Edited by **Heather J. Sharkey**
and **Karène Sanchez Summerer**

COMMENSALITY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Bringing the Foodways of the Middle East and Its Diasporas to the Table

University of Groningen Press

COMMENSALITY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE. BRINGING THE FOODWAYS OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND ITS DIASPORAS TO THE TABLE

Commensality and Cultural Heritage

Bringing the Foodways of the Middle East and Its Diasporas to the Table

Edited by Heather J. Sharkey and Karène Sanchez Summerer

University of Groningen Press

Published by University of Groningen Press
Broerstraat 4
9712 CP Groningen
The Netherlands

This publication appears in the series: *Visions of the Middle East and North Africa*
ISSN (print): 2950-2330
ISSN (online): 2950-2187

Cover design / Typesetting: LINE UP boek en media bv | Riëtte van Zwol
Photo front cover: Men in field, NINO, Frank Scholten collection, photographic print 18: 108.
Photos back cover: J. Alkorani, A. M. Hansen and F. Heinrich

ISBN (print): 978-94-034-3128-4
ISBN (ePDF): 978-94-034-3129-1
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21827/6883292eb0d00

Acknowledgement

This project would not have been possible without the support of the University of Groningen (RUG) Faculty of Arts Fellowship Program, the RUG Winter Schools, the University of Groningen Press (UGP, M. Nieborg and M. Stege), the Faculty Board, LINE UP boek en media (R. van Zwol and P. ten Hoor) and the Middle Eastern Studies Program. We also extend our gratitude to the Netherlands Institute for the Near East (NINO) for granting access to Frank Scholten's extensive collection of photographs.

We are especially grateful to all participants and invited lecturers of the Winter School *Commensality and Cultural Heritage in the Middle East and Its Diasporas* (20-24 January 2025), and to Artis Mazalis and Lars Baumann for their invaluable assistance during the Winter School.

University of Groningen Press continues to provide a vital platform for collaboration between students and researchers, for which we are sincerely thankful.

Contents

Introduction

Commensality and Cultural Heritage: Food, Identity, and Belonging in the Middle East and Its Diasporas

Heather J. Sharkey

Overview

In the Middle East and among Middle Eastern diasporic communities, culinary cultures have remained a source of pride along with customs that emphasize hospitality and helping those in need. The value of sharing stands at the heart of "commensality," which means being at the same table, with literal and metaphorical implications for treating others with respect and goodwill. Drawing on a wide range of sources, this volume views Middle Eastern and associated diasporic foodways through the lenses of cultural heritage and commensality while considering how food has shaped people and societies and remained dynamic amid changing conditions.

Introduction: Food Makes Us Who We Are

People eat to live, although food is about much more than daily survival. Food connects us to friends, neighbors, and families, and from there to wider communities. Food carries memories and imparts a sense of cultural heritage along with attachments to places and customs. Food nourishes bodies and can promote satisfaction and joy, just as it can comfort in difficult times.

Food can lead to companionship, a concept associated with sociability and friendship, whose Latin roots, "*com*" and "*panis*," mean eating bread with another person. Just as importantly, food can entail commensality: literally, being at a table together, from the Latin roots, "*com*" and "*mensa*." Commensality carries positive if more abstract meanings as well: it suggests sharing a meal not just with immediate relatives but also with neighbors, guests, and perhaps strangers, in a spirit of respect and goodwill.

Eating and drinking may not always afford happy occasions or bring people together: they can be divisive, too. Food can repel or disgust, poison or sicken. When scarce, it can fail to fill stomachs and quench thirst. Food can exclude some and impose hierarchies over others, since what people prepare and consume, and how they do it, may distinguish them or entail assertions of power. In any case, not everyone is always willing or able to come together at one table. Whether the term "commensality" even applies to what happens when people do *not* come together – or if we need another word to describe such avoidances – is open to question.

