such delicacies were to be obtained.
there. The other dishes were eaten in the European fashion, with knives and forks . . . London, or even Paris, could not have produced more effect or given more éclat to the entertainment, though, of course, in a different style . . . After five hours of eating and drinking, we returned thanks to our illustrious host, and rose to retire.40

Soyer also described a grand picnic given for 150 guests by a Greek hotel owner in a park, probably Göksu, on the Asian side of Bosphorus. ‘Such a culinary encampment I never before beheld,’ exclaimed Soyer in his memoirs. Four cooks prepared roasted chickens, quails, dotterels, sheep and lambs, grilled kebabs and several different kinds of fish, followed by ices, preserves, sweet pastries, melon and other fruits.41

In court circles, poetry was an important part of outdoor gatherings, and poets were sought-after guests.42 Night-time garden parties known as çırağan eğlencesi (torch-lit parties) became fashionable among the Ottoman elite in the eighteenth century. Crystal lanterns and mirrors were hung from arbours to illuminate the flower beds, and the renowned poets, singers and musicians of the day performed for the guests.43 Wine was often served, accompanied by foods like fruits, nuts, caviar, pastırma, pickled fish, lobster, sardines, cheese and kebab.44 Moonlight picnics on the shores of the Bosphorus were a popular summer recreation.
The guests were rowed to a picnic place after dark and musicians played while they ate a meal of stuffed roast lamb, freshly caught fish baked on tiles, vegetable dishes, salads and side dishes, milk puddings, stewed fruit and ice cream. The abstemious drank sherbet while others drank rakı or wine. When the meal was over, guests and musicians once more boarded the rowing boats to watch the moonlit scenery and the night sky, to the accompaniment of music and singing.45

Trade guilds held annual picnics at which journeymen were promoted to the rank of master and apprentices to that of journeyman. These outings usually lasted two or three days,46 and the guild members slept in tents loaned for the occasion by the tent makers. Cooking pots and dishes were similarly borrowed if necessary, and master craftsmen and journeymen contributed towards the cost of food and hiring cooks.47 Dishes served at the banquet following the promotion ceremony included roast lamb, pilaf, salad, helva and fruit.48 The last guild picnic known to have taken place in Istanbul was held by the horseshoe nail makers in 1898 and a chance witness of the event later published the following description:

I must confess that in all my life I never came across so enjoyable a gathering and do not expect ever to do so again. The amicability between the members of the guild, who ranged from young men of eighteen or twenty to old men of ninety, the respect of the younger for the elder and the kindliness of the elder towards the younger were impressed on my mind. And I never tired of watching them play traditional Turkish outdoor games like geçme, benzetme, atlama, esir alma, meydan boğası and kıra telli.49

Schools also held annual picnics, to which each child took food prepared by their mothers, such as dolma, semolina helva or rice pudding, in a dinner carrier, and families contributed what they could afford to cover the cost of three or four lambs to roast, salad and fruit. Wealthy people in the neighbourhood sometimes helped by contributing money, sending a cook to help with roasting the meat, or loaning dishes, mats, spoons and towels.50

City women turned their weekly visit to the hamam (public baths) into a kind of picnic. One foreign visitor who accompanied a Turkish family to the baths wrote, ‘I began to wonder if we were ever to return from this bathing picnic, so vast were the preparations.’51 After bathing, still in their bath wraps, the party first drank iced sherbet, then ate the food they had brought with them, such as stuffed vine leaves, artichokes cooked in olive oil, and helva, followed by coffee.52 In summer, melons and watermelons were submerged in the pool in the outer room to cool while the women bathed.53 Most bath houses employed a coffee maker,54 and some also served sherbet and fruit.55 The meal of ‘minced meat patties’ (börık) and salad eaten by James Silk Buckingham at a bath house in the eastern Anatolian city of Urfa was presumably brought from a neighbouring cook-shop.56

Travelling overland in the Ottoman Empire often involved crossing lonely and inhospitable mountainous or desert terrain. Merchants, soldiers, pilgrims and government officials, who made up the majority of travellers, preferred to join caravans, for safety against bandits. The chain of castle-like caravanserais located
at frequent intervals along main highways provided a haven for caravans at night. Along the walls were raised platforms with numerous fireplaces where travellers lit fires to cook food. At night, wrapped in their cloaks, the travellers slept on mats in front of the fires.

On the busy highway leading westwards from Istanbul, some of the caravanserais had shops selling foodstuffs — such as yoghurt, rice, chicken, meat and fruit — a coffee house, and even cook-shops where simple cooked foods such as soup, pilaf and stewed fruit could be purchased:

Prunes, pears, peaches, quinces, figs, raisins, and cornel-cherries, all of which are boiled in clean water and set out on large earthenware trays.

Each man buys what takes his fancy, and eats the fruit as a relish with his bread, and when he has finished swallows the remaining juice by way of drink.

For the most part, however, travellers had to cook their own food, so they carried cooking utensils and provisions such as hardtack, flour, rice, clarified butter, yoghurt, salted beef, cheese, onions, cucumbers, olives, dried fruits and sesame helva. Raw onion and garlic were recommended for travellers journeying through hot deserts like those on the way to Mecca, or on sea voyages, because they counteract air contaminated by plague and the harmful effects of poisonous desert winds. Affluent travellers took delicacies such as crystallized sherbet cakes, which were diluted with water to make sherbet, and sweet pastries that would not easily spoil on long journeys. Caravans were accompanied by victuallers who sold a range of basic provisions, in particular a good store of yoghurt, because of its refreshing quality. For travel through deserts, one-third of the camels had to be loaded with food and water to ensure these did not run out before the group reached a place where stocks could be replenished.

Eggs, chickens, lambs, kids, rice, fruit and bread could be purchased from villages, and occasionally travellers hunted game or caught fish. Armenian merchants always carried a fishing line, to catch fish for fasting days in the ponds or rivers they passed. Evliya Çelebi described how he and his companions caught trout that they cooked in butter, and roasted sheep bought from Turcoman shepherds when travelling in the mountains near Bursa; and how they hunted wild buffalo and grilled the meat over reed fires while journeying through the steppes north of the Black Sea.
in the winter of 1666, when the weather was so cold they had to defrost their bread by burying it in hot ashes.\textsuperscript{72}

Cooking utensils for travellers included sets of copper cooking pots, pans and coffee pots of diminishing size that fitted into one another and had handles that were detachable or foldable to save room. The seventeenth-century French linguist and traveller Jean de Thévenot remarked that the Turks carried along all the cooking equipment they needed ‘without any clutter’, and could ‘as easily Boyle the Kettle in a Desert, as at home in their own Houses’.\textsuperscript{73} Every traveller carried a leather water flask attached to his riding saddle, and in places where water was scarce carried a much larger leather container with a capacity of more than 28 litres (7.4 U.S. gal.).\textsuperscript{74} Clarified butter and honey were carried in copper jars hung from pack saddles.\textsuperscript{75} Another essential piece of travel equipment was a leather dining mat with a drawstring threaded around the edge so that any remaining food could be kept inside it like a bag.\textsuperscript{76} The French pilgrim Bertrand de la Brocquière purchased one of these for himself when he travelled with an Ottoman caravan through Syria and Anatolia in 1433, as well as spoons, knives and a leather cup for the journey.\textsuperscript{77} High-ranking dignitaries travelled in style, with large quantities of equipment including kitchen tents, coffee tents, canopies under which to eat their meals,\textsuperscript{78} and valuable coffee cups carried in special boxes to prevent breakage.\textsuperscript{79}

The simplest manner of cooking in the open air was to dig a hole in the ground, light a fire inside and set a pot over it, which was not only economical on fuel but protected the fire from wind and rain.\textsuperscript{80} Meat could be spit-roasted over a fire of this kind, as described in the recipe given above for spit-roasted lamb.\textsuperscript{81} In 1432 Brocquière came across some Turkish travellers near Bursa who offered him roast lamb, followed by clotted cream ‘so good and sweet that I ate of it till I almost burst’. He observed that instead of waiting for the meat to roast through, these travellers cut slices from the surface as it cooked, which is probably the way döner kebap evolved.\textsuperscript{82}

Ship’s passengers similarly carried their own provisions. On board a ship sailing from Alexandria to
İzmir in 1872, the British consular chaplain Edwin John Davis watched women in makeshift tents on deck preparing coffee and meals consisting of salad, black olives, sardines, salt cheese, yaourt etc.83 Passengers travelling down the Euphrates on rafts carried raisins, melons, snake cucumbers, garlic, onions, wheat flour, rice flour, honey, yoghurt, cheese and bread to eat during the long journey through desert and uninhabited terrain.84 Food was either cooked on board or on land when moored for the night.85 According to Leonhart Rauwolff, writing in the mid-sixteenth century, victuallers on these craft sold travellers small cups of honey mixed with butter to eat with their dry biscuit.

When the boat was tied up at night, the travellers collected firewood, dug a hole in which to light a fire and either cooked pilaf or baked fresh bread by the following method:

When they had a mind to eat new bread instead, or for want of biskets, they made a paste of flour and water, and wrought it into broad cakes about the thickness of a finger, and put them in a hot place on the ground, heated on purpose by fire, and covered it with ashes and coals, and turned it several times until it was enough. These cakes were very savory and good to eat. Some of the
Arabians have in their tents, stones or copper plates made on purpose to bake them.\textsuperscript{86}

Three centuries later, Mrs Ramsay, wife of the archaeologist William Ramsay, described travellers cooking meals in an Anatolian \textit{han}, the urban equivalent of the caravanserai:

You send to the eating-house in the \textit{tcharshi} for food already cooked, or you may, if you like, buy the raw material and cook it yourself. There is generally a fountain in the courtyard; but if not, you will find a supply of water in a gigantic earthenware jar in some handy corner, which is replenished daily by water-carriers, who bring the water in cows’ skins sewn up, so as to make huge bags. Opposite the door of each room there is generally a little wooden sink fixed to the rail of the gallery, from which the dirty water used by the visitors pours down upon anybody or anything that may chance to be below. About the hour of noon in any much-frequented khan, you will probably find a number of the guests engaged in preparing their midday meal in the galleries. Each has his little fire of charcoal in an iron tripod before the door of his room, and there he sits patiently on his heels watching some savoury morsel that frizzles in his little frying-pan, or waiting till the rice for his pilaf is sufficiently boiled.\textsuperscript{87}

Like other travellers, pilgrims making the arduous journey to Mecca had to carry their own provisions and do their own cooking. The largest pilgrimage caravan was that which set out annually from Damascus with 12,000–15,000 people. Only with the advent of steamers operating in the Red Sea in 1858 and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 did the number of pilgrims travelling overland fall dramatically. The overland journey to Mecca took 45 days, including stops at small towns and halting places where fresh provisions and water were available.\textsuperscript{88} At the town of Mürzeyrib, thirty hours’ journey south of Damascus, granaries were stocked with provisions in readiness for the pilgrimage and criers warned the pilgrims to buy the provisions they needed for the next stage of
the journey. On the return journey in the month of Muharrem, a charitable endowment provided hundreds of cauldrons of tarhana soup and aşure for the pilgrims at two small caravanserais, jointly named Tarhana Han, south of Damascus. In the winter of 1671 thousands of pilgrims travelling across the plain of Belka in Jordan faced starvation when heavy rain caused a flash flood, drowning hundreds of camels and mules and sweeping away their provisions. That night, the temperature fell below freezing point, killing more animals. Emergency food aid comprising sacks of flour and hardtack was sent by local notables from Maan in southern Jordan. The pilgrims’ tribulations were not over, however, because in the desert further south the caravan ran out of water and many more mules and camels died of thirst.

Pilgrims from Egypt had to make the hazardous journey across the Sinai desert. On the return journey, most of their food and water would be exhausted before they were halfway home, so they depended for survival on fresh provisions sent by the governor of Egypt to the fort of Ezlem, on the eastern Red Sea coast. These consisted of broad beans, rice, flour, honey, butter, hardtack and eggs, as well as barley for the horses, all carried by two to three thousand camels, and Nile water carried by hundreds more.
The efficient organization of food supplies was a major factor in Ottoman military success. The army travelled with thousands of camels and baggage mules carrying food and water as well as tents and military equipment. In 1560 Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq reported that when warring in the deserts of Persia and Iraq, the Ottoman army was accompanied by 'as many as 40,000 camels... and almost as many baggage-mules' laden with rice and other cereals, so that a shortage of food would not force the army to retreat and ensuring that sufficient food would remain for the homeward march.\(^1\) Lesser quantities of provisions were required in European campaigns due to the shorter distances from supply points, so that when the Ottoman army marched to war against Poland in 1634, only five thousand pack camels were used.\(^2\) During this campaign, the English traveller Sir Henry Blount noted that the soldiers were provided with abundant hardtack, rice, dried meat, mutton and clarified butter. The soldiers ‘would often make me sit, and eate with them very plentifully and well,’ he wrote.\(^3\) Two centuries later, in 1834, Turkish soldiers were still ‘better fed than any other troops in Europe, having an abundance of provisions, of excellent quality, and partaking of meat once, and of soup twice a day,’ according to Marshal Auguste de Marmont of France.\(^4\) After the Russians defeated the Ottoman army at Doğubeyazıt, on the Iranian border, in 1854, at the start of the Crimean War, supplies left behind when the Ottomans retreated consisted of six thousand bushels of wheat, nine hundred bushels of flour, six thousand bushels of bulgur and 4,860 kg of butter.\(^5\)

Even galley slaves were fed more generously than their European counterparts. A Spaniard who spent four years in slavery to the Ottomans in the mid-sixteenth century wrote that he would rather spend four years rowing a Turkish galley than one year on a Spanish galley; partly because the Turkish navy did not sail during the winter but also because their hardtack was of better quality and provided in sufficient amounts.\(^6\) A century later, Sir Paul Rycaut (1629–1700), the English consul at Smyrna, confirmed that Ottoman galley slaves were given a larger allowance of hardtack than their counterparts in the Venetian fleet.\(^7\)

Stores were laid up in advance at strategic points along campaign routes,\(^8\) and fortresses throughout the empire were kept stocked with large quantities of wheat, bulgur, rice, millet, barley, biscuit, water, tobacco, tents and horse equipage.\(^9\) At Van Fortress, for example, vast amounts of barley, wheat, millet, brown rice,
boulghur, flour, broad beans, lentils, chickpeas, linseed oil, sesame oil, tallow, clarified butter, olive oil, salt, biscuits and even wine for non-Muslims were stored in the caves that honeycombed the rock beneath the castle. At Özü (Ochakov) in the Ukraine there were two thousand grain pits, narrow at the mouth and widening towards the bottom, each described as ‘large enough to hold a hundred men’, filled with wheat, barley, millet and rye. Yedikule Fortress in Istanbul contained enough food supplies for eighty galleys.

One of the main provisions for both army and navy was a twice-baked bread known as hardtack or biscuit that was reconstituted by being wrapped in a damp cloth until it swelled and softened. A superior type of hardtack made for discriminating travellers and officers consisted of one part butter to eight parts flour. Hardtack was produced in most coastal towns and cities, such as the port of Bandırma on the Marmara Sea, where in 1573 Philippe du Fresne-Canaye, an official in the suite of the French ambassador François de Noailles, watched Turkish galleys spend an entire day loading up with hardtack. In the seventeenth century there were 105 bakeries producing hardtack in Istanbul alone, mainly in Galata, at the mouth of the Golden Horn, and in villages along the Bosphorus where ships sailing to the Black Sea and Aegean stopped to replenish supplies. The army required 56 tonnes of hardtack daily, according to Sultan Murad IV in a letter written to his grand vizier in 1637. So important was hardtack for the army that a government official called peksimet emini (superintendent of hardtack) was in charge of organizing sufficient supplies. Its importance for sailors in particular is reflected in a superstitious custom related in the Book of Navigation by the Ottoman naval commander Piri Reis (c. 1465–1554): when ships passed the grave of a saint called Emek Yemez Baba on a headland in the northern Aegean, sailors tossed biscuit into the sea, presumably as a way of asking for the saint’s protection.

For Tatar soldiers who fought alongside the Ottoman army in northern campaigns, the staple provision was not hardtack but roasted millet flour, supplemented by dried yoghurt and the meat of horses who became lame or too exhausted to go on. Horseflesh was either cooked on the spot or laid in strips under soldiers’ saddles, to be eaten when it had dried. The Tatar khan’s meals when on campaign consisted of ‘excellent Biscuits and flitches of smoked Horseflesh, concerning the excellence of which our Eulogiums
were endless, Pootargue [bottarga], Caviar, and dried Raisins. In the nineteenth century, first macaroni and then potatoes were incorporated into the Ottoman military diet. To ensure sufficient supplies of macaroni, the army established a factory in the grounds of Selimiye Barracks around 1830, presumably using machinery imported from Italy or France:

The scene was a singular one; the large hall in which we stood was entirely over-canopied with ropes of macaroni, and surrounded by presses and rollers. A major was deciding on the merits of the flour, a lieutenant was superintending the working of the machine, a couple of sergeants were suspending the paste to dry, and a fatigue party were turning the wheels . . . The whitest and finest of the paste supplies the kitchen of the Sultan; the darkest and coarsest finds its way to that of the soldiers.

Just as many Europeans had refused to eat potatoes, even when threatened by famine, so this new vegetable was resisted by Turkish soldiers until the second half of the nineteenth century, when wheat was in short supply and the military authorities substituted potatoes. Water supply was a particular concern when crossing arid terrain, and in the dry deserts of Syria the Ottomans built thousands of underground cisterns to collect rainwater for use by the army. Water was
also carried in enormous leather bags slung in pairs on packhorses. Each of the 196 janissary companies had a chief water carrier (saka başı), who organized the provision and distribution of water in times of war. Under him were three water carriers who carried water in leather containers and poured a cup of water for any soldier who was thirsty.

Aside from water, soldiers drank sherbet, ayran (diluted yoghurt) and boza. In 1636 Henry Blount recorded that sherbet made of boiled raisins was distributed to the troops before setting out on the march each morning, and that some prepared their own instant sherbet drink by diluting readymade sherbet mixes with water. Boza was a thick millet beer that ‘gave soldiers strength, kept them warm and satisfied hunger’, making boza makers among the most indispensable camp followers when the army was on campaign. Wine and spirits were strictly prohibited to...
troops in the field, and the absence of drunkenness was one of the aspects of Ottoman army life most admired by foreign observers such as Busbecq:

Anyone who knows the conditions which obtain in our own camps will find difficulty in believing it, but the fact remains that everywhere there was complete silence and tranquility, and an entire absence of quarrelling and acts of violence of any kind, and not even any shouting or merrymaking due to high spirits or drunkenness... You never see any drinking or revelry or any kind of gambling, which is such a serious vice amongst our soldiers.32

To prevent soldiers from buying alcohol en route, officers were sent ahead to close down taverns. Strict measures to prevent drinking, rape and robbery 'all tends to the success of their Armies, and Enlargement of their Empire', Paul Rycaut declared.33 The ban on drinking alcohol was not always successfully enforced, however. In 1627 Ahıska Castle in Georgia fell to the Safavids because the janissaries refused to leave the taverns and boza houses.34 Nor did their officers always obey the ban on alcohol. In 1672 the commander of the janissaries sent men to a nearby village to buy wine for his use,35 and janissaries sometimes complained that while they were engaged in battle, their commanders sat around eating kebab and drinking wine.36

Common soldiers and the provincial cavalry, who did not receive state rations, carried some basic provisions with them, such as pastırma (dried cured beef), yoghurt,37 clarified butter, leather bags of flour (probably roasted), spices and salt.38 A sixteenth-century foreign observer added that they carried 'a little sack full of beef dried and reduced to a powder', a mysterious product that is never mentioned in Ottoman sources. One explanation could be that this was actually roasted flour, a product unfamiliar to Western Europeans. On the other hand, a powdered meat product was used by the Hungarian army, according to the fourteenth-century Italian chronicler Matteo Villani.39 The existence today of a Mongolian foodstuff called borts, made of dried meat pounded to a fibrous powder, suggests the possibility that Hungarian and Turkish soldiers had both inherited an ancient Central Asian tradition.40

When their own provisions ran out, soldiers replenished them from the ordu pazarı (army market) that was set up when the army halted. There they could buy foodstuffs, cooked foods such as soup, and roasted chickpea flour, which was eaten as a cure for dysentery.41 An early sixteenth-century observer described the Ottoman army camp as like a city, with 'places for Shoemakers, Bakers and Butchers'.42 During the campaign to take the city of Egri, in Hungary, in 1596, the equipment included five tents for cooks (two of whom specialized in offal dishes), four tents each for grocers, butchers, bakers, boza makers and druggists, and others for swordsmiths, bowyers, tailors, bootmakers, saddlers, farriers, candle makers and other craftsmen.43 In the seventeenth century, more than three thousand tradesmen and craftsmen were commandeered to accompany the army, over a thousand of whom were victuallers.44 At the long Turkish siege of Candia in Crete (1666–9), the encampment outside the walls grew into a virtual town, with grocery shops, olive oil shops, butchers, water sellers, boza shops and sixty coffee houses, as well as forty bath houses and seven hans (commodity exchanges) used by tradesmen who sold goods to the soldiers.45 In 1801, when the
Army market (ordu pazari) selling foodstuffs and cooked food at an Ottoman military encampment, 1584.
British and Ottoman armies were fighting the French after Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt, the British army surgeon William Wittman observed ‘a considerable number of tents converted into cook’s shops, while others were set aside for the sale of various commodities, particularly coffee and tobacco’.46

Local villagers and traders brought fresh food to sell at Ottoman camps, encouraged by the strict obligation to pay fair prices for provisions purchased during campaigns.47 In the sixteenth century, Hungarian villagers brought cartloads of grain, and women went from tent to tent selling freshly made bread rolls called czipo, fruit and other foodstuffs.48 When an army led by Ahmed Paşa halted outside a city in Moldavia in 1659, sellers of boza, mustard, fish, wine and other goods swarmed into the camp.49 Soldiers who stole goods during campaigns or did not pay the going price were dealt with harshly, as described by Bartholomew Georgievitz in the early sixteenth century:

> Such severitie is used to the breakers of decrees, and ther ordinances in war that no souldier dare to take any thynge unjustelye, if otherwise he should be punished with out compassion: For ther ar elected among them certaine ordinarye kepers, or defendours of such necessaries as ar brought in the wayes, towards the campe, by children of eight or tenne yeares olde, which bring to be solde, bredde, egges, frute, corne, with other such like. The forenamed officers ar also bound to defende the Orchardes of frutes, sytuate by the wayes sydes, in so much that they themselves dare not to take one apple, or other such lyke thing, with out licence of the possessed, for if it happen otherwise they also shal be punished by leesing ther heads. When I was in an amye of the Turke, at an expedition or voyage against the Persians, I sawe a Espahye [sipahi, cavalry officer] together with his horse and servant beheaded, because his horse breakyng louse, had entred an other mans fielde.50

As a result, during the campaign against Tabriz in 1548, for example, ‘not a single egg, nor a chicken’ were stolen.51 Still, theft was not unknown, as illustrated by a court record dating from 1588 concerning soldiers who entered the village of Babayakub in Ankara and seized ‘sheep, lambs, chickens, barley, straw, hay, butter, honey, wheat, flour, bulgur, tarhana and firewood’. In response, a royal edict was issued reiterating the command that soldiers pay the market price for whatever was bought from local people.52 This policy was motivated primarily by practical rather than philanthropic considerations, ensuring that the army was fed wherever it went and that trade continued undisturbed:

> Thus their Armies never perish with hunger, Victuals being brought them in sufficient quantitie from all hands; for seeing they punctually pay for what they have, commit no disorder, nor plunder the Countrey, all things are brought to the Camp, as to a common Market: Nay, when the Turks are at War with the Persians, Merchants travel securely from one Countrey, and from one Army to another, and trade without any apprehension of being plundered. Sultan Amurat led to Bagdad an Army of six or seven hundred thousand Men; others say, nine hundred thousand Horse and Foot: It behoved him to march over Desarts, and nevertheless he took such orders, that his Armies subsisted very well.53
The custom of purchasing fresh food and provisions from local people during campaigns continued into the nineteenth century, when during the Crimean War local people brought lambs and sheep to sell in the Ottoman camp. The downside of allowing civilian traders access to the camps was exploitation by the enemy for purposes of espionage. During the Ottoman siege of Rhodes in 1522, the grand master of the Knights Hospitaller sent Turkish-speaking seamen to the Ottoman camp in a boat loaded with apples, plums, pears, melons, grapes and other fruits. Pretending they had come from the mainland, the seamen chatted to the soldiers about the siege as they sold the fruit, and then carried the intelligence back to the Knights. Another example is recorded in 1832, when the Ottoman army was in Malatya on its way to stop the advance of an Egyptian army led by the khedive İbrahim Paşa. The rebel khedive sent two officers disguised as pastry vendors into the Ottoman camp; they then relayed the gossip they had overheard in the form of coded messages.

Provisioning the janissaries and household regiments that formed the backbone of the Ottoman armed forces was one of the heaviest burdens on Ottoman state finances. Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1451–81) established a special slaughterhouse in Istanbul to cater for his standing army, and made an endowment of 24,000 gold pieces to subsidize the price of their meat and bread. The janissaries jealously guarded this privilege, and as meat prices rose over time the endowment dwindled, until the state ended up funding these subsidies directly from the Treasury. The janissary slaughterhouse was supplied from state-owned herds of sheep and cattle, kept in the Istrianca Mountains west of Istanbul and guarded over by huge mastiffs and shepherds attached to the janissary corps. These shepherds were armed with so many weapons that one Ottoman writer described them as ‘walking armouries’. Each day, the carcasses were collected from the slaughterhouse and carried by packhorse to Et Meydanı (Meat Square), where eighty butchers cut up the carcasses and distributed the daily meat rations to the janissary companies. According to the contemporary Ottoman historian Mevkufati (d. 1655), this daily ration totalled 1,825 okkas (2.3 tonnes) in the 1680s.

Being provided with food by the sultan was so central to the identity of the janissary corps that company commanders were called çorbacı (soup maker), a rank equivalent to colonel, and the company’s head cook (aşçıbaşı or aşçı usta) was the officer responsible for not only the kitchen and supply of provisions, but the imprisonment and punishment of soldiers for committing offences. Each company had a copper cauldron engraved with its symbol that was carried at the head of the company when on the march and placed in front of their tents when they camped. The greatest disgrace for a janissary company was to allow this cauldron to be captured by the enemy. Janissary

Sheep carcasses from the Janissary slaughterhouse slung over the back of pack horses. Janissary butchers would cut up the meat for distribution to the troops.
rebellions were known as *kazan kaldırmak* (lifting the cauldron), because the rebel soldiers expressed their dissatisfaction by carrying their cauldrons out of their barracks and placing them upside down in the Et Meydanı, symbolizing their refusal to eat food provided by the sultan. A similar expression of discontent was refusing to eat the meal provided at the palace on the days when the Council of State convened, as described by the French nobleman and traveller Jean-Baptiste Tavernier in the early seventeenth century:

>If it happen that they are in a mutinous humour, and incensed against a Vizir, or against the Grand Seignor himself, not one of them will put his hand to the *Chourba* [soup], but they scornfully thrust back the dishes, and by that action discover their discontent.

During campaigns, kitchen staff marched ahead of the main army to set up kitchen tents and build pit ovens for baking bread. For the campaign to Yemen in 1629, 4,436 such ovens were constructed. Rations were distributed daily, including fresh mutton provided by flocks of sheep taken along with the army, several hundred of which were slaughtered daily. The chief cook of each janissary company collected the rations in a cart, and six assistant cooks prepared the food in cauldrons over fires lit in the bottom of shallow circular pits. They prepared two meals a day, one at eleven o’clock in the morning and the other at seven in the evening, consisting of boiled meat and soup made with rice and seasoned with black pepper. Pilaf was a special dish served on Thursday evenings. Seven or eight soldiers sat around each dining mat, sharing food from a single copper basin set in the centre.

When fighting during Ramazan, Sultan Süleyman ate a meal at noon in full view of his troops to
encourage them not to fast.\textsuperscript{73} We know, however, from later accounts that most officers and men could not be dissuaded from fasting during campaigns.\textsuperscript{74}

When in barracks in Istanbul, the janissaries cooked their own food. Each janissary squad leader, known as the \textit{baş karakullukçu}, collected one \textit{akçe} weekly from each of the ten squad members for purchasing food, and the men took it in turns to cook for the week. The morning meal comprised bread with rice soup, and the evening meal bread with stew made with rice, meat and vegetables.\textsuperscript{75} When Antoine Galland visited the janissary barracks in 1672 he was amazed to see that the kitchens had running water – a rare luxury at that period.\textsuperscript{76} Another luxury enjoyed by the janissaries was large table candles, 200,000 of which were provided annually.\textsuperscript{77}

Soldiers outside the elite household troops had to buy and cook their own food during campaigns. When Salomon Schweigger, Protestant chaplain to the Habsburg ambassador Freiherr Joachim von Sinzendorf in 1578–81, was invited to eat with Ottoman soldiers camped at Gran on the Danube, the meal consisted of small loaves of bread baked in hot ashes and a quarter of a chicken per person, stewed with onion.\textsuperscript{78}
When pressed for time or rations were short, however, common soldiers made do with quick and simple dishes such as yoghurt mixed with fresh bread or hardtack, or porridge made of roasted flour mixed with butter and spices. Seamen made a porridge from crumbled hardtack topped with fried onions. This dish, known as paçamora, from the Catalan masçamorro, was common to seamen throughout the Mediterranean.

Soldiers who died in action were commemorated after the battle by their comrades, who cooked a type of flour helva called gaziler helvası (warriors’ helva) and recited prayers for the souls of the departed. This helva is first mentioned in a poem by the mystic poet Kaygusuz Abdal (d. 1444) in the early fifteenth century, and the earliest recipe is found in a sixteenth-century miscellany. In 1900 an Ottoman infantry lieutenant described the preparation of gaziler helvası by a platoon of soldiers in the field. After melting 18 kg of clarified butter in a cauldron, two soldiers added the flour slowly while another stirred with a large wooden spoon. When this was sufficiently cooked, boiled sugar or honey syrup was added.

After the janissary corps was disbanded in 1826, the modernized army was provided with rations and soldiers prepared their own food in the field. The English army surgeon John Netten Radcliffe (1826–1884), who served with the Ottoman army during the Crimean War, wrote that ‘the soldier of no other nation in Europe is so plentifully rationed as the Turkish soldier’ and recorded many interesting details about their diet and cooking methods, which were ‘singularly well adapted to a military life’. Soldiers used their rations of fresh meat, kavurma, rice, suet and vegetables such as onions, chickpeas and beans to make soups, stews and pilaf in tinned copper stew pans. These were placed over fires of wood or charcoal lit inside holes ‘about six inches in length, and five in breadth, formed like a horse-shoe, and dug into the side of a bank, or an enclosure of similar form and size, built up with clay and stones’. By this means, the food would cook slowly over a gentle heat and required a minimum of fuel. Radcliffe lamented that British soldiers in the same campaign not only had inadequate rations, but used impractical cooking methods that wasted both food and fuel. Each squad of ten Ottoman soldiers was also issued with a griddle, which they used to bake flatbread. Occasionally they also grilled small pieces of meat or intestine, threaded on skewers made of twigs.

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**Warrior’s Helva (Gaziler Helvası)**

- 400 dirhems (1,280 g) honey
- 200 dirhems (640 g) butter
- sufficient flour

Boil the butter and gradually add the flour until it becomes a paste. Add blanched almonds and stir over a low heat until the almonds turn golden brown. If no almonds are added then the signs that the helva is cooked are the aroma and the bubbles that appear when you take up some in the spoon.

Then bring a skimmed syrup of sugar or honey to the boil and tip it all at once onto the cooked flour and butter, blend well and take off the fire. After it has cooled, crumble it in the hand. It will be a fine white colour.
In 1900 an Ottoman infantry lieutenant, Mahmud Nedim bin Tosun, published a cookery book written for fellow officers who were posted away from home and needed to cook their own meals. If they could not roll out pastry themselves, he advised, they should ask a private soldier, and suggested that a spur could serve as a pastry wheel.88

Giving feasts to troops, whether on the eve of battle, at the outset of a campaign or to celebrate a conquest, was a way of boosting morale and cementing group identity.89 After the conquest of Istanbul, the army feasted for three days and nights, served in person by Sultan Mehmed II wearing an apron.90 One such feast, given before the attack on Uyvar Castle (now in Slovakia), was made up of three hundred sheep and fifty cattle, roasted whole, three thousand chickens, fifty cauldrons of pilaf, fifty cauldrons of zerde, soup, and 200,000 loaves of bread. Live hares and pigeons were placed inside the roasted cattle, and the surprise when they rushed out added to the festive atmosphere.91 Sweet dishes were particularly important at such banquets because of their associations with good fortune, as well as being luxuries that ordinary soldiers rarely enjoyed. When the army set out on campaign in 1635, the banquet served to the troops included sweet pastries made with more than a tonne each of honey and butter.92 In 1802 the army’s return from fighting Napoleon in Egypt was celebrated with a three-day feast in Istanbul.93

Feasts given by the sultan to the janissaries were often of the type known as yağma, literally meaning ‘plunder’, because the copper dishes were laid out on the ground and the soldiers raced over and seized them. This was an enactment of the idea that, as his personal troops, the janissaries had the right to seize the sultan’s own food. In 1560 Busbecq observed this custom in its original form at the military encampment at Üsküdar, on the eastern shore of the Bosphorus, when the janissaries snatched food from Süleyman I’s own table:

Presently those whose duty it was brought the Sultan’s dinner; when, lo and behold! the Janissaries laid hands upon the dishes and seized all the food and ate it up amid great merriment and gaiety. This privilege is allowed by ancient custom as part of the festivity of the occasion, and the Sultan’s wants were provided for from elsewhere. I returned to Constantinople much delighted by the spectacle.94

Yağma feasts for janissaries were a tradition at royal circumcision celebrations, such as those for the two young sons of Mehmet IV in 1675, when 15,000 copper dishes of pilaf and zerde and hundreds of spit-roasted sheep were laid out. At a signal given by a palace official, the stampede to grab the food began.95 A yağma feast was also given on the days when the janissaries collected their three-monthly salaries. Palace servants laid six hundred copper dishes filled with food

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**Pilaf as Cooked by Turkish Soldiers**

The rice having been boiled in water until softened, the superfluous fluid is poured off, and the grains are fully distended by exposure to a gentle heat. Then boiling sheep’s tail fat or butter is poured over the rice, and mixed with it. The proportion of fat or butter in a pilaf should be sufficient to sheath each particle of rice.87
on the ground, and at a signal the janissaries raced to these dishes, seized them and returned to their places under the arcade on the southeast side of the Second Courtyard to eat their meal.96

Following a successful campaign against the Cossacks in 1657, a series of Ottoman-style yağma feasts for the Tatar troops was given by the Ottoman commander Melek Ahmet Paşa. These were composed of roasted meat (five hundred sheep, fifty cattle and twenty horses), ten cauldrons of boiled mutton, ten cauldrons of pilaf, ten cauldrons of zerde, ten cauldrons of rice soup and ten cauldrons of herise, served in 17,000 copper dishes with 50,000 loaves of bread.97
Cooking pots, cooking trays, serving dishes and dining trays were almost exclusively made of copper. Probate inventories show that copperware constituted a very high proportion of the kitchen equipment and tableware owned by most families, and for low-income families copper pots and pans were among their most valuable possessions. Copperware was therefore used as a guarantee against loans and to ensure that corvée duties were performed. When a caravan was expected to pass through lonely districts, men from the nearest village were obliged by law to stand guard against bandit attacks, and to ensure they did not shirk this duty the authorities confiscated the family copperware for 24 hours.

When preparing meals for large numbers on special occasions like weddings, families often borrowed cooking pans from their neighbours. One of the traditional humorous stories about Nasreddin Hoca relates how one day he borrowed a large pot from his neighbour and the next day returned it with a small pot inside. ‘What is that for?’ asked the neighbour. ‘Your pot gave birth,’ explained Nasreddin. Apparently satisfied with this explanation, the neighbour took both pots and went away. Some time later Nasreddin again borrowed the large pot from his neighbour, but days passed and he did not return it. When finally the neighbour asked for the pot, Nasreddin replied that it had died. ‘How can a pot die?’ demanded the man. ‘And how can a pot give birth?’ Nasreddin retorted.