Without a doubt, food shapes people as social beings. Its "ingredients," which form identities, may come from wealth, gender, age, religion, place of origin, profession and more. Writing in the thirteenth century, Ibn Razin al-Tujibi (1227-1293), an Andalusian scholar and refugee whose family fled to North Africa in the wake of the Christian conquests in Spain, observed that food distinguished people of high rank, by showing their good taste, while *sharing* food gave insights into character – and showed a person's nobility.[1] In 1825, the food-loving French lawyer, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755-1826), observed the social significance of food practices and summarized it pithily in his path-breaking *Physiologie du goût* ("The Physiology of Taste"). "Tell me what you eat," he wrote in his book, "and I will tell you what you are." With his attention to the aesthetics of food and fine dining, Brillat-Savarin modelled what many would now call gastronomy. He also showed an ability to see human culture in food-related behaviors and attitudes, or "foodways."

Food bears on health, as Middle Eastern food writers have noted for centuries. Consider Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq, a *bon vivant* who had connections to the court of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad. Around the year 1000, Ibn Sayyar wrote a cookbook in which he acknowledged food as a source of good health *and* pleasure. Like many fans of today's cookbooks, food shows, and food-related social media, Ibn Sayyar enjoyed not just eating food, but thinking about it, in the spirit of pursuing a serious hobby. The same was true about the exiled Ibn Razin al-Tujibi, who in the thirteenth century described food as the "cornerstone of health."

Authors like Ibn Sayyar and Ibn Razin al-Tujibi included abundant recipes in their texts and commented on their delicious results. But like other elite food writers, they had nothing to say about the strenuous labor that went into making food: what people did, for example, to farm, fish, tend sheep or goats and milk them, mill grain, and so on, not to mention chop vegetables, stoke the hearth fire, stir pots, and the like. As people of relative leisure, they could partake of good food without having to worry about getting it onto the table or cleaning up afterwards. Their books should remind us to account for class dynamics in food cultures, and to recognize that providing food requires many resources along with a lot of hard work that may be invisible to those who consume it.

1 Ibn Razin al-Tujibi, *The Exile's Cookbook: Medieval Gastronomic Treasures from al-Andalus and North Africa*, translated and introduced by Daniel L. Newman (London: Saqi Books, 2023), p. 87.

The Why and How of Food Studies

There are many ways to study food, and scholarship is now booming. Appreciating the scope of recent developments, and excited about their potential for teaching and research, Professors Karène Sanchez Summerer of the University of Groningen and Heather J. Sharkey of the University of Pennsylvania organized a Winter School which the University of Groningen sponsored in January 2025 on "Commensality and Cultural Heritage in the Middle East and Its Diasporas." (A visiting scholar's fellowship from the university's Faculty of Arts brought Sharkey to Groningen and made this collaboration possible.) This intensive, one-week program introduced participants, who were graduate students in PhD and MA programs at various universities, to Food Studies while focusing on the Middle East and associated diasporic communities in Europe and the Americas. As speakers, the program enlisted scholars from Dutch universities – Groningen, Leiden, and Radboud – and international ones – Concordia (Canada), Koç (Turkey), Bordeaux (France), Oslo (Norway), and Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand). Speakers also included two Kurdish artists, who engaged students in a hands-on project with clay, and a local Syrian restaurateur. The goal was to present new subjects, models, and methods for research and then, in a metaphorical spirit of commensality, to gather and share ideas. This book is the fruit of these efforts.

Food is so integral to daily life that it is easy to overlook as a subject for research. Yet it can speak volumes about peoples, communities, and societies precisely because of its ubiquity in everyday life. Food has as much to say about agriculture and medicine as about literature, art and religion.

Food is also political. It can provoke battles over land and resources, involving, for example, access to water and farmland or, in crisis zones, the distribution of aid, as when non-government organizations (NGOs) try to get beans or rice to hungry people. Food can trigger battles over meanings and symbols. Who 'owns' things like falafel, feta cheese, and champagne? Is there a correct way to make baklava? More philosophically, who has or should have the authority to declare or impose rules, claim rights, and set standards? Who judges taste and determines authenticity? Who can rightfully claim a food or recipe as part of a culinary tradition? Precisely because what people eat and drink may carry emotional weight and strike at the heart of identities, "food fights" can get fierce.