The borrowing of copper pots and dishes was not restricted to the poor. People of all classes would need to borrow additional utensils for the hundreds of guests invited to weddings and circumcisions. Philanthropists sometimes made endowments to provide these free of charge, as in the case of Kara Mustafa Paşa (1634–1683), who paid for large quantities of cauldrons, ladles, trays and bowls for the use of guilds at their annual feasts. In the city of Balıkesir, such copperware was marked with the name of the foundation and a bird motif to make it easily recognizable. Even the palace borrowed tableware from charities of this kind or from imarets when particularly large numbers of people were fed, on special occasions such as religious festivals, victory celebrations or circumcision festivities. Some trade guilds had their own stocks of copper cooking equipment and tableware for their annual feasts, and in 1573 the palace borrowed extra tableware from the guild of leatherworkers. The guild of goldsmiths was particularly well equipped because as a young prince, Sultan Süleyman I had been apprenticed to a Greek goldsmith named Constantine in the city of Trabzon, and after succeeding to the
throne donated 10,000 lidded copper dishes, five hundred cauldrons, pans and other copperware to the guild, together with a building containing workshops, a bath house and mosque. It was customary when an apprentice was promoted to journeyman and a journeyman to master for them to donate a piece of copperware to the guild, engraved with their name and that of their master.

Since eating and drinking from silver or gold vessels was regarded as impious, even those who possessed such pieces sometimes avoided their use, as in the case of the sixteenth-century high admiral Sinan Paşa. Instead, the rich often used copperware, which resembled silver when freshly tinned. This may have been one reason for the frequent re-tinning that took place in grand households, although its principal function was the prevention of copper poisoning. The Ottoman technique of tinning interested European travellers, as shown by this detailed early account by the sixteenth-century German traveller Hans Dernschwam:

The dishes are first rubbed well with sand, then placed on a trivet over a hot fire. The tinner rubs a rod of tin over the inside of the dish, then strews it with salammoniac while turning the dish with pincers. He then removes the dish from the fire and burnishes it with cotton. So the copper dish is brightly tinned, shining as if it were plated with silver. Finally the master tinner places it in water to cool.

Other foreign visitors remarked on the quality of Ottoman tinning, which employed pure tin rather than a mixture of tin and lead as in Europe. The French traveller Joseph Pitton de Tournefort (1656–1708) observed that the tinning was done ‘very neatly’ and that the tin ‘adheres to the copper so well, that their vessels do not lose it so easily as ours.’ Istanbul had 106 tinning shops in the seventeenth century, and the beards of elderly tanners were tinted green and blue from absorbing copper over the years.

The wide variety of Ottoman kitchen equipment included pots, pans and trays designed for cooking particular types of dish, such as lamb, stew, helva and baklava. Probate inventories list even such minor items as strainers and trivets, giving a fairly detailed picture of the utensils used over the centuries. From cookery books we learn of others, such as a hooked utensil used when stuffing mackerel to remove the flesh without damaging the skin, and fritter pans with seven hollows used for making mürver (savory fritters of eggs with various vegetables or minced meat). Cast brass pastry cutters were multifunctional items combining a notched pastry wheel for cutting börek and baklava, and a semi-circular hollow base at the other end of the handle, used for cutting out circles of pastry. A nineteenth-century Ottoman cookery book for housewives gives a list of over forty different utensils required for food preparation in a middle-class kitchen, some of which came in several types, such as graters with holes of various shapes and sizes for quinces, cheese, ‘fine things’, radishes and onions, and pestles and mortars made of different materials depending on the foods for which they were used.

In the early Ottoman period, meals for up to ten people would be laid on circular leather dining mats about 1.2 metres in diameter. In 1489 a new dining mat
made for Sultan Bayezit II consisted of twelve pieces of leather sewn together and lined with thick felt. This would almost certainly have been embroidered, as were most dining mats used by the wealthy classes. From the sixteenth century onwards the upper classes ate around dining trays made of copper, brass, silver or painted wood, set on low, collapsible stands that were octagonal or hexagonal in shape and inlaid with ivory and mother-of-pearl. Beneath the stands, leather dining mats continued to be spread over the rush mats or carpets to protect them from spills. No tablecloths were used, but sometimes a cloth with embroidered or painted designs was laid over the leather floor mat. At feasts for large numbers of people, only the most distinguished guests were seated around circular trays, while the rest sat around long rectangular dining mats.

When the Ottoman governor of Buda, Yahyapaşazade Mehmed Paşa, gave a banquet for a visiting Hungarian delegation in 1545, he and the envoys ate at two circular dining trays while the members of their retinues ate around a rectangular floor mat.

Each hot dish was placed on a padded and embroidered leather table mat. When rectangular dining mats were used, multiple dishes of the same foods were placed at intervals.

Table napkins embroidered at each end were presented to each guest to protect their clothes. One end was draped over the right shoulder and the other over the chest and thighs. A second, smaller napkin was given to wipe the fingers. Sometimes, instead of individual napkins, a single napkin over 6 metres in length was laid across the laps of all the diners seated around the dining tray. A long napkin of this type with wide bands of silver and gold embroidery at each end could cost as much as 120 kuruş in 1673 – a huge sum when compared with the price of one kuruş for a book in the same period. Servants in grand houses were able to fling these long napkins so that they fell in a circle around the dining tray. The British chaplain Robert Walsh observed this display of skill performed by his host’s son when he was invited to dinner with an Ottoman official in the town of Lefke, near İzni̇k, in the 1830s:

The young man stood up, took a cloth from a servant, and with a dexterous fling spread it in
a circle on the floor; in the centre of this he placed a joint stool, and on the stool a large metal tray. We were now motioned to approach, and having sat cross-legged on the floor round the stool, we drew the skirt of the cloth over our knees, while servants brought embroidered napkins and laid one on each of our shoulders.36

Turkish embroidered napkins became popular in Europe in the late nineteenth century, when they were exported in huge quantities for use as antimacassars.37 During the First World War and its aftermath, when poverty forced many Ottoman families to sell off anything of value in order to buy food, these napkins were exported ‘by the shipload’ to America, along with Turkish copperware.38

Spoons were the only item of cutlery used at table, varying in shape and size depending on whether they were for soup, pilaf, stewed fruit or milk pudding. Pilaf spoons had tapering oval bowls, while those for soup and stewed fruit were hemispherical.39 Small triangular spoons were used for ground rice pudding (muhallebi), oval spoons for fruit preserves, and other special spoons whose shape is unknown for eggs and bone marrow.40 Ordinary families used only wooden spoons, sometimes decorated with painted designs or inlaid coloured beads. These were given a smooth, glossy finish with several layers of varnish made from juniper or pine resin mixed with linseed oil. This varnish did not react with food and lasted for many years so long as the spoons were not left to soak in hot water.41 Wealthy families used wooden spoons carved from ebony, fruit woods like arbutus, horn, tortoiseshell or ivory, and handles were ornamented with coral, mother-of-pearl, silver, gold or precious stones. In the seventeenth century, exotic spoons made in India

Ottoman spoons made of ivory, tortoiseshell, ebony and coral.
from the yellow and red beak of a tropical bird sold in Istanbul for a sum equivalent to £30 at the time.\textsuperscript{42} Silver spoons were avoided not just for religious reasons, but because when used for hot food they heated up too quickly and could burn the mouth.\textsuperscript{43}

At one time, an entire section of the Covered Bazaar in Istanbul was devoted to the spoon makers, and the gate nearest them was called Spoon Makers’ Gate. Wooden spoons were often inscribed with maxims in the form of couplets, three examples of which are given below:\textsuperscript{44}

\begin{quote}
I could find no faithful friend in the world, 
He I thought a friend turned out to be a foe.

Our own hovel is better than another’s shining palace, 
Our tarhana soup is better than another’s delicious dishes.

Salt can do nothing for a flavourless dish, 
Advice can do nothing for a brainless head.
\end{quote}

Only wealthy families could afford porcelain or silver tableware. The seventeenth-century statesman Defterdar Mehmed Paşa owned hundreds of Chinese celadon and porcelain dishes as well as silver dining trays, serving dishes, bowls and ewers, and gold-embroidered napkins.\textsuperscript{45} Ömer Paşa, governor of the cities of Malatya and Maraş in the late eighteenth century, also owned large amounts of silverware, including sixteen coffee pots, fifteen water bowls, two soup bowls, three ewers, fourteen spoons, five rose-water sprinklers and three mugs.\textsuperscript{46} The use of silver tableware rose in the nineteenth century, probably under European influence, and during this period the trousseaus of rich Ottoman brides included silver sherbet jugs and cups for serving guests when the Nativity poem of the Prophet was being recited; coffee jugs and matching chafing dishes for keeping coffee hot; services for presenting fruit preserves to guests (comprising goblets, spoons, spoon holders, bowls and tray); ewer and basin sets for hand washing at meals; dining trays; and layered dinner carriers for picnics.\textsuperscript{47}

Chinese blue-and-white porcelain was being exported to Western Asia in the second half of the fourteenth century and began to influence Ottoman ceramics in the first half of the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{48} Much of this export porcelain was specifically designed for dining practices in the Islamic world, as in the case, for example, of large serving dishes holding sufficient food for up to ten people, and ewer and basin sets for ablutions.\textsuperscript{49} An Ottoman delegation that travelled to China in 1506 was presented with two porcelain bowls bearing Arabic inscriptions as a gift for the sultan from the Zhengde Emperor (r. 1505–21, Ming dynasty), showing how carefully the Chinese researched their prospective markets.\textsuperscript{50}

As well as blue-and-white ware, the Ottomans imported large quantities of celadon, a type of heavy stoneware with a green or yellow glaze\textsuperscript{51} that was believed to change colour or crack upon contact with poisoned food. In 1600 Simon Simonius, chief physician to Archduke Maximilian III of Austria, obtained a celadon dish that had belonged to the Ottoman governor of Buda in Hungary, and wrote to his kinsman in Leipzig:

I have sent a Dish of precious China, which was found among other Things in a Chest of the Basha of Buda, who is now a Prisoner at Vienna. The Turks drink Water, Sherbet, and other
Broths out of it, because by a sudden Alteration and Change in its Transparency, it is supposed to discover, and powerfully to resist Poyson. I shall not exchange it for a Vessel of Silver of the same Weight, for I am certain it is pure and genuine, and not in the least adulterated, which is very probable, because used by so illustrious a Person among the Turks.  

Consequently, celadon was far more expensive than porcelain. In the second half of the sixteenth century a small cup of Chinese celadon sold for seven or eight ducats in Istanbul, and in 1675 John Covel noted that a single celadon dish could cost as much as 200 thalers (equivalent to around £4,000 today): 

They call the mettal of them Martabani; they are very dear and much heavier (in proportion) than China, which they call Phorphore; their platters, which they call Taback, or Martabani, are worth some of them 200 dollars. China is not half so dear here; your little sherbet cups and coffee dishes are made often times of the same earth; they ring like a bell; the earth is darkish, but the outside glazed colour is greenish. 

The high value of porcelain and celadon meant that vessels were not thrown away if cracked or broken, but instead mended by craftsmen called filcân kinedcisi (cup stapler). Porcelain that was already cracked when it arrived from China found ready buyers, as demonstrated by a list of retail prices for the year 1640: porcelain coffee cups fetched 22 akçe if undamaged, 14 akçe with a single crack, and 10 akçe with a double crack. Even at the palace, damaged porcelain was not thrown away but instead chips and cracks were concealed by decorative metal mounts.

With blue-and-white chinaware in such high demand, local Ottoman potters in the city of İznik set about imitating blue-and-white porcelain in the second half of the fifteenth century. Using clay containing a high proportion of kaolin and some frit, they fired their vessels at a temperature of 1,260ºC (2,300ºF), close to that used for porcelain, resulting in a white hard-paste ware. They also developed a brilliant clear glaze that was applied over blue-and-white decoration that initially imitated Yuan and Ming porcelain. Gradually, a distinctive Ottoman style of decoration evolved, consisting of bold, exuberant designs influenced by Ottoman textiles, book illumination and calligraphic compositions, executed in vivid shades of turquoise, cobalt blue, coral red and emerald green. In the second half of the sixteenth century, naturalistic flower designs typical of classical Ottoman art were used to decorate İznik pottery. Dernschwam visited İznik at this time and recorded that an entire street in the town was filled with pottery shops, where large numbers of potters produced brightly coloured and gilded dishes, bowls, ewers, jugs and other vessels. 

Archive records show that forms included compote bowls, yoghurt bowls, pickle bowls, salad dishes, sweetmeat and dessert bowls, helva plates, small bowls for
individual servings of soft puddings like _pelete_, clotted cream dishes, oval dishes large enough for a whole lamb, cups and saucers, and storage jars.60

The best-quality local pottery could sometimes fetch higher prices than chinaware, as illustrated by a probate inventory dated 1623, in which a Kütahya plate is valued at 500 akçe, compared to 150 akçe for a piece of Chinese porcelain.61 The use of decoration that appealed to Ottoman tastes, as well as the high quality of the paste and glaze, must have kept prices buoyant, and demand was so high that in the mid-seventeenth century Istanbul had a hundred shops selling pottery made in İznik and Kütahya.62

One of the most interesting items of Ottoman kitchen equipment are ceramic lemon squeezer by the potters of Kütahya in the eighteenth century. The existence of a fourteenth-century Seljuk example shows that these must have been used over the intervening centuries, although none are known to have survived. Ottoman lemon squeezer are so rare that in 2013 one sold at auction for £16,250. Though similar in form to the bowl-shaped plastic lemon squeezer familiar today and for which they may have been the prototype, they were more ingenious. Once the bowl was full there was no need to stop and pour out the juice, because a siphon system concealed inside the central dome caused the juice to flow from an aperture in the bottom as soon as it reached a critical level. This hydraulic mechanism, used by Islamic scientists since the eighth century, came to light when the art historian John Carswell had one of the Kütahya lemon squeezer X-rayed.63

Exports of İznik ceramics to Venice began in the fifteenth century,64 and from the late sixteenth century İznik ware found its way to England.65 Thomas İznik ware tankard, c. 1575–80. İznik ware plate, c. 1570–75.
Winspear, a freeman of the Mercers’ Company, is known to have possessed an İznik dining service in the 1660s. When demand outstripped supply in the early sixteenth century, Venetian potters began producing imitations of İznik ware described as maiolica alla Turchesca. Ottoman-style designs popularized by Venetian potters were carried to northern Europe, where they were imitated and adapted by Dutch potters, and spread to England in the seventeenth century.

Local Ottoman ceramic production declined from the late seventeenth century onwards, unable to compete with increasing imports of, first, Chinese porcelain and then, from the 1730s, Meissen and other European porcelain. The earliest Ottoman order from the Meissen factory in 1732 was for 24,000 coffee cups. Like the Chinese before them, European factories produced porcelain ware specially designed for the Ottoman market, one early example being a Meissen coffee cup made in 1756 bearing the Turkish inscription ‘May God give health to he who drinks.’

Ottoman glassmaking thrived in the sixteenth century, but thereafter fell behind the rapid developments in glassmaking technology and decorative techniques being used in Venice. Glassware such as lidded glass goblets for water, sherbet and sweetmeats was imported from Venice and Poland in the seventeenth century, and later from Bohemia, France and England. In an attempt to improve the quality of Ottoman glass, crystal glassmakers were hired from France during the reign of Sultan Mahmud I (r. 1730–54), and around 1800 a Mevlevi dervish named Mehmed Dede was sent to Italy to study glassmaking. At a new glass works established in Beykoz, on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus, in the early nineteenth century, Venetian, Bohemian and French glassmakers were employed to produce crystal, opaline and colour-twist glass, and these works became the seed of Turkey’s modern glass industry.

European crystal glass was particularly esteemed by the Ottoman elite, who purchased it in large quantities. Starting in the eighteenth century they also began to acquire European tea sets and sets of knives, forks and spoons, reflecting the increased European influence during this period. Initially, their use was restricted to entertaining foreign guests, as on 29 October 1799, when British officers invited...
aboard the Ottoman flagship, the Sultan Selim, were entertained by the high admiral with tea à l’Anglaise, out of an elegant and superb tea equipage. James Ellsworth de Kay ate dinner with the Ottoman naval commander of the port in 1831, and wrote, ‘We found the dinner served up in as handsome style as it has ever been our lot to witness in Europe or America. The knives, forks, and plates were of English manufacture, and of the most costly kind; the table was set off by cut glass of exquisite workmanship.’

By the second half of the nineteenth century, fashionable Istanbul homes possessed tea sets, knives and forks, soda siphons, tablecloths, French-style saucepans and jelly moulds. A cookery book published in 1882 included diagrams for setting both traditional and European-style tables.
FOURTEEN

Water and Sherbet

Water was the principal drink of all Ottomans, rich or poor, and the flavour of water from different springs was discussed as seriously as wines in other countries. Fynes Moryson, who travelled through Turkey in 1596 and 1597, noted that when Turks travelled they sought out a place to pitch their tents next to fountains or streams, ‘which they no lesse know, or as curiously search out, as we doe the best Innes or Tavernes . . . not omitting to taste a good spring of water, no more then we would a peece of rare Wine’. An American born in Istanbul in 1875 wrote that the Turkish connoisseur of water ‘calls for the product of his favourite spring as might a Westerner for a special vintage, and he can tell when an inferior brand is palmed off on him’. The importance attached to drinking water was also noted by Sir Henry Woods, an English naval officer who served for many years in the Ottoman navy:

The water-drinking Turk has a very fine discriminating palate as regards that fluid, and can tell at once, upon taking up a glass of it, the spring from which it has come. Those wealthy enough to afford the expense, have, when away from Constantinople, barrels of it sent to them daily, even to considerable distances.

In folk belief, the first rain of April was considered beneficial for the health and a source of prosperity and good fortune. The poet Nefî (1572–1635) spoke of the ‘abundance brought by April rain’. Palace pages collected this rain in crystal glass bottles each year and presented it to the sultan, who rewarded them with a substantial gift of money. Five bottles of April rain recorded in the probate records for a middle-class Ottoman gentleman who died in Buda in 1588 were probably used, as they are still in some parts of Turkey today, for drinking, adding to yoghurt or sprinkling over food.

While the state was responsible for major infrastructural projects for water provision in cities, thousands of public fountains were built in villages, towns and at the wayside by private individuals as an act of charity. The finest were richly carved with ornamental motifs and inscriptions such as ‘By water all things have life.’ One English visitor compared Ottoman fountains to European statuary, adding, ‘with the difference that most fountains are beautiful or interesting’. One of the most famous of Istanbul’s fountains was Ayrılık Çeşmesi (Fountain of Departure), located at a spot near the sea on the Asian side of the city, where travellers and pilgrims filled their flasks and bade farewell to family and friends who had come to see them off on
their long journey. Once on the road, travellers could obtain fresh water from roadside fountains supplied by springs or cisterns where rainfall collected. In the seventeenth century Jean-Baptiste Tavernier recorded that such cisterns were built by philanthropists, and that if they dried up in times of drought, villagers brought water for travellers:

There is one thing remarkable in this Road as in many others, which manifests the Charity of the Turks. For in most of the high Roads, that are far from Rivers, they have set up Cisterns, whither when the Rains fail, the neighbouring Villages bring Water for the Travellers, who would otherwise be very much distressed.9

Vendors of free drinking water were a frequent sight in cities, carrying ‘good and alwayes freshe water in certaine bottels, of the which they give to everye one demaunding for the same, freely and gladlye for the which dutifull good will and worke of mercye’.10 This free distribution of water was financed by legacies, as described by Baron Wenceslas Wratislaw in the sixteenth century: ‘Many in their last wills give directions for this, and appoint perpetual wages for persons who
Calligraphic picture of a ewer, c. 1815.
serve in this manner. The same custom was recorded in the early eighteenth century by the French traveller Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, who wrote,

Even they who have but a moderate fortune, leave something after their death, to maintain a man to give water in the summer-heats to drink to passengers, as they go along by the place where they are bury’d.  

Other charitable bequests were made to provide snow to cool fountain water during the summer months. At Yeni Mosque in Istanbul, water chilled with snow was distributed from the mosque’s drinking water fountain (sebilane). People commonly kept pitchers of water outside their doors for passers-by to quench their thirst, a custom that continued into the second half of the twentieth century in some rural areas. In the 1970s in the countryside near Bodrum, for example, local people were still placing pottery jars of water for passers-by in niches in the dry stone walls bordering lanes. The water was kept refreshingly cool even in the hottest weather by slight evaporation through the porous clay.

Public works for water provision were on an immense scale. Süleyman I spent such large sums on expanding and improving Istanbul’s water system that his chief architect, Mimar Sinan, said of a new aqueduct, ‘In place of water we poured gold and silver into its construction.’ In 1833 an American who examined Istanbul’s water system estimated that it could not be built for less than $50 million at current prices, observing that New York was still not provided with a clean water supply:

After a deliberate survey of the various hydraulic contrivances for supplying Constantinople with water, one is at a loss to know which to admire most, the native good sense which pointed out the necessity and importance of furnishing the capital and its suburbs with pure and wholesome water, the ingenuity displayed in conquering almost invincible obstacles, or that wise and liberal economy which considers no expense too enormous, no sacrifices to great, in comparison with the health and comfort of the people. The various water-courses about Constantinople must exceed 50 miles in length, and the expenses of the various reservoirs and aqueducts could not have been less than 50 millions of dollars. With a single remark we shall conclude our observations.
on the subject. The city of New-York, with a population of more than 200,000 inhabitants, has been deliberating for years over the question – whether it is expedient to spend two millions of dollars for the purpose of introducing a copious supply of pure and wholesome water.\textsuperscript{15}

In 1858 Baronne Durand de Fontmagne drew a similar comparison with the poor water supply of Paris,\textsuperscript{16} and the well-travelled parson Nathanael Burton wrote in the 1830s, ‘no country which I have visited exceeds it in the excellence of its water, and the attention the inhabitants pay to the erection of fountains and their preservation.’\textsuperscript{17}

While admiring the water supply, however, many visitors were at a loss to understand the Turkish fondness for water. No one, they concluded, would drink water unless compelled to do so, and most attributed this strange habit to the Islamic ban on alcohol. William Grelot wrote in the seventeenth century,

\begin{quote}
Were not Wine forbidden by their Law, it would have been a much greater convenience, and an act of higher Charity to have erected so many Taverns near the Tombs of the Dead, where the Living might have drank the Founders Health in good Wine.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

\textbf{AFTER WATER, THE PRINCIPAL} beverage was sherbet, which was made in scores of flavours using fruit juices, spices and flowers, often with the addition of rose water.\textsuperscript{19} In its simplest form it consisted of grape molasses or honey mixed with water,\textsuperscript{20} while at the other end of the scale were luxury sherbets made from flowers such as violets or water lilies and flavoured with expensive aromatics like musk or ambergris. Sherbet was chilled with ice in summer, and in winter hot spiced sherbets were sold in the streets.\textsuperscript{21}

No cups or glasses for either water or sherbet were provided at meals. At banquets, servants carrying sherbet in leather containers filled a goblet for those who requested a drink and took it away when they had finished. The English ambassador William Hareborne related that diners were presented with sherbet made of rose water, sugar and spices at a palace banquet on 24 April 1583, before his audience with Murad III (r. 1574–95).\textsuperscript{22}

Sherbets were originally medicinal drinks made palatable by the addition of honey or sugar, and continued to be valued for their curative properties after they evolved into beverages drunk primarily for enjoyment. They were recommended for various illnesses and regarded as necessary for preserving health by improving the appetite, acting as a laxative or being good for digestion, blood or the nerves.\textsuperscript{23}
The early fifteenth-century physician Ali Çelebi bin Şerif of Bursa described a large number of sherbets not found in earlier works on Islamic medicine which were evidently intended primarily as beverages. These include pomegranate, lemon, emblic myrobalan, violet, tamarind, plum, myrtle, fig, lily, mint, honey, rose, bitter orange, winter cherry, apple, quince and mulberry sherbets that mark a shift of emphasis from medicinal to culinary consumption. Sherbets became an inherent element of Ottoman gourmet culture. Those made for Sultan Mehmed II in the second half of the fifteenth century were made from luxury ingredients such as coconut, rose water, musk and ambergris, and served in bowls of Chinese porcelain.

When Sultan Mehmed IV was camped with his army at Edirne in August 1676, he was accompanied by his chief sherbet maker, who had a tent to himself equipped with bowls, snow and spring water. He offered a cup of the sultan’s sherbet to John Covel, who recorded in his diary that it was the finest he had ever tasted.

In hot weather, sherbet was chilled using snow collected during the winter. This became packed solid and when summer came was cut into large slabs and carried to towns and cities for sale. It was available in such abundance that according to one Spanish observer in the mid-sixteenth century, shops selling snow were ‘as numerous as butchers’, and since it melted quickly in hot weather it was sold at a price affordable even by the poor. In the late sixteenth century Leonhart Rauwolf remarked that sherbets were ‘sold in their great bazars, where they have baskets full of ice and snow all the summer long, whereof they put so much into the drink that it maketh their teeth chatter and quake again.’

People of all classes drank such immense quantities of sherbet that in the seventeenth century in Istanbul alone there were three hundred street vendors of sherbet. They carried the sherbet in a leather container ‘distended like bagpipes’ that was fitted with a brass tap and hung by a strap over the shoulder. In the late Ottoman period these containers began to be made of copper, which is the type still seen today in towns where the custom continues. Vendors served the sherbet in cups or glasses kept in a curved case strapped to their waist.

At more elaborately equipped sherbet stalls and shops a selection of sherbets in various flavours was kept in ceramic jars. These were poured into tinned copper bowls to which the vendor added some snow, sliced with a knife from a slab standing on the counter. Sherbet sellers advertised their wares by devices consisting of thin plates of metal struck by a jet of falling water to produce a tinkling sound that attracted the attention of passers-by. An eighteenth-century illustration of a sherbet stall shows the vendor pulling on a rope to operate the mechanism.

Offering sherbet to guests was part of Ottoman hospitality rituals, and it was served on all kinds of special occasions, including weddings, circumcisions and the Christian festival of All Souls’ Day. Sherbet
Sherbet vendor’s stall in the 16th century. The block of packed snow on a small stand at the front of the counter was used to chill the cups of sherbet.
Sherbet vendor's stall in the early 19th century. Water dripping from the vessel suspended from the roof of the stall turned metal vanes, which emitted a chiming sound.
made at the palace was served to the congregation of Sultan Ahmed Mosque after the Mevlid (Nativity hymn) was sung on the birthday of the Prophet, and Ayşe Osmanoğlu, the daughter of Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909), recalled iced sherbets made of redcurrant, pomegranate and lemon with mint being served in the imperial harem following the same ceremony. Hot spiced sherbet dyed with cochineal was given to new mothers to help them recuperate, and the birth was announced by sending jugs of the same sherbet to the homes of relatives and friends. Pilgrims were welcomed home with sherbet served with small unsweetened biscuits called hacı lokumu (pilgrim’s morsels).

Like water, sherbet was sometimes distributed gratis, as an act of charity. One of the most notable examples is the honey sherbet distributed to the congregation of Yenicami Mosque during Ramazan following the late evening teravih prayers. This was paid for by a pious endowment established by Mehmed IV’s mother Hatice Turhan Sultan (c. 1627–1683), who specified that it should be made of Athens honey and no other, however high the price. It was prepared daily from 42 kilograms of honey, and distributed by six sherbet vendors hired for the month.

One of the first Europeans to describe Ottoman sherbet was Bartholomew Georgevitz, who in 1537 wrote that it was made of honey, sugar or grape syrup diluted with water, the latter being regarded as fit only for servants. A more detailed account was given in 1553 by the French botanist Pierre Belon, who explained that ‘Some are made of figs, others of plums, and of pears and peaches, others again of apricots and of grapes, yet others of honey’, and went on to describe how they were cooled with snow and ice stored in
special structures that were among the ‘singularities to be observed in Turkey’.\textsuperscript{46}

The fashion for Turkish sherbet in Europe began in Venice around the middle of the sixteenth century. In 1577, news of this exotic drink reached Florence and Francesco I de’ Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany (r. 1574–87), wrote to Maffeo Veniero in Venice asking him to send recipes for ‘sorbette’ and other Turkish beverages.\textsuperscript{47} Within a few decades, news of sherbet, if not the drink itself, had reached England, where Francis Bacon (1561–1626) described the preserved sherbet mixes used to prepare it:

They have in Turkey and the East certain confections, which they call servets, which are like to candied conserves, and are made of sugar and lemons, or sugar and citrons, or sugar and violets, and some other flowers; and some mixture of amber for the more delicate persons: and those they dissolve in water, and thereof make their drink, because they are forbidden wine by their law.\textsuperscript{48}

Sherbet drinking became popular in England in the mid-seventeenth century, around the same time as coffee, and the sherbet concentrates that Bacon likened to ‘candied conserves’ began to be imported (see Chapter Nine). But by the nineteenth century, English vendors had devised a cheap substitute made with lemon essence, cream of tartar, sugar and bicarbonate of soda (inspired by the fashion for fizzy drinks), and eventually the powder stopped being made into a drink at all and was eaten by children as the sweet that is still known in Britain today as sherbet.\textsuperscript{49}

Sherbet mixes in the form of syrups, pastes or tablets were prepared by Ottoman housewives and confectioners when each fruit or flower was in season.\textsuperscript{50} Some were specially prepared for the Ottoman sultan in distant parts of the empire: limes, water lilies and tamarind in Egypt,\textsuperscript{51} rhubarb in Aleppo, roses in Edirne and barberries in the Balkans.\textsuperscript{52} “These kept indefinitely and were diluted as required. An Italian slave who served as a page at the Ottoman palace in the second half of the sixteenth century described the preparation of lemon sherbet from a ready-made paste:

This sherbet is made every year and preserved in great porcelain jars made specially. From these only a spoonful is taken at a time and put into a large cup of silver, glass or heavy crystal, because it is made as an electuary which, when diluted, becomes clear and looks just like wine. A great quantity of this is consumed in the Seraglio, for they give it to all the pashas and other officials of the Seraglio, except to the lower ranks, who are given diluted vinegar instead.\textsuperscript{53}

As well as being diluted with water, sherbet paste was eaten as a sweetmeat, as described by Friedrich Unger in his book on Ottoman confectionery, published in 1858: “A very soft type of scherbet (lohuk scherbet) is kept and presented in glass jars, out of which it is consumed with a spoon, served together with a glass of water, or alternatively directly mixed in with the water.”\textsuperscript{54}
Coffee and Coffee Houses

Ottoman pilgrims, itinerant dervishes and merchants who had picked up the coffee-drinking habit in Arabia or Egypt introduced coffee to Istanbul in the first half of the sixteenth century, and soon people were 'sipping of it all the day long.' After becoming established in the capital, coffee spread like wildfire, reaching as far as Hungary in 1579. Although the historian İbrahim Peçevî (1572–1650) wrote that the first coffee house opened in Istanbul in 1554, a poem written in 1551 referring to coffee houses as 'places of entertainment' shows that they were already familiar. Coffee itself was certainly known by 1543, when several ships carrying cargoes of coffee to Istanbul were holed and sunk in an attempt to prevent its consumption. The large quantities of these imports and the violent reaction from the authorities suggest that this coffee was destined not for private consumption but for public coffee houses.

As meeting places for people of all classes, coffee houses began to transform Ottoman social life. In 1585 the Venetian ambassador Gianfrancesco Morosini reported,

The favorite entertainment of all Turks, from the important men right down to the lowest of them, is to congregate in shops or on the streets and drink a black liquid called kahvè as boiling hot as they can stand it. They say it helps a man to stay awake.

Coffee houses offered a secular alternative to mosques as communal gathering places, causing a worried religious establishment to view them as a threat. Islamic scholars were divided into two camps: those who approved of coffee as a non-alcoholic beverage that kept the mind alert for study and prayer, and those who disapproved because it drew people to coffee houses, where they conversed on improper subjects, listened to lascivious poetry, played board games like chess and backgammon and neglected their prayers. Some anti-coffee clerics even argued that it was preferable to frequent taverns than coffeehouses, 'which are places of evil deeds.'

The government was equally concerned about goings-on in coffee houses, but for different reasons. They had become places where people exchanged ideas, discussed politics and criticized the authorities, and so were seen as potential hotbeds of political dissension. Orders for their closure, describing them as 'nestes of iniquity,' were issued with increasing frequency. Coffee houses in the city of Homs in Syria were closed...
down in 1559; in Aleppo, Damascus and Jerusalem in 1565; in Egypt in 1567; and in Istanbul in 1568. Measures continued to be taken to stop the supply of coffee, as illustrated by a letter to the şerif (title used by members of the local Hejaz dynasty who became vassals of the Ottomans from 1517) of Mecca in 1567 instructing him to prohibit the sale of coffee to pilgrims and merchants.

A ban was imposed on coffee houses in 1583 during the reign of Sultan Murad III, on the grounds that they were ‘places of scandalmongering’ and were also selling wine. In 1633 coffee was again banned, this time throughout the entire Ottoman Empire, by Sultan Murad IV, who saw coffee houses as having a role in the military intrigues and rebellions that beset the early part of his reign. But even this campaign, notorious for its severity, failed to deter hardened coffee drinkers. One contemporary scholar commented that pleasure-loving people were willing to die for the sake of a cup of coffee.

When coffee drinking spread to England in the mid-seventeenth century, coffee houses were similarly seen as a political threat. In 1675 King Charles II issued a proclamation demanding that coffee house owners ‘prevent and hinder all scandalous Papers, Books or Libels concerning the Government or the public Ministers There of, from being brought into his House, or to be there read, perus’d or divulged.’

Sporadic closures of coffee houses continued during periods of political instability, but as time went on the government came to rely more on spies to report on any dissident opinions discussed in coffee houses, merely closing down a few notable offenders as a warning to others. Many coffee houses were owned by janissaries, and following the abolition of the janissary corps in 1826, a total ban was imposed on all coffee houses in Istanbul apart from the most reputable, which were granted licences. To get around the new licensing law, the rest transformed themselves into barber shops, and carried on serving coffee behind wooden screens at the back. When the Scottish traveller Charles MacFarlane arrived in Istanbul in 1828 he was ‘much surprised to see the great scarcity of coffee-houses, which abound in Smyrna and in all the
Turkish towns I had visited, and was struck with a disproportionate frequency of barbers’ shops. Soon, all was back to normal, but barbers continued to occupy a corner of coffee houses, particularly those in suburbs and villages, well into the twentieth century.

Stamping out coffee houses was a losing battle. They quickly proved to be a lucrative form of investment, and some were opened by leading members of the ruling class, such as grand viziers Derviş Paşa (d. 1606) and Nasuh Paşa (d. 1616). At the end of the sixteenth century there were around six hundred in Istanbul, and by 1633 the total may have been even higher, since we know there were 120 in the suburb of Eyüp alone. The prohibition on coffee houses imposed by Murad IV that year did not affect the sale of coffee itself, and there were around three hundred shops selling coffee in Istanbul in 1638. Outside Istanbul the authorities seem to have been reluctant to impose the ban, since an English traveller found the country abounding with more coffee houses than Innes and Ale-houses with us’ in 1634, and an Ottoman traveller to the city of Bursa recorded in 1640 that there were 75 large coffee houses there, where the intelligentsia and men of quality gathered. There were 217 coffee houses in Damascus, and even small cities like İzmir and Beirut had dozens.