As efforts to address myriad food-related issues have increased, scholars have gathered in a field that now goes under the banner of "Food Studies". Admittedly, the term "Food Studies" is vague, perhaps even banal, although it has the virtue of being both simple and spacious. It can cover scholars from many disciplines – anthropology and archaeology, history and art history, economics and sociology, and more. It can also fit scholars from other hybrid, incipient fields, such as Environmental Studies, Gender Studies, and Media Studies. This breadth makes Food Studies interdisciplinary: open to mixing methods and subjects and crossing the intellectual borders that university departments may impose.

The field of Food Studies is also young. Perhaps for this reason, few have yet tried to define it. A working definition might be as follows: Food Studies is an inter-

disciplinary field of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences which covers the production, preparation, consumption, exchange, environmental and social impact, and value of food for culture and health. Using diverse sources and analytical approaches, its practitioners treat food as a lens, vehicle, or medium to see and understand larger issues that bear on human existence.

To be clear, food on its own is not the focus of Food Studies. Food is rather the *lens* through which to focus on social phenomena, the *starting point* to explore different directions, or the *medium* for conducting inquiries. Food Studies invites creative use of sources, including recipes, cookbooks, and menus; material objects like cups and dishes; ethnographic fieldwork (observing people in their everyday lives); photographs, paintings, and other works of art; archaeological evidence; and more. Its sources may also be sensory and experimental. That is, scholars may try to create foods and dishes – for example, brewing wine, baking sourdough bread, or preserving lemons according to historic recipes – to understand processes, methods, and experiences. In the pages that follow, readers will glimpse possibilities for what a Food Studies approach can do, what sources it can use, and where it can lead.

The Illustrious History of Middle Eastern Food and Foodways

Middle Eastern societies claim a particularly illustrious heritage in the domain of food. Millennia ago, the Fertile Crescent – roughly the area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers of Mesopotamia and the Nile of Egypt – became a cradle for agricultural development. The region was the birthplace of ancient "founder crops" such as wheat, barley, and lentils. After the rise of Islam in the seventh century and the expansion of the first Islamic empire, the region became a hub for the global diffusion of crops like watermelon, spinach, and sugarcane – with the latter enabling the proliferation of sweets, giving rise to what we now call desserts. From roughly the seventeenth century onward, the region popularized and spread coffee, and with it, the social institution of the neighborhood café, via routes that started in Ethiopia and went through Yemen. The region also helped to circulate New World foods like chilis, tomatoes, and potatoes as they traveled eastward from the Americas through Europe and deep into Asia and Africa. Then, too, the Middle East was a conduit in the spice trade that linked South and Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, the East African coastline, and the Red Sea to the Mediterranean basin and beyond. Commodities like cloves, cinnamon, and peppercorns passed through its channels. From the viewpoint of food studies, the Middle East has played major roles in world history.

The Middle East has also been supremely important for cookbooks as a literary form. A thousand years ago, elite men in cities like Baghdad and Cairo, enjoying access to palaces and courts, began to write Arabic cookbooks, some of which doubled as dietary manuals containing advice on what to eat for good health. As one scholar put it, the region produced "the richest medieval food literature in the world – [so that] there are more cookbooks in Arabic from before 1400 than in the rest of the world's languages put together…"[2]

2 Lilia Zaouali, *Medieval Cuisine of the Islamic World: A Concise History with 174 Recipes*, Trans. M.B. DeBevoise, Foreword by Charles Perry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. ix.

Figure 1 *Hummus bi Tahini*, November 2019. Photo by Heather J. Sharkey.