Coffee came to epitomize sociability and companionship, as expressed by the poet Seyyid Vehbi, who declared in 1720 that ‘among likeminded friends the best banquet is two cups of coffee and a pipe of strong tobacco.’ Socializing with friends was the prime attraction of coffee houses, as described by the French traveller Jean de Thévenot in the mid-seventeenth century:

There are many publick Coffee-houses, where it is boyld in great Kettles. All Men are free to go to these Houses, without any distinction of Religion or Quality; and it is no shame to go
thither, many resorting to them for Conversation. There is even without doors Stone Seats, covered with Mats, where those who would see those that pass by, and take the Air, sit ... When one is in a Coffee-house, and sees any of his acquaintance come in, if he be civil a la mode, he'll order the Master to take no money from them, and that with a single word; for when they present Coffee to them, he needs say no more to them but Giaba, that is to say Gratia.²⁹

Some Ottomans took a more cynical view, however. The sixteenth-century scholar Mustafa Ali complained that although wise men, dervishes and intellectuals went to coffee houses to enjoy friendly conversation, these places also attracted fools, lazy would-be poets and ignorant men who went there to gossip, malign and boast.³⁰ The historian İbrahim Peçevî (1572–1650) commented that one reason for their popularity was that they avoided the trouble and expense of inviting friends to one's home for dinner.³¹

The word ‘coffee’ derives from the Arabic kahwa, which originally meant wine, and indeed for Muslims coffee largely usurped the role of wine at social gatherings, just as coffee houses became an alternative to taverns. The similarity between coffee houses and taverns was noted by the English traveller George Sandys in 1610:

Although they be destitute of Taverns, yet have they their Coffa-houses, which something resemble them. There sit they chatting most of the day, and sip of a drink called Coffa (of the berry that it is made of) in little China dishes: as hot as they can suffer it: black as soot, and tasting not much unlike it.³²

When Sultan Süleyman I (r. 1520–66) closed down Istanbul’s taverns towards the end of his reign, a contemporary poet wrote despairingly that wine drinkers now had no choice but to drink coffee: ‘The jars are broken, the goblet is empty, wine is no more, / O what times have befallen us, we are enslaved to coffee.’³³ Another complained that by replacing wine, coffee had dealt a blow to conversation at gatherings of friends.³⁴ But some poets were on the side of coffee, such as Beliği, who in 1554 wrote that although the ‘black-faced’ coffee was not as beautiful as wine, yet its temperament was warm.³⁵

Different social groups and trades tended to congregate in particular coffee houses. In the city of Aydın, for example, intellectuals such as religious scholars and poets frequented one coffee house, while soldiers, merchants and members of certain trades gathered in others.³⁶ Their interior decoration reflected their clientele, as illustrated by a chandelier in the shape of a ship in a coffee house for sailors in Istanbul. This chandelier was set moving by a wire pulled by the proprietor so that it pitched and rolled as if sailing through heavy seas.³⁷ Coffee houses owned by janissaries always had a canary in a cage as a lucky mascot, presented as a gift by fellow members of their company.³⁸

Coffee houses catering for the wealthy were the most ornately decorated, as illustrated by a miniature painting dated 1610 showing tiled and painted walls, arched doorways and tracery at the windows.³⁹ Elegantly dressed customers are depicted drinking coffee out of china cups, reading, writing, playing draughts and mangala, and listening to an ensemble of musicians. The miniature gives an idea of the ‘very fair houses where this koffwey is sold’ seen by George Manwaring in Aleppo in the late sixteenth century.⁴⁰
The Anatolian city of Aydın had forty coffee houses with richly decorated ceilings, pools, fountains and windows overlooking flower gardens and orchards of lemon and bitter orange trees.41 Such coffee houses were evidently designed as a home-from-home for wealthy customers, and allowed the less well-off to enjoy luxurious surroundings to which they were unaccustomed.

The following description of an upmarket coffee house was written by Robert Walsh, who lived in Istanbul for several years in the early nineteenth century:

The caffinet, or coffee-house, is something more splendid, and the Turk expends all his notions of finery and elegance on this, his favourite place of indulgence. The edifice is generally decorated in a very gorgeous manner, supported on pillars, and open in front. It is surrounded on the inside by a raised platform, covered with mats or cushions, on which the Turks sit cross-legged. On one side are musicians, generally Greeks, with mandolins and tambourines, accompanying singers... In the centre of the room is generally an artificial fountain, bubbling and playing in summer, and round it vases of flowers, with piles of the sweet-scented melons of Cassaba, to keep them cool, and add, by their odour, to the fragrance of the flowers.42

At the other end of the scale were ramshackle summer coffee houses with pleasant views of the sea or countryside. Some of these consisted of no more than a wooden platform raised on stilts or a few stools scattered under the shade of a large tree.43 The spreading branches of a huge ancient plane tree on the Greek island of Kos provided shade for no fewer than three coffee houses.44

Murals and paintings by folk artists became common features of Ottoman coffee houses. In the village of Maito, on the European shore of the Dardanelles, the principal coffee house had ‘gay paintings of fruits and flowers’ covering the walls and ceilings,45 and Adolphus Slade described ‘highly coloured representations of ships, kiosks, gardens, etc., in which the fish are as large
as the ships, the men as tall as the houses.'

A coffee house in Adana was adorned with paintings representing scenes from the life of the early seventeenth-century minstrel and folk hero Köroğlu. Inscriptions were also common, often involving adages relating to coffee, such as, ‘It is not coffee the heart craves, nor the coffee house, but companionship,’ and, ‘There are forty years of memories in one cup of coffee.’

Coffee houses and itinerant coffee vendors were so thick on the ground that in 1874 Edmondo De Amicis related that ‘anywhere at all in Istanbul you just have to shout “Coffee” and in three minutes a cup will appear beside you.’ Every village had a coffee house, and others situated on lonely roads catered for passing travellers, who could spend the night there:

The coffee-houses in Turkey are the resting-places of benighted travellers, of houseless poor, of all in short who choose. The poor that sleep on the benches pay nothing, and have the chance of getting a bit of supper from richer occupants.

The place in a coffee house where the poor were allowed to sit or sleep was called the Allah kerim yeri (trust in God place). On the island of Tenedos, Turkish fishermen slept in local coffee houses, and some rural ones provided simple meals such as yoghurt with bread or fried eggs.

Often, a literate customer would read stories aloud to the gathered company – epic tales being the most popular – and this tradition continued into the nineteenth century. Coffee houses sometimes attracted customers with performances by professional entertainers, including musicians, folk minstrels, singers, dancers, storytellers and shadow puppeteers, particularly during Ramazan.

Storytellers were the stand-up artists of their day, imitating the accents of each character. They would break off at cliffhangers in the story to collect money from the audience in a large coffee cup, while musicians played songs to fill the interval.

In seventeenth-century Mecca, coffee house customers were traditionally entertained by troupes of Ethiopian dancing girls, and in 1676 John Covel was shocked by
the bawdy shadow plays and ‘lascivious dancing’ performed in the coffee houses he visited in the western Anatolian city of Manisa:

Then it was Ramazan, and they were all open till past midnight. Though they are so strict as neither eat nor drink all day, yet I perceived all is but a shew of piety, for here the greatest part of the night they spend here in seeing puppet plays and lascivious dancing and hearing most beastly bawdy songs; their puppets they expose not . . . but by the light of a candle shew their shadowes through a piece of tiffany or Trabezond cloth.⁶¹

Another form of coffee house entertainment was riddles, written in verse and hung on the wall with a tempting gift of money, a sword, a gun or a length of silk fabric placed above it to encourage competitors. The answer to the riddle was locked away by the proprietor until the contest to solve the riddle was held a few days later. The entertainment value lay not so much in discovering the answer to the riddle as in listening to the ingenious verses submitted to explain it. Composing riddles was a branch of literature originating in Iran that was practised by Ottoman scholars and poets from the fifteenth century on, and taken so seriously that treatises were written on the subject.⁶² Coffee houses were also venues for folk minstrels, who sang traditional sagas and held musical duels in which they recited improvised verses by turn.⁶³ The Hungarian folklorist and Turkokologist Ignácz Kúnos (1860–1945) gathered much of his source material in coffee houses, where the oral traditions of folk literature were perpetuated by performers and customers alike.⁶⁴

Although coffee houses continued to be contentious, the debate about coffee drinking itself was played out by 1592, when the head of the religious establishment, Şeyhülislâm Bostanzâde Mehmed Efendi (1536–1598), defended coffee in a fatwa composed in the form of 52 rhyming couplets, in which he declared, ‘The doubts that have been expressed about coffee are all empty hypocritical arguments.’⁶⁵ By the seventeenth century, coffee had become so entrenched in Ottoman culture that it was the principal gesture of hospitality. As one early seventeenth-century foreign traveller observed, ‘The usuall courtesie they bestow on their friends, who visite them is a Cup of Coffa.’⁶⁶ Coffee counted among the basic necessities in ordinary homes,⁶⁷ and the habit of drinking coffee immediately upon waking in the morning was so widespread that it gave its name to breakfast in the term kahvaltı, coined in the seventeenth century, which is still used for this meal in Turkish today. There is ‘no Man, Rich nor Poor, who drinks not at least two or three Dishes of it a day’, wrote Thévenot.⁶⁸

Any special occasion – whether a celebration of marriage, a circumcision, receiving a prospective
mother-in-law or welcoming pilgrims home from Mecca – was an excuse to drink coffee. In some Turcoman communities it was customary to prepare coffee when visiting family graves, and small stone hearths for this purpose can still be seen in village cemeteries. In a group of Turcoman villages in the Zamantı valley in Kayseri, many of the gravestones are carved with motifs representing coffee-making utensils such as coffee pots, cups, and pestle and mortars.69

At the palace, all kinds of ceremonial occasions involved coffee drinking, such as the start of the sucre procession carrying gifts to Mecca, recording salary payments to the janissaries, or the sailing of the imperial fleet.70 At the circumcision of Sultan Ahmed III’s sons in 1720, coffee was served both before and after dinner to honoured guests, and coffee tents were erected to serve the hundreds of less distinguished guests.71

Since coffee was a crucial part of official etiquette, high-ranking dignitaries needed large quantities of coffee cups and coffee-making equipment. When Abdurrahman Paşa died in 1768, the inventory of his estate listed a coffee maker’s tent, for use during journeys and campaigns, ninety porcelain coffee cups in boxes, four coffee cups made of rhinoceros horn (two with silver holders), one gold and 24 silver coffee cup holders, several coffee pots of different sizes, including one of silver and another gold plated, two copper coffee trays, and a coffee cloth used when presenting coffee to guests.72 Rişvanzade Ömer Paşa, who died in 1791 after serving as governor of Malatya and Maraş, also owned a large quantity of expensive coffee equipment, comprising one gold coffee cup holder studded with diamonds, four gold coffee cup holders, 73 silver coffee holders and eighteen silver coffee pots.73
Optimistic claims for coffee’s health-giving qualities may have enhanced its popularity, although the sixteenth-century Ottoman physician, mathematician and astronomer Davud of Antakya (d. 1599) listed harmful as well as beneficial properties in his treatise on coffee. He considered that sweetmeats should be eaten with coffee, and this medical opinion perhaps gave rise to the custom of serving sweetmeats before coffee.74

[Coffee] allayes the ebullition of the blood, is good against the small poxe and measles, and bloudy pimples; yet causeth vertiginous headheach, and maketh lean much, occasioneth waking, and the Emirods [hemarrhoids], and asswageth lust, and sometimes breeds melancholly. He that would drink it for livelinesse sake, and to discusse slothfulness, and the other properties that we have mentioned, let him use much sweet meates with it, and oyle of pistaccioes, and butter. Some drink it with milk, but it is an error, and such as may bring in danger of the leprosy.75

Coffee’s power to fend off sleep was the original reason why Sufis in Yemen began to drink coffee in around the thirteenth century, and this association with Sufi orders continued during the Ottoman period. From the seventeenth century onwards, many coffee houses in Istanbul were opened by retired janissaries, who were affiliated to the Bektaşi Sufi order. At the ceremony held when a new coffee house was opened, a Bektaşi dervish recited prayers while tossing a pinch of sugar and a pinch of coffee into the fire.76

Coffee was never cheap, and numerous coffee substitutes, including ground chickpeas, hazelnuts and Pistacia terebinthus fruits, were used by the poor who could not afford it or by others in times of shortage.77 Reusing coffee grounds was a common coffee-house keepers’ trick78 that evidently went back a long way, since in 1720 Seyyid Vehbi complained, ‘See what the coffee maker has done! / Taking us for fools and giving us coffee like dish water.’79

Yemen coffee was always preferred by Ottoman connoisseurs, even after cheaper coffee grown in European colonies became available in the second half of the eighteenth century. Ottoman coffee dealers who mixed colonial with Yemen coffee were taken to court for fraud.80 Coffee grown in Yemen became known to Europeans as mocha, after the port of that name at the mouth of the Red Sea from which most of it was shipped.81 After being dried, the coffee beans were packed in rush baskets, made up into bales weighing 150–200 kg and wrapped in sacking to protect them from becoming damp on the voyage to Suez; there the bales were loaded onto camels (each carrying two bales) for the land journey to Cairo and on to Alexandria, where they were shipped to Istanbul and other northern ports.82

In the seventeenth century, 5,000 tonnes of coffee were exported annually via Egypt, half of which was destined for Istanbul. Coffee merchants became rich men, with fortunes invested in property in Egypt and Yemen.83 As a luxury consumer product, coffee was subject to twice normal customs duty, making it a significant source of state revenue, which was probably a factor in the increasing lenience towards coffee houses.84

Ottoman pilgrims to Mecca customarily purchased coffee to take back home; sometimes in such large quantities that their object was clearly commercial. In 1670, for example, one pilgrim in Mecca purchased...
five camel-loads of coffee, equivalent to 1.5 tonnes, and had it transported to Istanbul via the port of Jiddah.\textsuperscript{85}

In an attempt to keep up sufficient supplies of Yemen coffee to the Ottoman Empire, exports to Europe were prohibited in the late eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{86} Soon afterwards, however, the British consolidated their control of the Red Sea trade,\textsuperscript{87} and Yemen coffee became as great a rarity in Istanbul as in London. When a shipload of Yemen coffee arrived in Istanbul in the late 1820s, it sold immediately at a high price, equivalent to 2 shillings per pound, and the coffee houses that managed to procure some were crowded until stocks were exhausted.\textsuperscript{88} The only Ottomans able to procure Yemen coffee on a regular basis were the sultan and wealthy individuals with the clout to arrange supplies directly from Arabia for their personal use.\textsuperscript{89}

Coffee was sold in three forms in the seventeenth century: with the husk (\textit{fındık}), without the husk (\textit{kalb}) and ready-ground (\textit{sahk edilmiş}).\textsuperscript{90} Some epicures preferred the whole dried fruits, since the maturity of the bean could be judged by the redness of the outer skin.\textsuperscript{91} Small quantities were roasted by stirring the beans in a small iron or copper pan with a boss in the centre that ensured the beans roasted evenly. Larger quantities were roasted in an iron cylinder rotated over a fire.\textsuperscript{92} The beans were then poured into a wooden container to cool before being pounded to a fine powder in a bronze or wooden mortar, or ground in a hand mill. Wealthy households that consumed coffee in large quantities and coffee-processing factories called \textit{tahmis} or \textit{tahmishane} had large stone mortars sunk into the ground, in which the roasted coffee was pounded with iron pestles.\textsuperscript{93} Some \textit{tahmishanes} were state-owned, and others founded as a source of revenue for charitable institutions.\textsuperscript{94} In the largest of Istanbul’s two coffee factories, the coffee beans were roasted in three ovens and pounded to powder in a hundred large mortars, making a ‘thunderous sound that was terrifying to hear’, according to a seventeenth-century Ottoman writer.\textsuperscript{95}

In the early nineteenth century, horse-driven machines replaced manual workers at the main coffee factory in Istanbul:

Fronting the north-west entrance to the Flax-market, is situated Tahmiss Khana, where a large portion of the coffee consumed in the city is roasted, pounded, and sold wholesale or retail to bakals (grocers), or coffee-house keepers. Tahmiss Khana, a government monopoly, farmed to an Armenian company, under the superintendence of a Turkish \textit{kihaya}, is the only establishment of the kind in Europe. It comprises magazines for storing and sorting, stoves for roasting, and mills for pounding the bean. The latter consist of three distinct horizontal wheels, each worked by two horses. Each wheel acts upon a set of levers, that turn a long cylinder, armed with semi-circular pegs, placed at regular intervals. These pegs, acting like the teeth of a barrel organ, rise in succession, and lift up an equal number of iron pestles, which are elevated about two feet, and then the pegs, revolving backward, allow the pestles to fall upon the beans strewned in a long stone trough. The powder, when sufficiently bruised, is swept out, and conveyed to an adjoining chamber to be weighed and sifted. The three mills pound an average of 2,750 lbs. per day.\textsuperscript{96}

Visiting the \textit{tahmishane} became so popular with foreign visitors that it is listed alongside Yeni Mosque and the
Egyptian Market in the first tourist guide to the city, published by John Murray in 1840.97

THE OTTOMAN METHOD of making coffee was first described in detail by Jean de Thévenot in 1655–6:

When they have a mind to drink of it, they take a copper Pot, made purposely, which they call *Ibrik*, and having filled it with Water, make it boil; when it boils, they put in this Powder, to the proportion of a good spoonful for three Dishes or Cups full of Water; and having let all boil together, they snatch it quickly it off of the Fire, or stir it, else it would run all over, for it rises very fast. Having thus boil'd ten or twelve wambles, they pour it out into China Dishes.98

The ‘ten or twelve wambles’ refers to the way the simmering coffee heaved up each time the pot was replaced on the heat. This created plenty of froth to cover the surface of each cup, which is still the sign of well-prepared coffee in Turkey today.99

Coffee was mostly drunk plain and unsweetened. Additional flavourings that were occasionally used were ambergris, cardamom, cloves, star anise, aloes, citron, jasmine or orange flower.100 Ambergris was added either in the form of essence that was rubbed around the inside of the cup,101 or by placing a fragment inside a tiny silver filigree compartment fitted inside the cup.102

Every European account of coffee stressed the fact that coffee was drunk ‘scalding hot’ or ‘as hot as they can suffer it’.103 For this reason, coffee cups were not at first filled to the brim: ‘to the End that, the Coffee being just boiling, one may hold it, without burning himself, with the Thumb underneath, and the two Fore-Fingers on the Edge.’104 This was possible with the early coffee cups, which were the size of Chinese tea bowls, but gradually coffee cups diminished in size until by the late eighteenth century they were so small that three or four were equivalent to a European coffee cup.105 These were placed inside holders called *zarf* to protect the fingers from burning.

Since coffee was the main refreshment offered to guests, coffee cups, holders, trays, tray cloths and coffee-making utensils were as ornate as a family could afford.106 Coffee cup holders were made of diverse
Coffee maker to the grand vizier, early 19th century.
materials, including pottery, copper, silver, gold, ebony and jade. In 1718 Lady Wortley Montagu was served coffee in cups set inside silver-gilt holders. Those who could not afford expensive holders merely put one cup into a second empty one, which was the way coffee houses solved the problem.

In elite homes, a chief coffee maker orchestrated the ritual of serving coffee by his team of underlings. For numerous guests, coffee was prepared in large coffee pots that were kept hot on a chafing dish suspended by three chains, and once poured, the cups were presented simultaneously to each guest. Robert Curzon, private secretary to the British ambassador Sir Stratford Canning, described this ritual when he visited a Turkish official during negotiations over the frontier with Iran in 1843:

As I was kicking off my goloshes, I was seized by Enveri Effendi himself, who had come up behind me. This was considered as an excellent good joke by the Chaoushes, servants, etc, who stood in a row to receive us; so we went into the selamlık (or reception room) together... Enveri Effendi sat on a cushion on the floor, in the right-hand corner, and the others were ranged on the two sides of the room. As we were fourteen people, on a sudden fourteen servants rushed into the room with pipes; then one brought coffee on a tray, the brocade covering of which was thrown over his left shoulder; and then came a man bringing to each of us a cup, well frothed up, and in a zarf, or outer cup, of a different kind, according to the rank of the person to whom it was presented. Enveri Effendi and the three Commissioners had cups of enamelled gold, the rest of the Pashas, etc., of silver.

Servants preparing to serve coffee to guests in an Ottoman harem, 1865.
The same ceremonial was observed when elite women received guests. Lucy Garnett, a British folklorist who travelled widely in Turkey and the Balkans in the late Ottoman period, gave the following account of her visit to the daughter-in-law of Mehmet Ali Paşa of Egypt:

The *kalfça* of the *kahvehdjis* enters, bearing on a tray draped with a richly embroidered crimson napkin the coffee-pot, tiny porcelain cups, and *zarfs*, or holders of gold or silver. She is followed by her pupils, who advance one by one to the tray, pour out a cup of coffee, place it in the *zarf*, and present it to the guests according to their rank, which it is their duty previously to ascertain. If two or more of equal rank are present, they must be served simultaneously; but if the hostess happens to be of higher station than any of her guests, she must be served the first. Then . . . the attendants range themselves in a line at the lower end of the room, where they stand with their arms crossed on bosoms, and their eyes modestly cast down, until their services are again required to remove the tchibouks or coffee cups.
A bstemious Ottoman Muslims condemned wine as the mother of all evil; the Spurre of Sensualitie, and the Tombe of Reason. Yet many people, particularly members of the elite class, drank discreetly in the privacy of their own homes, arguing that the religious injunction against wine was not designed for those who knew how to consume it in moderation. The idea that alcohol was harmless, even beneficial, for civilized men of good sense was a venerable one, stated convincingly by many over the centuries. The thirteenth-century Sufi Rumi wrote, ‘If he who drinks wine is intelligent, he becomes more so. But if he is of ill-temperament he becomes worse. Since most men are wicked and immoral they forbade everyone to drink wine.’ Another, less convincing, argument used by drinkers was that since the Qur’an only mentioned wine specifically, the ban did not apply to spirits. On these grounds it was regarded as a sin to drink wine in any quantity, whereas with other alcoholic beverages, like rakı, only drinking enough to get drunk was sinful.

So despite often drinking alcohol themselves, the Ottoman elite regarded it as a source of disorder among the general populace, and drinking to excess by anyone was frowned on. Selim II (r. 1566–74), who was a hard drinker, became the target of veiled criticism by a contemporary scholar, Mustafa Ali, who declared that one of the causes of rebellion was rulers who were habitual drinkers and neglected public affairs. Yet Mustafa Ali himself was not against drinking per se, as shown by his lively account of private drinking parties that formed a chapter of his book on manners written in 1587 at the request of Murad III.

Drinking was also the subject of long verse compositions originating in Persian literature known as sakinâme (book of the wine server) or işretnâme (book of drinking parties), which described the origin of wine and its characteristics, drinking parties, food served with alcoholic beverages and the etiquette of conversation over the wine table. One of the earliest Turkish examples, consisting of 694 couplets, was written by Revâni of Edirne (1475–1524), who presented it to Sultan Selim I.

In summer, private drinking parties were usually held in gardens or parks, accompanied by bands of musicians. The guests sat in a circle and drank by turns from the same cup, which was presented first to the host and then to the others, so ensuring that each person drank only at fairly long intervals.

Conversation was one of the most enjoyable aspects of these parties, as expressed in the following couplet by Mehmed II’s son Cem Sultan (1459–1495): ‘Let
Tiled tabletop inscribed around the border with an exhortation against drinking alcohol, first half of 19th century. The inscription reads: 'This table of nine sections turns as / Man comes to this revolving feast of the beloved / Know the worth of life, the world visited but once / Do not waste your body in worldly pursuits / Life is given to the man of wisdom / If a cup only remain do not visit the hall of ruination / The tavern that brings ruin to all who resort there / Throw down the raki, break the wine, let it seep away / Let the road to ruin become a racing course.'
us drink, that wine be the road to the spirit / Give strength to the mind and open the tongue.’11 The phrase ‘opening the tongue’ refers to the way wine makes people speak freely, without hypocrisy or pretension – a desirable quality mentioned by other poets of the period.

Poets were notorious for overindulgence, such as the fifteenth-century court poet Melihi. Mehmed II demanded that Melihi give up drinking wine, and the poet swore never to touch another drop. He turned to boza (which although it could have a similar alcohol content to wine did not bear the same stigma) and cannabis instead, but found these to be disappointing substitutes: ‘A curse on boza and marijuana / Hurrah for the rose-red wine.’12

Poets were also the most outspoken against attempts to prohibit alcohol. The poet Lamiî Çelebi (1472–1532) attacked the hypocrisy surrounding wine drinking in a humorous anecdote about an old man who was taken to court for drinking. When the judge declared that drinking wine was a sin, the man retorted, ‘So why are you wearing a silk kaftan?’ (wearing silk being regarded as a sin by pious Muslims). The judge replied that the silk was mixed with cotton, but the old man countered, ‘O judge of Muslims, I mix alcohol with water.’13 The poet Baki (1526–1600) accused pious and abstemious people of being intolerant and narrow-minded, and declared that drinkers longed for Ramazan to be over so that they could start drinking again.14

Cures for hangovers are mentioned in Ottoman poetry: for example stew with pomegranate juice, sherbet made with vinegar and honey, rose water, and tarhana soup.15 On the latter, the eighteenth-century poet Tirsî wrote, ‘Each morning I eat tarhana to dispel my hangover / With plenty of garlic and crusty thin bread.’16

Apart from occasional crackdowns, legal measures focused on preventing Muslims from drinking in public, particularly during Ramazan.17 Prohibitions on alcohol over the centuries almost all refer only to ‘drinking openly’.18 An early example is a decree sent in 1507 by Sultan Bayezid II to the judge of Bursa, ordering him to prevent Muslims from ‘drinking openly’ at weddings and other celebrations.19 Measures were also taken to keep Muslims out of taverns, by banning Christians from opening taverns in Muslim neighbourhoods and selling wine to Muslim customers.20 The traveller Hans Dernschwam reported that in 1553 when three young men were caught drinking with four young women in a Greek tavern during Ramazan, customers and the tavern keeper were paraded through the streets riding back to front on donkeys, holding on to the animals’ tails, then beaten and charged a fine.21 Tavern customers ran the additional risk of being press-ganged into the navy as galley oarsmen. Stewards from the naval arsenal would slip money into their purses and then accuse them of accepting state money, so obliging them to serve for six months.22
Habitual drunks were imprisoned as a means of forcing them to give up alcohol, and Muslim women could obtain a divorce on the grounds that their husband drank. Court records show that before such divorces were finally granted, husbands were given a chance to mend their ways by swearing to renounce alcohol. In one sixteenth-century case the man declared in the presence of the judge, ‘If I ever drink wine, rakı or strong boza again, I will let my wife Ayşe have a divorce.’

In 1553 Süleyman I launched a long campaign against alcohol consumption by Muslims in Istanbul. The poet Baki was so incensed that he wrote a poem in which he declared, ‘The sultan’s sword of subjugation has severed the road to the tavern.’ The strong measures taken by Süleyman during the last part of his reign affected non-Muslims as well as Muslims. In August 1562, for example, he ordered the authorities to set fire to any ships laden with wine that arrived in Galata harbour. When the Austrian embassy of the time was unable to procure wine, the ambassador Ghiselin Ogier de Busbecq appealed to the Council of State, arguing that ‘the change of diet would be unendurable and would inevitably cause disease and death to many of our number.’ The council reluctantly gave permission for a daily consignment of 100 litres of wine to be delivered to the embassy, and thereafter it became customary during crackdowns on alcohol to make exceptions for European embassies. In 1746, when an edict was issued declaring that ‘not a drop of wine’ was to be brought into the city, an allowance was made for ‘the personal use of the ambassadors of friendly states and their interpreters.’

In 1567, during the reign of Selim II, an edict was passed describing taverns as dens of iniquity and debauchery and ordering the chief of police to spoil any wine he found by adding salt to it. Murad III reimposed the stringent ban on taverns in 1583 after an incident that occurred while he was out riding. As he passed two janissary cadets drinking in a Greek tavern, they lifted their cups and shouted, ‘We drink to the health of Sultan Murad!’ Murad III may also have been influenced by another incident, which took place during the circumcision festivities for his son Mehmed in 1582, involving a group of dissolute young cavalrymen who held a drinking party in their rooms and hired a wanton woman to dance for them. The revellers were raided, one of the cavalrymen died in the ensuing fight, and cavalry commander Osman Ağa was dismissed from his post. The severest of all prohibitions was introduced in 1634 by Sultan Murad IV, who used to go about the city in disguise, hunting for transgressors. He ordered the execution of hundreds of people caught drinking or smoking tobacco. His motives were political rather than religious, however. The janissaries had overthrown and
killed his predecessor, Osman II, for his attempt to bring them into line, and the empire was in a state of turmoil. Murad set out to prove his character as a strong leader by imposing his will on society at large and intimidating the janissaries, who had become the real power behind the throne. In the 1570s janissaries are reported to have attacked their own officers when they attempted to punish drunkenness, and by the early seventeenth century their insubordination had become intolerable. When Osman II led an attack on the fortress of Khotyn in the Ukraine during the Polish–Ottoman War (1620–21), the janissaries refused to fight and instead sat drinking wine sent to them by the Poles and eating kebabs.

Attempts to ban wine and close down taverns were never long-lived. For the government, the great disincentive to prohibition was loss of revenue from wine taxes. In 1573 Selim II reversed the outright ban on transporting wine and rakı into Istanbul on the grounds that it only encouraged smuggling and reduced tax revenues. Taxes were charged on taverns and consignments of wine and rakı brought into cities, and these were collected by officials called şarap emini (superintendent of wine). In the seventeenth century, Istanbul had so many taverns that the şarap emini needed a staff of three hundred men to collect the wine tax.

Although European travellers tended to scorn Islamic opposition to alcohol, some appreciated the absence of drunken brawls and drink-related crime. A sixteenth-century German convert to Islam employed by the grand vizier tried to persuade his brother to follow suit, declaring, ‘Christians are always drinking, wasting their money and arguing. Whereas the Turks pray five times a day, fast and refrain from alcohol. That is why God grants them success.’ Jean de Thévenot expressed his approval of the wise Policy of Mahomet, who kept from them two Great causes of Quarrels, Wine, and Gaming. European Protestants felt a particular affinity with the puritanical Islamic view of alcohol. Salomon Schweigger (1551–1622) was so shocked by the quarrelling and profanity of members of the Austrian embassy when they had been drinking that he declared God was using the Turks to punish Europeans for their sins.

Christians and Jews were permitted to run taverns and manufacture wine and rakı. There were around 1,500 taverns in Istanbul in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, mostly situated in Christian neighbourhoods. Some of these had far more taverns than their populations warranted, presumably because people from other parts of the city went there to drink. The Bosphorus village of Ortaköy, for example, had two hundred shops, ‘most of which were taverns’, in the seventeenth century. Similarly, the inhabitants of the village of Karaağaç near Edirne made a living from the manufacture and sale of wine to customers from the city. The janissary commander occasionally visited and made a show of severity, but the villagers were warned of this beforehand and he was bribed to turn a blind eye to the presence of Turks among the revellers:

All the Greekes and Armenians (not daring to be merry in Adrianople in companies) come here to feast, and I have been several times by when 200 or 300 persons have all been setting together feasting and drinking like fishes; and the Turkes observe the same freedome.

The greatest number of taverns in Istanbul were concentrated in the dockland district of Galata, where
sailors made up the majority of customers. These taverns were not obliged to comply with regular closing hours and some remained open late at night and entertained customers with musicians, singers and troupes of dancing boys. As well as local Christians and Jews, it appears that Europeans also operated taverns in Istanbul, since during the disturbances following the deposition of Mustafa II in 1703 the grand vizier asked foreign ambassadors to ‘keep their Servants from straggling abroad, or opening any Taverns under their Protection’.

A great diversity of wines, both fresh and aged, were sold in Istanbul’s taverns, as described by a Spanish writer in the 1550s:

They have very good and cheap taverns. When we entered we used to be showered with questions: White or red? Candia or Gallipoli? When you have chosen one, they ask what vintage you want . . . Muscatel and above all Malvasia wine is the best and costs four aspers for a thousand-dram bottle if it is four years old. If it is just one or two years old it costs three aspers. Even that is better than the wine of San Martin [a town in Spain celebrated for its white wine in the sixteenth century] . . . Finest of all is what the Greeks call Topiko, meaning local, which is strong and pale in colour. They charge two aspers for a thousand-dram bottle. A thousand-dram bottle of the dark wines of Lesbos and Chios, which are similar to our Toro, costs one and a half aspers. Slaves can only afford the wines of Trabzon, Marmara Island and Euboia, because these are just seven maravedi for a bottle.

In the seventeenth century the numerous taverns of Galata served wines from as far afield as Ancona and Syracuse in Sicily, as well as local wines. Dernschwam reported in the sixteenth century that he thought Jewish wine was the best and complained that the Greeks added water to theirs. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier praised the wines of Tokat, Urfa and Diyarbakır in central and southeast Anatolia, while later European travellers extolled the Greek wines of İzmir, the Aegean islands and the eastern Black Sea region.

In the provinces, wine was produced and stored in pottery jars, which were buried in the ground up to the rim to keep the contents at a constant temperature.
The grape juice was clarified by the addition of marl, which made the wine ‘a fine transparent red that shone brightly’, then poured into the huge jars and the mouth tightly sealed.

The spirit called rakı, from the Arabic arak, was mainly distilled from the pomace (crushed residue of grapes) left over from making grape molasses or wine. Known in Turkish as arslan sütü (lion’s milk), because it turned an opaque white when water was added, rakı was often flavoured with mastic, hence the alternative name masteki; other flavourings included star anise, aniseed, cinnamon and coriander. In the seventeenth century there were around a hundred rakı distilleries in Istanbul and three hundred taverns where rakı was sold.

The other principal alcoholic beverage was boza, an ancient type of beer with a thick consistency made by fermenting millet or occasionally other cereals. It contained no hops and was usually not malted. The term boza, which the linguist Berthold Laufer suggests was the origin of the English slang term ‘booze’, is the generic name for this type of beer, which is still made in regions ranging from Africa to Central Asia and the Balkans. The type called tatlı boza (sweet boza) had a very low alcohol content, but there was also an inebriating variety known as eksi boza (sour boza) or Tatar boza, which was as strong as wine.

The fifteenth-century Ottoman physician Şerefeddin Sabuncuoğlu of Amasya described treating an artist who had fallen into such a heavy stupor after drinking boza that he awoke with his arm paralysed. Strong boza was sometimes exempt from bans on wine, which meant that boza houses could step into the breach when taverns were closed down. This happened in Ankara in 1584 when, according to a court record, a boza house keeper named Haydar bin Abdullah was brought before the judge on a charge of drunkenness. The assistant judge sent to inspect the house reported that it was no better than a tavern, with music playing and drinkers shouting. Incidents like this led to a ban on boza houses in Ankara, and all their jars and bowls were smashed by the authorities.

Alcohol was never drunk without appetizers known as meze. According to Stephan Gerlach’s account of Istanbul’s ‘innumerable’ taverns in the 1570s, food was served in small bowls placed on the narrow tables, at which customers sat on benches. Large taverns employed a cook and an assistant to prepare appetizers, which typically consisted of grilled fish, crab, mussels, oysters, octopus, crayfish, snails, dried beluga sturgeon, dried salted mackerel, dried cod, sardines, grilled meatballs, sliced radish, bean salad and lettuce.

Regular customers often took along their own fruit, cucumbers, garlic sausage, pastırma, caviar or fresh fish. In Istanbul, fish and seafood were regarded as essential accompaniments to alcohol by the mainly non-Muslim clientele, and many of the city’s taverns clustered around the fish markets.

At boza houses, the clientele was largely Muslim. Here the food served consisted primarily of kebabs and offal dishes, such as çevren (minced liver wrapped in caul fat), stuffed abomasum, minced-liver balls, grilled or roasted spleen, kidney and heart, sausage cooked in a tandır oven, and fruit compote. In March 1594 residents of Koca Nişancı in Istanbul complained that the cooks of boza houses that had opened in the neighbourhood had been ripping boards off local houses to use as fuel to cook kebabs.
Young man being entertained by musicians in an Istanbul tavern. He is seated at a dining tray laid with various appetizers. Barrels of wine can be seen at the back.
A detailed account of foods eaten at elite private drinking parties in the sixteenth century by Mustafa Ali emphasizes the importance of seafood among the wide range of mezes:

At the drinking table, pastries and heavy greasy food should be avoided. Apart from pilaf no greasy food is suited to such a meal. According to men of wisdom, sophistication and reason, essential foods for drinking parties are lightly cooked kebab, soup with a sour flavouring, cooked meats such as mutton kavurma [terrine], meatballs, and above all diverse fish and other seafood such as crabs, oysters, lobsters, shrimps and mussels. These form the mezes of innumerable sorts . . . At gatherings of generous men of high distinction, great men of title, and those experienced in the cultivation of pleasure, there should be forty to fifty meze dishes, not to mention pistachio nuts, hazelnuts and roast almonds. The table should overflow with dishes like fish roe, caviar and pasturma, and be decked with diverse fruits of the season. Vases of flowers are essential, and if it be the rose season, fresh rose petals should adorn the table. People of refinement wish their reputation to rest on such necessary things as these.75

Ottoman poetry also mentions drinking party foods, including stuffed mackerel, sturgeon, pilaf with mussels, tripe soup and various sweet foods – which were widely believed to counteract the inebriating effects of raki – such as honey, dried and fresh fruits, sweet pastries like revani (cake made of semolina and egg whites drenched in syrup) and sugared almonds.76 Pickled sardines were another favourite, according to Selim III’s historian Ahmed Cavid.77

Raki was usually drunk before meals, accompanied by small plates of appetizers.78 To the uninitiated these
**Stuffed Cabbage**

Stir-fry finely chopped onions in six or seven spoonfuls of olive oil, add a little cinnamon, rice and sufficient water to make slightly undercooked pilaf. If desired, add pine nuts and currants. Take cabbage leaves (discarding those from the outside and the heart) and scald them. Roll them up with some of the pilaf to make dolma the size of the middle finger. Arrange in a cooking pan with a clean tile on top to weigh them down and add salt and water to cover the tile. Place the pan on a gentle heat and simmer for about an hour. When cold, arrange neatly on a dish and sprinkle a little cinnamon and lemon juice over. This type of dolma is a source of joy for epicures and those who are drinking.