The first surviving (but not the earliest attested) cookbook comes from the tenth century: it is the *Kitab al-Tabikh* ("Book of Cooking") by Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq (mentioned earlier), who included recipes, anecdotes, and sometimes strong opinions of a kind that make him seem very modern. "The key to good cooking," he believed, in the words of the eminent Iraqi food historian Nawal Nasrallah, "was freshness of ingredients and hygiene." She continued, "He [Ibn Sayyar] asserted that what elevated a dish to high cuisine status was not the expensive ingredients as much as the utmost care taken to clean the food and the receptacles and tools used in handling it."[3] For example, he advised that the cutting board used for meat should not be the same as the one used for vegetables. Hygiene was paramount; health depended more on cleanliness than on fancy ingredients.

In the Middle East, literate elites paid close attention to the connection between health, diet, and food. Cookbooks from the early Islamic era onwards often contained recipes for medicines or cited ingredients or dishes that had curative properties.[4] In Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, which was built after 1459 and served as a home for the Ottoman sultans for more than four centuries, cooks who specialized in sugar prepared candies and cough syrups alike. The fact that this palace's kitchens occupied the largest "footprint" of buildings in the complex points not only to their importance for feeding residents, workers, and visitors on an institutional level, but also for showing the sultan's munifi-

3 Nawal Nasrallah, Trans. & Ed., *Annals of the Caliph's Kitchens: Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq's Tenth-Century Baghdadi Cookbook* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 35.

4 Paulina B. Lewicka, "Diet as Culture: On the Medical Context of Food Consumption in the Medieval Middle East," *History Compass*, 12:7 (2014), pp. 607-17.

cence, impressing guests, and projecting imperial power. The kitchens of Topkapi Palace offer a vivid example of what scholars would now call "gastrodiplomacy" at work.

Middle Eastern foodways have been important for religious cultures, too, since the region was the birthplace of the three major Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. While Jews, Christians, and Muslims have been and still are heterogeneous, they have tended to uphold recurring customs regarding, for example, the slaughter of animals for meat along with expectations about what is kosher (for Jews) and halal (for Muslims). They have developed distinctive foodways associated with religious fasts, such as Yom Kippur, Lent, and Ramadan, and with feasts linked to holidays. Middle Eastern Christians historically had an extensive culture of vegan foods associated with fasts that were linked to saints' days and church calendars. In the early Islamic period and later, Muslim doctors often prescribed the Christians' plant-based, *muzawwar* ("counterfeit" or mock-meat) dishes, believing that they were good for the sick.[5]

While some foodways kept members of different religious communities apart, thereby contributing to sectarianism, other customs brought people together. Some customs reflect the seasonality of ingredients – the time of the apricot harvest, for example – or the realities of common "popular" or "lived" religious practices. In Egypt, there was Sham al-Nasim, a largely Coptic Christian holiday which many Muslims also observed; this holiday involved picnicking in cemeteries, at the gravesites of relatives, in the Spring. In Iran and in parts of what are now Turkey, Iraq, and beyond, there was Nawruz, another Spring holiday and Persian new year celebration with roots in the Zoroastrian religion. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Muslims, Christians, and Jews of Ottoman and British-mandate-era Palestine commonly celebrated a festival that honored the Prophet Moses (Nabi Musa), held during the week before Easter, when people celebrated by eating delicacies like *ma'moul*, which are small date- or nut-filled pastries.

Commensality, Cultural Heritage, and Diasporas

Since the field of Food Studies is potentially vast, we have chosen to focus our inquiry through two conceptual lenses.

The first lens is "commensality," which means, again, being at the same table, with implications for respecting differences while affirming common values among those who share a meal. Commensality has begun to attract attention in the field of public health, where scholars find the concept useful for describing a mode of sociability, among individuals and groups, which can reduce isolation and loneliness. Public health experts suggest that the simple act of having a meal together – even just lunch with a colleague in a workplace cafeteria – can boost a person's sense of well-being. Scaling commensality to larger groups, some contend that food can forge solidarity – a sense of community and common cause – among diverse people who may not only eat together but who may engage in related mundane acts, such as shopping for

5 David Waines and Manuela Marín, "Muzawwar: Counterfeit Fare for Fasts and Fevers," in *Patterns of Everyday Life*, ed. David Waines (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 303-15.

food in the same markets or getting food from the same shelter.