**Pickled Grapes**

At a time when the grapes are fully mature, select bunches of thick-skinned grapes spaced widely apart on the stems. Dip them into gently boiling salt water, and after draining place into vinegar. Make sure that the vinegar is warm or the grapes will wrinkle. Leave them for forty days and then remove. One can never tire of the flavour, which is sweet and sour and salty. Especially if they are left until the weather becomes cold, they make a crisp ringing sound [as you bite into them], and are such a fine pickle that once drinkers get started on them, the barrels [in which the pickles were prepared] beg for mercy.81

**hors d’oeuvres** are more like the banquet itself than its prelude, and indeed for many it has the effect of incapacitating them for the performance itself, commented the Hungarian-born Turkologist and British spy Ármin Vámbéry in the 1860s.80 Lieutenant-Colonel James Baker, who travelled through Turkey in the 1870s, described such a ‘cocktail hour’ in the garden of a provincial Turkish landowner in the 1870s:

[There were] several little dishes with different kinds of burnt almonds and nuts, salt fish, pickles, olives, two large dishes of most delicious melons neatly cut up, one of the pink and the other of the yellow variety, two pint decanters of raki, and some biscuit. I was, as usual, ravenously hungry, and a horrible dread came over me that this was dinner . . . However, my friend, who knew the ways of the country, assured me that this was not dinner, but only a sort of preliminary canter, and that we should afterwards be invited by the Bey to adjourn to the house, where the great meal would be served . . . Time went on. My host kept talking and drinking raki. I commenced by picking at all the dishes for manner’s sake and curiosity, and partly to pass the time. At last I saw that one decanter of raki had been finished and the other was commenced, and as we had sat there for an hour I was now convinced that this was dinner, and nothing else, so I thought there was no time to be lost, and therefore attacked the melons and biscuit in real earnest. But I was mistaken.81
Mahmud Nedim’s cookery book published in Istanbul in 1900 includes four recipes described as appetizers suitable for drinking parties – cabbage leaves stuffed with rice, pickled cucumbers, pickled grapes and grilled sea urchins – two of which are given above.82

Imports of foreign wines and spirits, including Champagne, Madeira, Bordeaux, Cognac, rum, absinthe, whisky, German beer and liqueurs, rose sharply in the nineteenth century as a result of free trade agreements.83 If Edward Lear is to be believed, the governor of Skodra offered his dinner guests a choice of ‘marsala, sherry, hock, champagne, Bass’s pale ale, bottled porter, rakhi, and brandy’ in 1848.84 Importation of alcoholic liquors was not a new phenomenon – brandy made in Poland and Russia had been imported to Istanbul in barrels in the sixteenth century – but the scale was unprecedented.85

Punch was introduced to the Ottomans in the eighteenth century by the French and British, who had first encountered it in India. The name was a corruption of the Persian panj (five), in reference to the original five ingredients: arrack (raki), rose water, citrus juice, spices and sugar.86 Europeans made their own versions with brandy, rum and, later, Champagne. Punch became popular with the Westernized elite of Istanbul, helped by the fact that the fruit juice, sugar and spices disguised the presence of alcohol. Lord Charlemont, a wealthy Irish nobleman who visited the Ottoman Empire in a privately chartered ship in 1749, may have been the first to serve punch to his Turkish guests:

Many Turks who have come on board our ship, though they absolutely refused wine, seemed to delight in punch, which however, the more scrupulous among them would not drink till we assured them it was English sherbet, in which confidence they have frequently got drunk in the most Christian manner.87

By 1831 there were 47 punch shops in and around Galata, the district of Istanbul where European communities congregated, and a further four on the European side of the Bosphorus. Selling wine and raki in punch shops became a way of avoiding licensing laws,88 and some taverns even masqueraded as sweet-shops.89 Over a thousand new wine and spirit shops in the guise of punch shops were opened in the 1840s by Europeans taking advantage of the new free trade agreements, and aggrieved tavern owners who had to pay the wine tax petitioned the grand vizier, demanding that these unfair competitors be dealt with.90 When the British government adviser and lawyer Nassau William Senior visited Istanbul in 1857, he was shocked by the British interpretation of the free trade treaty as permission for anyone holding a British passport to open wine and spirit shops in Istanbul:

Nearly all the violent crimes of Constantinople are the fruits of the wine-shops and spirit-shops, and those shops exist only because the English government forces the Turks to submit to them. By the Turkish law, neither wine nor spirits can be sold in retail. By the treaty of commerce, which was negotiated by Lord Ponsonby, English subjects are entitled to full liberty of trade in Turkey. We interpret this as giving them full liberty to trade in any manner whatever, in defiance of Turkish laws… Such shops are prohibited by the Turkish law; they are looked on with
horror by the better Turks; they complain that their young men are corrupted there; but we insist that our treaty gives us a right to open them, and the only concession which we make is that they shall be licensed by our ambassadors. But what safeguard is that? What can the ambassador know of the character of the crowds of Ionians and Maltese who ask for licenses? It is only charitable to suppose that he knows nothing of them; for worse ruffians than the keepers of these shops, or worse dens of vice and crime than the shops themselves, do not exist.91
Glossary

akçe
A small silver coin that was the official Ottoman unity of currency. It lost value over the centuries and in practical terms was gradually replaced by the kuruş from the mid-eighteenth century. Europeans called it the asper.

caravanserai
A large building around a courtyard for the accommodation and protection of merchants and other travellers.

dirhem
Unit of weight equivalent to 3.2 g.

gözleme
A thin sheet of pastry folded like a large envelope, plain or with a savoury filling, cooked on a griddle.

güllaç
Very thin starch wafers used to make a dessert of the same name.

han
An urban commercial building where merchants rented rooms to conduct business and stored their merchandise. They were equivalent to commodity exchanges in Europe. The same term was sometimes also used for a caravanserai.

herise
A porridge of whole wheat grains cooked with mutton.

imaret
A public kitchen that was part of a mosque complex and provided meals for staff, schoolchildren, university students, travellers and the needy.

kadayıf
A drop scone baked on a griddle that originated in Abbasid cuisine. In the early Ottoman period the same batter dribbled in strands onto a griddle became known as tel kadayıf. A third type of kadayıf, invented in the
nineteenth century and made from twice-baked bread soaked in syrup, became known as ekmek kadayıf (bread kadayıf).

kavurma
Preserved meat prepared by cooking in its own fat until all the moisture evaporated. It is the origin of the Indian term korma.

kaymak
Clotted cream, usually made from buffalo milk.

kebab
Roasted, grilled or baked meat. Siş kebab refers to cubes of mutton threaded on skewers and grilled.

keşkek
Persian term for herise.

keyl
Unit of weight equivalent to 12.825 kg.

kiyma
Very finely chopped meat.

kıyye See okka.

kunafa
Arabic term for what the Ottomans called tel kadayıf.

kuruş
A large silver Ottoman coin known as the piaster in Europe.

kurut
Dried strained yoghurt or dried buttermilk curds.

lohuk
A viscous sweetmeat that originated as a medical electuary.

lokma
Doughnuts sweetened with syrup.

lokum
Turkish delight.

mantı
Dumplings stuffed with finely chopped meat and served with garlic yoghurt.

okka
Unit of weight equivalent to 1.283 g, also known as kıyye.

pekmez
Juice of grapes or other fruits boiled to a thick, dark syrup.

pelte
Starch pudding flavoured with grape pekmez or fruit juice.

pide
Thin circular leavened bread, sometimes baked with toppings such as cheese or spinach.

sherbet
A beverage of water sweetened with honey or sugar, flavoured with fruit juices or spices and chilled with ice or snow.

tandır
An ancient type of oven comprising a large earthenware jar buried in the ground with an air duct in the base.

tarhana
A fermented and dried soup mix made of yoghurt mixed with wheat flour or whole wheat grains.

tulum cheese
Full-fat ewe’s milk cheese with a crumbly texture, matured in sheepskins or dried stomach linings.

tutmaç
An ancient Turkish noodle and yoghurt soup flavoured with ingredients like barberry juice and mint.

yahni
Boiled meat stew.

yufka
Paper-thin rolled pastry sheet used to make börek and baklava.

zerde
Saffron-flavoured rice pudding eaten as a celebration dish with rice pilaf.

zirva
(from Persian zirbac) A starch pudding mixed with various dried fruits.
References

Introduction

2 Apart from one eighteenth-century manuscript cookery book, there is a collection of over eighty recipes added by the fifteenth-century Ottoman physician Şirvânî to his translation of the thirteenth-century Arabic cookery book Kitâb al-Tabikh.

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3 Finkel, Osman’s Dream, pp. 28–33; Imber, Ottoman Empire, pp. 52–73.
11 Charles Perry, personal communication, May 2013, based on recipes from the Persian Kārnāmeh Dar Bāb-e Tēbâkhi ve San’āt-e Ān dating from the reign of Ismail i (1501–24).
13 Perry, personal communication, 30 March 2016.
24 Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, pp. 29, 149.
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44. This dish also entered European cuisine under names like blanc-manger and mammonia. See Darra Goldstein, *The Oxford Companion to Sugar and Sweets* (New York, 2015), p. 66.


2 Historical Development, 1299–1922


6 Ibid., p. 245.


8 Sultan Hatun was the daughter of Süleymanşah of the Germiyanoğlu principality, and on her mother’s side the great-granddaughter of Mevlânâ Celâleddin Rûmî. See M. Çağatay Uluçay, Mevlânâ, Hayatı Eserleri (Ankara, 1985), p. 7.


10 Finkel, Osman’s Dream, pp. 17–19.


12 Paşazade, Osmanlıoğlu’nun Taribi, p. 293.


14 Ibid., p. 77.


there a “Western” and “Eastern” Ottoman Empire?; Osmanli Araştırmaları, 36 (2010), pp. 97–133: 118.


20 Muhammed bin Mahmud Şirvâni added these recipes at the end of his Turkish translation of a thirteenth-century Arabic cookbook. See Muhammed bin Mahmud Şirvâni, Yüzyıl Osmanlı Mutfağı, ed. Mustafa Argunşah and Müjgan Çakır (İstanbul, 2005), pp. 216, 217, 226–50.

21 Charles Perry, Medieval Arab Cookery (TOTNES, Devon, 2001), p. 473.


24 My thanks to Charles Perry for the transcription of this recipe from Kârnâmeh dar Bâb-e T ebâkhi ve Sonat-e Ân, a cookery book written by Haji Mohammad Ali Bavorchi Baghdadi during the reign of the Safavid shah Ismail (r. 1501–24). The earliest Ottoman recipes are in an undated document dating from the sixteenth or seventeenth century.


28 Ibid., part 3, p. 141; part 3, p. 208. Mehmed built his first palace in Bayezit (close to where the Covered Bazaar is today) and in 1459 set about building a second palace, later known as Topkapı Palace, which was completed in the 1460s. See Gülru Necipoğlu, 15. ve 16. yüzyılda Topkapı Saray, Mimari, Tören ve İktidar, trans. Ruşen Şezер (İstanbul, 2007), pp. 28–32.


30 Ibid., pp. 244, 266.

31 Ibid., pp. 1–380.


34 Macun flavoured with mint and musk were eaten as sweetmeats in the seventeenth century; see Orhan Şaik Gökyay, ‘Sohbetnâme’, Tarih ve Toplum, 111/14 (1985), pp. 56–64.


37 Barkan, ‘İstanbul Saraylarına’, p. 216. The mention of a ‘royal pigeon keeper’ shows that these were domesticated pigeons.


40 Walsh, A Residence, p. 271.


43 Ibid., pp. 139–51: 148.


47 Kesnin Bey (Eugène Chesnel), The Evil of the East; or, Truths About Turkey (London, 1888), pp. 134–5.

48 Şirvâni, Osmanlı Mutfağı, p. 243.


Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 229 (fol. 159r), 264 (fol. 180v).


Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatnâmesi*, vol. ix, p. 16.

The date of this kitchen is not known, but it was already long established by the end of the seventeenth century: www.topkapisarayi.gov.tr/tr/content/saray-mutfaklar, accessed 27 October 2016.


[Thomas] Coke, *A True Narrative of the Great Solemnity of the Circumcision of Mustapha, Prince of Turkey, Eldest Son of Mahomet, Present Emperor of the Turks: Together with an Account of the Marriage of His Daughter to His Great Favourite Mussaip, at Adrianople; As It was Sent in a Letter to a Person of Honour: by Mr Coke, Secretary of the Turkish Company; Being in Company with His Excellency the Lord Ambassador Sir John Finch*, *Harleian Miscellany* (London, 1676), vol. v, p. 366.

For more on akıde see Chapter Eight.


The chief black eunuch was both custodian of the royal harem and an influential political figure.


Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive, Istanbul: Çevdet İktisat, 9/431 (23 March 1795).

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33 Ali, Ziyâfet Sofralarî, pp. 107, 171.
35 Prof. Dr Abdulkadir Dündar kindly provided the transcription of this endowment deed (Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul, Archive D. 10232).

37 Ünver, ‘Anadolu ve İstanbul’dan’, p. 2402; Ünver, Fatih Devri, pp. 5–9, 27, 81–2; endowment deed of Bayezid r’s mosque complex in Amasya (1495–6), Topkapı Palace Museum Archive D. 10232.


42 Evliyâ Çelebi, Seyahatnâmesi, vol. xi, p. 256.


44 Singer, ‘İmaret’, p. 80.

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50 Ibid., vol. ix, p. 423.


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6 Palace Cuisine

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38 Withers, Description, p. 727.


40 Ibid., vol. III, p. 110.

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42 Baudier, History, p. 141.

43 Uzunçarşılı, Saray Teşkilâtı, p. 381; Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives: Cevdet Timar 173/8607 (30 July 1783), Yıldız: Perakende Evrakı Hazine-i Hassa Nezareti Maruzatı 5/23 (9 July 1879).


48 Seferioğlu, Türk Yemekleri, p. 17.


Ohsson, 18. *Yüzyıl Türkiye’ s i n de*, p. 247.


Artan, ‘*Food Consumption*’, p. 100.


Bilgin, ‘*Seçkin Mekanda*’, pp. 35–75: 59. Although today *çilbir* is a dish of poached eggs with yoghurt, in the past it also referred to eggs with fried onions, probably the dish that was later known as *enderun yumurtası*, the famous ‘palace eggs’.

Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives: Cevdet Saray 53/2698 (9 July 1816).

Withers, *Description*, p. 713.

Reindl-Kiel, ‘*Cennet Taamları*’, pp. 70, 71, 105 n. 53.


No knives were normally placed on an Ottoman dinner table, so perhaps Afife Kadin was in possession of a European set of cutlery and used it in honour of her foreign guest.


Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives, Istanbul: Cevdet Saray 48/2414 (20 September 1789).


Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives: Cevdet Saray 88/4405 (22 December 1799).


Brocquière, *‘Travels*’, pp. 347, 349.


Penzer, *Harem*, p. 81; White, *Three Years*, vol. i, p. 110. The public park next to Topkapı Palace that originally formed part of the palace gardens is still known today as Gülhane Park after this manufactory.
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138 Barkan, 'Istanbul Saraylarına', pp. 98, 133.


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146 Uşakçığil, *Şaray ve Ötesi*, pp. 20–22.


149 Ibid., pp. 188, 189, 191, 193, 198ff.


152 Withers, *Description*, pp. 711, 721. For more on bread see Miller, *Beyond the Sublime Porte*, pp. 164–7.


155 Barkan, 'Saray Mutfağının', p. 393; Reindl-Kiel, 'Cennet Taamüleri', pp. 61, 95; Barkan, 'Istanbul Saraylarına', pp. 116, 275, 24, 133, 122 etc.


159 Pappe was a dish of 'water and bread boiled, for young infants etc.' Harborne may have been trying to describe pilaf with zerde poured over it.


164 Brocquière, ‘Travels,’ pp. 350–51. It is not certain exactly when the custom of using dining trays began, although Joanita Vroom, based on K. Dilger, says it was an innovation of Sultan Süleyman I in the sixteenth century; see “Mr. Turkey Goes to Turkey’, Or: How an Eighteenth-century Dutch Diplomat Lunched at Topkapı Palace, in Starting with Food: Culinary Approaches to Ottoman History, ed. Amy Singer (Princeton, NJ, 2011), pp. 139–75: 147. An Arab miniature illustration made in Baghdad in 1236 depicts men eating at low circular tables on stubby legs, which appear to be carved from single pieces of wood, see Maqamat d’al-Hariri, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, arabe 5847, fol. 47v.


171 Withers, Description, p. 714.


175 Du Vignau [Sieur des Joanots], The Turkish Secretary, Containing the Art of Expressing Ones Thoughts, without Seeing, Speaking, or Writing to one another: With the Circumstances of a Turkish Adventure; As also a Most Curious Relation of Several Particulars of the Serrail that have Not Before Now Ever Been Made Publick (London, 1688), p. 75.


181 Ahmet Refik, Eski İstanbul, p. 21.

182 Saf, Harem’in İçyüzü, p. 139.


185 Ahmed Refik, Onuncu Asr-i, p. 6.

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3 Tanman, 'Kitchens of the Ottoman Tekkes', p. 216.


6 Nilay Çorğan Karakaya, 'Kayserideki Roma Ve Bizans Dönemi Eserleri', in Erciyes’in Rüyası Kayseri, ed. Filiz Özdem (Istanbul, 2013), p. 86; Priscilla Mary Işın, ‘Aşure: Echo of a Shared Past’, in Culinary Encounters: Food, Migrations, and the Making of Identities, ed. Richard Delerins (forthcoming). The Islamic version of the Fall is clearly an allegorical account of the Neolithic Revolution that pre-dates the Abrahamic faiths and was passed down in Near Eastern folklore. This would help to explain why Cappadocian Christians knew the same story, despite its absence from Byzantine theological discourse.