Commensality has been especially important in the Islamic world, where sharing food with others – whether to help strangers who show up at the door, or to help the hungry – has been a cardinal virtue and, indeed, a religious duty enshrined in Muslim, Christian, and Jewish practices. As Ibn Razin al-Tujibi put it in the thirteenth century, a person is noble only if they avoid "shirking the debt owed to their neighbours" and if they are "content with half the pot and…not satisfied unless they share it."[6] The Kurdish sculptor Erdal Tüt, who led a cultural program within the Winter School workshop, expressed it powerfully when he described a proverb that was common among Turks, Armenians, and Kurds: "I cannot sleep if my neighbor is hungry." Feeding others – bringing others to the table – is an imperative when people are in need.

The second lens for this inquiry is "cultural heritage," referring to legacies and traditions that connect people to the past, instill pride, and cultivate awareness of historical values and customs with an eye to the future. We can think of cultural heritage, when it relates to food, as *culinary heritage* – something that fills many people of Middle Eastern origin with pride.

In fact, culinary heritage is especially important in diasporic communities, among people who have migrated or experienced displacement, as well as among their heirs and descendants. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records the year 1694 as the earliest use of this term "diaspora" in English, when it referred to Jewish history; its extension to other populations has been much more recent. "Diaspora" has not denoted simple migration – straight movement from a Point A to a Point B – but rather refers to a scattering. Through its connections to Jewish history, furthermore, "diaspora" implies that members of the dispersed group remember and seek to honor the culture of their forebears even as they live in newer settlements. The word ultimately conveys nostalgia – a longing for a past place and time – and perhaps the pang of exile.

Cultural heritage has broader connections to nostalgia, arguably reflecting an anxiety arising from a fear of losing oneself and one's family or culture. Having a sense of heritage suggests having an urge to preserve it, through a conscious effort of saving traditions, memories, and attachments to people, places, and customs. Taking into account that many people feel a deep attachment to foodways, regarding them as intimate parts of who they are, it is no wonder that culinary heritage is so important to diasporic or migrant communities, and to those who feel fragile. Food can move with people, but it can anchor them at the same time – and herein sits part of its power.

Conclusion: Sampling Middle Eastern Food Studies

This book offers a "tasting menu" of scholarship. A "tasting menu," the *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us, is a chiefly North American English term, which refers to "a type of meal offered in some restaurants, consisting of small sample portions of many different dishes, typically served in several courses for a set price." The *Cambridge English Dictionary* adds to this

6 Al-Tujibi, *The Exile's Feast*, p. 88.

definition, by noting that items on a tasting menu are "often chosen to show the skill of the chef."[7]

The contributors to this volume include the scholars who spoke at the Winter School as well as those who attended its talks and joined its activities and a few who have committed to speak at future events. All of us are "students" in the sense of being eager to learn about new subjects and try new things as we might try out a collection of recipes. The goal of this collective enterprise is to share knowledge, suggest possibilities for research, and model ideas for using diverse sources creatively, in what is becoming the bountiful field of Middle Eastern food studies. Without further ado, as one might say in Arabic, *Sahhatayn*! Here is "to your health," and to your enjoyment of what appears on these pages!

7 Oxford English Dictionary, "tasting menu (n.)," June 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3937020174; Cambridge English Dictionary, "tasting menu (n.)," https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/tasting-menu

FURTHER READING

Dmitriev, Kirill, Julia Hauser, and Bilal Orfali, eds. *Insatiable Appetite: Food as Cultural Signifier in the Middle East and Beyond*. Leiden: Brill, 2020.

Faroqhi, Suraiya, and Christoph K. Neumann, eds. *The Illuminated Table, the Prosperous House*. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2003.

Gaul, Annie, Graham Auman Pitts, and Vicki Valosik, eds. *Making Levantine Cuisine: Modern Foodways of the Eastern Mediterranean*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021.

Işin, Priscilla Mary. *Bountiful Empire: A History of Ottoman Cuisine*. London: Reaktion Books, 2018.

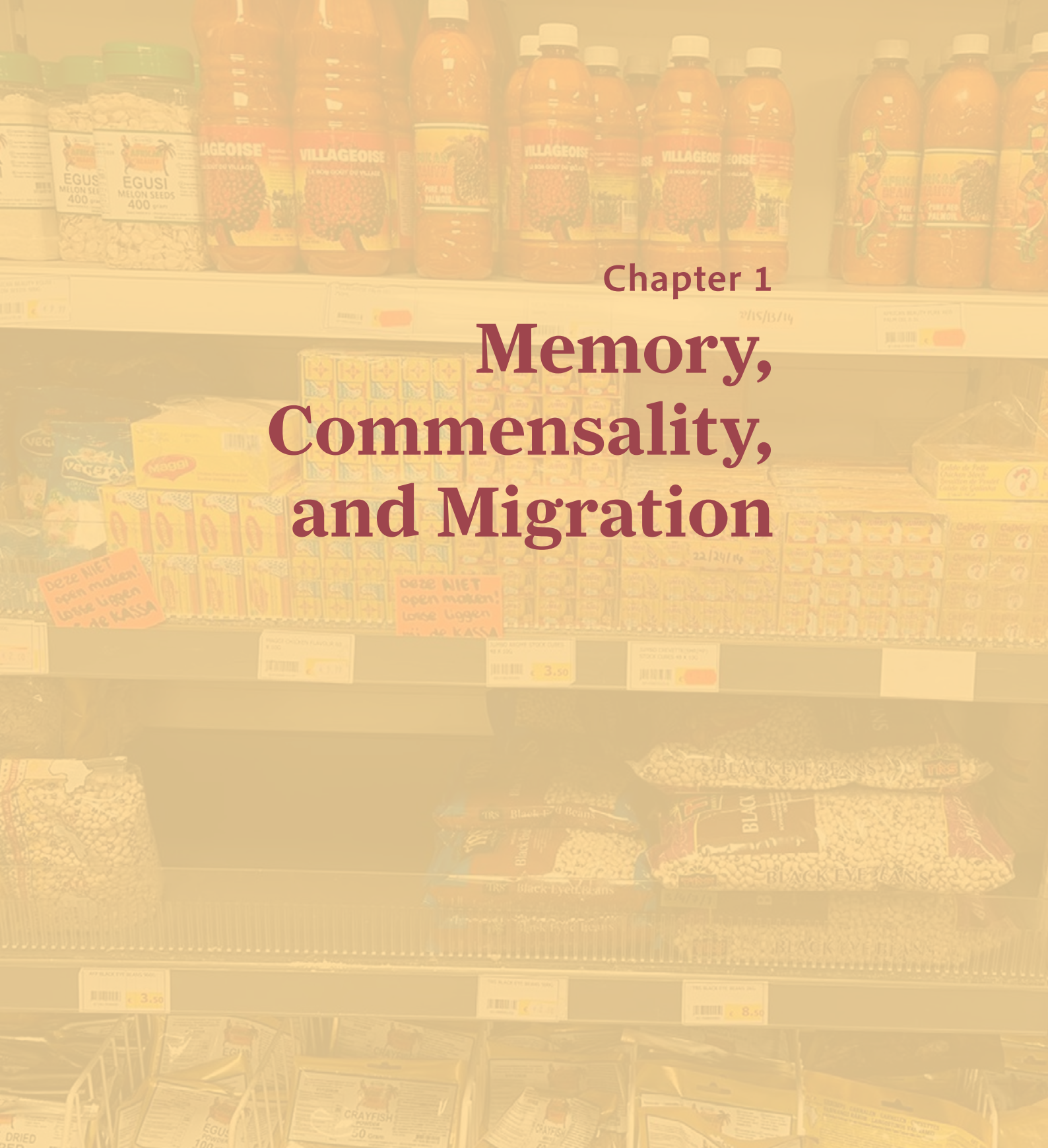
Komaroff, Linda, ed. *Dining with the Sultan: The Fine Art of Feasting*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2023.