12 Ibid., pp. 9–10.


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26 Fanny Janet Blunt, The People of Turkey: Twenty Years’ Residence among Bulgarians, Greeks, Albanians, Turks and Armenians, ed. Stanley Lane Poole, 2 vols (London, 1878), vol. 11, pp. 31–2; Russell, Natural History of Aleppo, p. 238.

27 Ali Riza, Bir Zamanlar, p. 132.

28 Sefercioğlu, Türk Yemekleri, p. 20.


30 Ignatius Mouradgea d’Ohsson, Tableau général de l’Empire Ottoman, 7 vols (Paris, 1791–1824), vol. iv, p. 29. Black slaves from northeast Africa were widely used as domestic servants in Ottoman households. As Ottoman territorial conquests came to a halt, white slaves captured as prisoners of war or levied into servitude declined in number, and from the eighteenth century onwards their place was increasingly taken by black Africans supplied by slave traders. See Bernard Lewis, Race and Slavery in the Middle East (Oxford, 1990), pp. 11–12.


32 Saz, Harem’ in İçyüzü, pp. 58, 247–8.


40 Alus, İstanbul Yazları, p. 138.

41 Abdülaziz Bey, Osmanlı Âdet, p. 273.


45 İskin,’1882 Tarihi,’ pp. 96–9.

46 Alus, İstanbul Yazları, p. 137.

47 Sefercioğlu, Türk Yemekleri, pp. 27, 39, 44, 49, 64–5, 73.

48 ‘Yemek Hakkinda Defter,’ Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Dr A. Süheyl Ünver Bağışı, no. 652, fols 12–14.


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52 Antranig Azhdarian, Under Oriental Skies; or, Asia Minor and Her Inhabitants (Cleveland, OH, 1894), p. 186; Selim Ileri, Oburcuk Mutfakta (İstanbul, 2010), p. 270.


8 Celebrations


2 The word akide derives from akıda, meaning boiled grape juice or sugar syrup in Syrian Arabic dialect, and faith or loyalty in Classical Arabic, both having the original meaning ‘to knot’ or ‘to thicken’. See Andreas Tietze, Târîhi ve Etimolojîk Türkiye Türkçesi Lugatı (İstanbul and Vienna, 2002), pp. 110, 126–7. In Ottoman Turkish the form ağda was used for syrup, while from around the mid-sixteenth century akide came to mean hard boiled sweets.


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Defteri

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Mesopotamia, Assyria, Chaldea, Etc.' , trans.

Syria, Palestine, or the Holy Land, Armenia,

Itinerary into the Eastern Countries, as


Aşçıbaşı

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10 Evliyâ Çelebi, Seyahatnâmesi, vol. iv, p. 112.
11 Ibid., vol. v, p. 96.
18 Murphey, Ottoman Warfare, p. 87.
24 Frederick Burnaby, On Horseback through Asia Minor (Gloucester and New York, 1895), p. 149.
27 Evliya Çelebi, Seyahatnamesi, vol. 1, p. 231 (fol. 160r); Murphey, Ottoman Warfare, p. 48.
30 Ibid., p. 105.
32 Busbecq, Turkish Letters, pp. 150–51.
34 Evliya Çelebi, Seyahatnamesi, vol. 1, p. 95 (fol. 65v).
37 Four Legationary Letters to the Grand Turkish Empire (Hanoviae [Hanau], 1605), p. 128.
39 Evliya Çelebi, Seyahatnamesi, vol. 1, p. 244 (fol. 168r); Hezârfen Hüseyin Efendi, Telbisül-Beyân, p. 98; Süheyl Ünver, Fatih Devri Yemekleri (Istanbul, 1952), p. 80; Murphey, Ottoman Warfare, p. 85.
41 Murphey, Ottoman Warfare, p. 89.
43 Charles White, Three Years in Constantinople; or, Domestic Manners of the Turks in 1844, 3 vols (London, 1845–6), vol. III, pp. 126–7; Wittman, Travels, p. 236.
or seventeenth century.

manuscript miscellany dating from the sixteenth
to include soldiers on campaign – to miss fasting
sick and travellers – which could be interpreted
to the old system.

calculating each day from sunset to sunset according

to the system.

the old system.

The Islamic Cuma began on Thursday evening when
calculating each day from sunset to sunset according
to the old system.

Marsigli, Stato militare, Part 2, p. 68.

The Islamic Cuma began on Thursday evening when
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to the old system.


Thévenot, Travels, p. 45; Duncan, Campaign, vol. 1,
p. 87. Surah 11 verse 185 of the Koran allows the
sick and travellers – which could be interpreted
to include soldiers on campaign – to miss fasting
during Ramazan and make up lost days afterwards.

Radcliffe, Hygiene, pp. 16–20; Thornton, Present
State, p. 199.


Hezârfen Hüseyin Efendi, Telhisîül-Beyân, p. 250.

Salomon Schweigger, Sultanlar Kentine Yokuluk,
1578–1581, trans. Türksin Noyan (Istanbul, 2004),
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Letters, pp. 110–11; Busbecq, Legationis turcicae,
p. 128; Hans Dernschwam, Istanbul ve Anadolu’ya
Seyahat Günülgü, trans. Yaşar Önen (Ankara, 1987),
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Henry and Renée Kahane and Andreas Tietze,
The Lingua Franca in the Levant (Istanbul, 1988),
p. 299; Pakalim, Osmanlı Tarîh, vol. 11, p. 749.

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in Birinci Milletlerarasi Yemek Kongresi, Türkiye,

Radcliffe, Hygiene, p. 23.

Ibid., pp. 13–49.

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pp. 38–49: p. 41. This recipe is from an undated
manuscript miscellany dating from the sixteenth
or seventeenth century.

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calculating each day from sunset to sunset according
to the old system.


74 Thévenot, Travels, p. 45; Duncan, Campaign, vol. 1,
p. 87. Surah 11 verse 185 of the Koran allows the
sick and travellers – which could be interpreted
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p. 128; Hans Dernschwam, Istanbul ve Anadolu’ya
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87 Radcliffe, Hygiene, p. 20.

88 Mahmud Nedim bin Tosun, Aşçibaşı, ed. Priscilla
Mary İşin, 2nd edn (İstanbul, 1999), pp. 29, 108.

89 Carl Max Kortepeter, The Ottoman Turks: Nomad
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Murphey, Ottoman Warfare, pp. 90, 152.

90 Evliyâ Çelebi, Seyahatnamesi, vol. i, pp. 44–5
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91 Ibid., vol. vi, p. 198; vol. iv, pp. 126, 136.

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Askeriye 96/4396 (3 November 1802), Cevdet Saray
51/2599 (6 March 1803), Cevdet Dahiliye 153/7603
(15 May 1803).

94 Busbecq, Turkish Letters, p. 163.

95 Özdemir Nutku, iv. Mehmetsin Edirne Şenliği 1675,

96 Hezârfen Hüseyin Efendi, Telhisîül-Beyân, pp. 58, 76.

97 Evliyâ Çelebi, Seyahatnamesi, vol. v, pp. 87–8. For
another Tatar feast, with boza and kebab, at the
fortress of Ferahkirman following a victory over the
Kalmuks, see ibid., vol. vii, p. 213.

13 Kitchen Utensils and Tableware

1 Levent Kuru, ’29 Numaralı Edirne Şeride Sicili’, ma
thesis, Trakya University (Edirne, 2006), p. 51;
Saadet Maydaer, ’xvii. Yüzyılda Bursa’dan Emekli Bir
Kadi: Balıkesir Oğlu Öğlu Derviş Mehmed Efendi ve
Serveti’, Uludağ Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi,

2 Halit Ongan, Ankara’nın Iki Numaralı Şeride Sicili
(1 Muharrem 997–8 Ramazan 998 (20 Kasım 1802–11

3 Hans Dernschwam, Istanbul ve Anadolu’ya Seyahat
Günülgü, trans. Yaşar Önen (Ankara, 1987), pp. 177,
239.

4 Pertev Naili Boratav, Nasreddin Hoca, 2nd edn

5 Hacıbeyzâde Ahmed Muhtar, Aşevi: Açlık,
Beyne’l-milel Sofracılık (İstanbul, AH 1332

6 Ahmet Aydın Bolak, Balikesir Yemekleri, Catering

7 Ömer Lütfi Barkan, ’İstanbul Saraylarına ait
Muhasebe Defterleri’, Belgeler, xi/13 (1979),
p. 1–380: 133.

8 Joana Vroom, “Mr Turkey Goes to Turkey,” Or:
How an Eighteenth-century Dutch Diplomat
13 Kurutluoğlu, Türkiye’nin Dört Yılı, p. 156.
16 Dernschwam, Istanbul ve Anadolu’ya, p. 322.
20 Karagöz Matbahda (Istanbul, AH 1329 [1913]), p. 20.
27 Kurutluoğlu, Türkiye’nin Dört Yılı, p. 155; Tavernier, New Relation, p. 80.
34 Antoine Galland, Istanbul’la Ait Günlük Amlar
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40 Ahmet Refik, Eski Istanbul, p. 16; Vroom, ‘Mr Turkey Goes to Turkey’, pp. 139–75.

41 Büngül, Eski Eserler, vol. i, p. 152; Agnes Dick Ramsay, Everyday Life in Turkey (London, 1897), pp. 148–9. The technique was traditionally used in the spoon-making area of Târâkî in northwest Turkey.

42 Galland, İstanbul’a Ait, vol. ii, pp. 75–6.

43 Du Vignau, The Turkish Secretary, Containing the Art of Expressing Ones Thoughts without Seeing, Speaking, or Writing to One Another: With the Circumstances of a Turkish Adventure; As also a Most Curious Relation of Several Particulars of the Serrail that have Not Before Now Ever Been Made Publick (London, 1688), p. 75.


47 Abdülaziz Beğ, Osmanlı Âdet, pp. 116–18; Musahipzade Celâl, Eski İstanbul Yaşayışı (İstanbul, 1946), p. 100.

48 Shahid Ahmad Rajput, ‘Blue and White Ware and its Development in Iran’ (forthcoming).

49 Ayşe Erdoğan, ‘The Place of Chinese Porcelains in the Ottoman Daily Life’, in Expo Shanghai 2010: Better City Better Life (İstanbul, 2010), pp. 95–100; Rajput, ‘Blue and White Ware’.


51 Erdoğan, ‘Chinese Porcelains’, pp. 95–100.


54 John Covel, Dr Covel’s Diary (1670–1679), in Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant, ed. J. Theodore Bent (London, 1893), pp. 101–287: 263. Also on celadon see Galland, İstanbul’a Ait, vol. ii, p. 75. The term martabani derived from the port of Martaban (now Mottama) in Myanmar, from where celadon was shipped westwards, and fağfur from fağfur, the Persian name for the Chinese emperor.


56 Kütükoğlu, Osmanlılarda Narb, p. 203.

57 Erdoğan, ‘Chinese Porcelains’, pp. 95–100.


61 Kürkman, Magic of Clay, p. 28.

14 Water and Sherbet

1 Fynes Moryson, An Itinerary, Containing His Ten Yeeres Travell through the Twelve Dominions of Germany, Bohmerland, Sveizerland, Netherland, Denmarke, Poland, Italy, Turkey, France, England, Scotland and Ireland, 4 vols (Glasgow, 1907), vol. iv, p. 128.


9 Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, 'The Persian Travels: The First Book of Monsieur Tavernier’s Persian Travels, Containing the Several Roads from Paris to Isphahan, the Chief City of Persia, through the Northern Provinces of Turkey,' in Collections of Travels through Turkey into Persia and the East Indies, 2 vols (London, 1684), vol. i, pp. 1–264: 38.


BOUNTIFUL EMPIRE

35 Kurutluoğlu, Türkiye'nin Dört Yılı, pp. 182–3.
37 Warsaw University Library, Royal Collection T. 171.
41 Ayşe Osmanoğlu, Babam Sultan Abdülhamid (İstanbul, 1984), pp. 64, 66.
44 Şafak, 'Bir Vakfı Sarti', pp. 1–16; Tarih Hazinesi, 1 (15 November 1950), s. 23.
47 Ibid., p. 10.
51 Hummâs limonu or Miss limonu. Lime juice was still being exported from Egypt to Istanbul in 1810; see Thomas Mortimer, A General Dictionary of Commerce, Trade and Manufactures; Exhibiting their Present State in Every Part of the World (London 1810), ‘Limes’.
53 Domenico Hierosolimitano, Domenico’s Istanbul, trans. Michael Austin (Warminster, Wiltshire, 2001), p. 21. ‘Diluted vinegar’ was the ancient beverage oxymel, made of vinegar and honey mixed with water and known to the Ottomans by the Persian name sikencübin.

15 Coffee and Coffee Houses
1 Abdulkadir Emekşiz, ‘İstanbul Kahvehaneleri’, Karaların ve Denizlerin Sultanı İstanbul, 2 vols (İstanbul, 2009), vol. 11, p. 123.
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8 Ahmed Refik, Eski İstanbul (İstanbul, 1931), p. 28.

9 Ahmed Refik, Onuncu Asr-ı Hicri’de İstanbul Hayatı (1495–1591) (İstanbul, 1988), p. 141. This ruling is dated 1567 but says it has been reiterated several times before.


18 Mary Wortley Montague, Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M—y W—y M—e, Written during her Travels in Europe, Asia and Africa to Persons of Distinction, Men of Letters etc. in Different Parts of Europe, Which Contain among Other Curious Relations, Accounts of the Policy and Manners of the Turks, 3 vols (London, 1763), vol. 1, p. 18; Charles White, Three Years in Constantinople; or, Domestic Manners of The Turks in 1844, 3 vols (London, 1845–6), vol. 1, p. 283.


20 For example, eleven of the fourteen coffee houses in the neighbourhood of Kadiköy in Istanbul in 1793 were run by janissaries (Arif Bilgin, personal communication, 11 April 2015).


24 Ibid.


26 Evliya Çelebi, Seyahatnâmesi, vol. 11, p. 18.


31 Ahmed Refik, Eski İstanbul, pp. 28–9.


39 Miniature painting dated 1610 depicting a coffee house in Istanbul, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ms 439, fol. 9.

40 Chew, *Crescent*, p. 183.


51 Slade, *Records of Travels*, p. 273. Also see Francis Vyvyan Jago Arundell, *A Visit to the Seven Churches of Asia; with an Excursion into Pisidia; Containing Remarks on the Geography and Antiquities of Those Countries, a Map of the Author’s Routes, and Numerous Inscriptions* (London, 1828), pp. 20–21.


58 Moltke, *Türkiye Mektupları*, p. 53.


60 Evliyâ Çelebi, *Seyahatnâmesi*, vol. ix, pp. 400–401.


63 Pakalin, *Osmani Tarih*, vol. iii, pp. 169–70 ‘Semaî Kahvesi’.

have included coffee when detailing what was meant by ‘basic necessities,’ which in 1655 included food, coffee and money for visiting the public baths twice a week. In a personal communication on 1 February 2016, Dr Saadet Maydaer said that although there are no divorce cases in the Ottoman court records which mention coffee, in her opinion Thévenot’s informants must have included coffee when detailing what was meant by ‘basic necessities.’

Thévenot, Travels, p. 33.

The references cited in this text follow the Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition. The citing style is as follows: (Surname, Year of publication, pp. xx-yy).


68 Thévenot (Travels, p. 33) wrote that women could apply to the courts for a divorce if their husband failed to provide them with these necessities, which in 1655 included food, coffee and money for visiting the public baths twice a week. In a personal communication on 1 February 2016, Dr Saadet Maydaer said that although there are no divorce cases in the Ottoman court records which mention coffee, in her opinion Thévenot’s informants must have included coffee when detailing what was meant by ‘basic necessities.’

69 Thévenot, Travels, p. 33.


74 This extract is from the translation made by Edward Pococke, English professor of Arabic at Oxford, and published in 1659. Dr Pococke’s fondness for coffee, acquired during his travels in the Near East in the 1630s, aroused suspicions of Muslim sympathies.

75 Chew, Crescent, p. 184.


79 Seyyid Vehbi, Surname, p. 185; James Baillie Fraser, A Winter’s Journey (Tâtar) from Constantinople to Tehran; with Travels through Various Parts of Persia etc., 2 vols (London, 1838), vol. I, p. 85.


89 Mübâhat S. Kütükoğlu, Osmanlılarda Narh Müessesi ve 1640 tarihli Narh Defteri (İstanbul, 1983), pp. 48, 98.

110 Robert Curzon, Armenia: A Year at Erzeroum, and on the Frontiers of Russia, Turkey, and Persia (New York, 1854), p. 809.


### 16 Alcoholic Drinks and Taverns


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Dernschwam, Istanbul ve Anadolu’ya, p. 183.


Ahmed Refik, Onuncu Asr-ı Hicride, pp. 50, 141–2; Gerlach, Türkiye Günliğü, vol. 1, pp. 178, 185.


Evliyâ Çelebi, Seyahatnâmesi, vol. 1, p. 223 (fol. 155r).

Ibid., p. 185 (fol. 130r).


Ahmed Refik, Onikinci Asr-ı Hicride, p. 163.

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54 Dernschwam, Istanbul ve Anadolu'ya, p. 141.
55 Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, The Persian Travels: The First Book of Monsieur Tavernier's Persian Travels, Containing the Several Roads from Paris to Ispahan, the Chief City of Persia, through the Northern Provinces of Turkey, in Collections of Travels through Turkey into Persia and the East Indies, 2 vols (London, 1684), vol. 1, pp. 1–264; pp. 5, 6, 68, 104.
57 Dernschwam, Istanbul ve Anadolu'ya, pp. 143, 217–18.
59 Ibid., p. 318.
60 Öztekin, xviii. Yüzyıl, pp. 86, 195.
64 Robert Withers, A Description of the Grand Seignor's Seraglio, or Turkish Emperor's Court (London, 1737), p. 762.
73 Ibid., pp. 54 (foll. 37v), 190 (foll. 134r), 247 (foll. 170r).
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75 Mustafa Ali, Ziyafet Sofraları, vol. 1, p. 159.
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78 Kurutluoğlu, Türkiyê'nin Dört Yılı, pp. 66, 160–61.
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