Newman, Daniel. "Food in the Medieval Islamic World (9th–15th Centuries)." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Food Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780197762530.013.7.

Shapin, Steven. *Eating and Being: A History of Ideas about Our Food and Ourselves*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2024.

Zubaida, Sami, and Richard Tapper, eds. *Culinary Cultures of the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1994.

University of Groningen. "Commensality and Cultural Heritage in the Middle East and Its Diasporas." Program for the Winter School, January 20–24, 2024. https://www.rug.nl/education/summer-winter-schools/winter_schools/winter-schools-2023-2024/commensality-cultural-heritage/



Chapter 1

Memory, Commensality, and Migration

Searching for *Sa'soo'ah*

Joud Alkorani

Growing up, one of my favorite things to eat for breakfast was *sa'soo'ah* – a grilled cheese sandwich. It remains one of my favorites to this day. Cubed Syrian sheep's-milk cheese cut into thin slices, scattered across an open pita, sprinkled with dried mint and spicy Aleppo pepper, doused in olive oil inside and out. Grilled to produce a salty, stretchy, crispy experience, balanced with cucumber, tomato, and olives on the side. The kind of sandwich that requires a nap afterward.

Syrian cheese – simply called *jibneh* in Arabic – comes in two forms, cubed and string. It is traditionally made in Syria only between April and May, when lambing season and young spring grass yield the fatty sheep's milk that gives the cheese its rich flavor. In this brief period, Syrians stock up a large preserve, or *mouneh*, of the essential breakfast item.

I have lived abroad for most of my life, with my family forming part of the large Syrian diaspora that existed long before the start of civil war in 2011. Every year, we awaited Spring and the cheese that accompanied it, following the same rhythmic cycles in the diaspora that our relatives did back home. My aunt was the link; when preparing the annual cheese *mouneh* for her household, she stocked up for us as well.

My aunt followed in the steps of her parents; back in the day, a truck would deliver my grandparents forty kilos of cheese intended to feed their family of six for the year. In large pots, they boiled the cheese in a water bath to make it softer, seasoning it with the desired amount of salt, *mahlab* (a spice made from cherry pits), and black caraway seeds. It was then stored in brine-filled glass jars that were placed in cool cellars or attics.

The goal of this short essay is to explore how a seemingly ordinary food item, *sa'soo'ah* – a grilled cheese sandwich – serves as a profound site of memory, cultural continuity, and adaptation for the Syrian diaspora. Through the narrative of cheese-making traditions and culinary practices, the essay examines how commensality shapes experiences of identity, displacement, and integration within new social contexts.

Prior to the 2011 conflict, it became popular to pack cheese in resealable plastic bags that were kept in large chest freezers, along with other *mouneh* items. This mode of preservation made it easier to transport cheese across borders. At the end of every summer vacation spent

Figure 2 My aunt's cheese mouneh in 2025. Lacking electricity for most of the day, in the past years, Syrians have foregone freezers and returned to old methods of preserving cheese in brine-filled glass jars. Photo by Adeela Alkorani.

in Aleppo, my family and I would stuff our suitcases with kilos of cheese and fly back to wherever we lived at the time – Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, or the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Throughout the year, we enjoyed this taste of home with rose jam (homemade by my aunt), *kaa'ik* (a savory biscuit flavored by the water cheese-making left behind), and *mamounia* (a sweet semolina breakfast pudding).

The last time we felt safe enough to visit Aleppo was 2011, a moment when many Syrians who had never left became exiles and refugees. The degree of agency Syrians had in their lives – including over what they ate – differed radically, but the everyday experience of eating transformed us in significant ways. Without our summer trips to Syria, my family no longer had access to our coveted cheese. We experimented with the alternatives available in the supermarkets of Dubai, where we lived at the time. We made do with Akkawi, Nabulsi, or halloumi, but not very happily. *Sa'soo'ah* did not taste the same with these substitutes.

Lamenting the loss of *sa'soo'ah* might seem mundane, even insensitive – in the grand scheme of things, in light of all the death and destruction the past fourteen years have entailed, does cheese really matter? I would argue it does – simply because it continues to matter to Syrians themselves. For those who remained in Syria, cheese is still an essential food item: supply has decreased, prices have skyrocketed, so people eat less of it and savor what they have – but they eat it nonetheless. Syrians abroad have used other tactics to set the breakfast table in familiar ways.

Searching for *sa'soo'ah* in Rotterdam, where I now live, led me to a Syrian grocer in Nieuwe Binnenweg, a neighborhood housing many Syrian-run stores, restaurants, and services. Like Turkish, Moroccan, Indonesian, and Surinamese markets before them, Syrian establishments have come to be key features of the Dutch urban landscape. Their presence has transformed neighborhoods across the country, and the foods they offer reach not only Syrian clientele, but an ever-expanding cosmopolitan population.

At this Syrian grocer, I found my cheese: vacuum sealed in a plastic bag, the cubes inside a dark yellow color, indicating its fattiness and depth of flavor. Named "Al Shahbaa," a nickname for Aleppo, and described as "Authentieke Syrisch kaas. Gemakt in Nederland" (Authentic Syrian Cheese, Made in the Netherlands) the packaging also features an illustration of a cow grazing in a green field, beneath a blue sky.

Figure 3 Al Shahbaa cheese, labeled "made in the Netherlands with Dutch milk." Photo by Joud Alkorani.

A cow and not a ewe? Indeed. Syrian cheese was now being made with cow's milk – not just any cows, Dutch cows. It all began when, yearning for the familiar and essential, the Syrian newcomer Nidal Aswad visited a nearby dairy farm in Leusden. Buying milk in bulk, he deployed the conventional methods to make cheese, the primary difference being the kind of dairy used. At first, Aswad only produced enough cheese to feed his family and some close friends. When word about the cheese's tastiness and authenticity spread, however, the Aswad family saw a demand they could fill. Partnering with the dairy farm's Dutch owners, they built an on-site dairy manufacturing facility and began producing cheese in greater quantities – eventually expanding to string cheese and *shinkleesh* (a curdled yogurt cheese) as well.

With the transformation of Syrian cheese – from sheep- to cow-milk based – also came its translation to a new audience. Syrians did not need instructions for how the cheese could be used, but curious consumers who wanted to widen their culinary repertoire required a helping hand. The website offers recipes that illustrate how Al Shahbaa cheese can be incorporated into familiar recipes – cheese is not just for *sa'soo'ah*, but can be grilled and added to a green Thai curry, eaten alongside *boerenkool* (mashed kale and potatoes), or made into cheese sticks.

These suggestions point to a new client base of non-Syrians, but perhaps also a new generation of

Figure 4 Traditional Syrian grilled cheese sandwich. Photo by Joud Alkorani.

Syrians looking to connect their heritage foods to the new tastes they have grown up with in the diverse Western European contexts they now call home. This form of cultural – and indeed culinary – translation, which entails positively sharing and promoting one's gastronomic traditions, is a vital task in a host society where some more established residents may view newcomers with hostility and suspicion. The dual process of transformation and translation that characterize emergent Syrian foodways warrant further reflection – one *sa'soo'ah* at a time.

FURTHER READING

AlShahbaa. "Wie zijn wie." Accessed June 2, 2025. https://shahbaa.nl/Wie-zijn-wij.

Hartmann, Carina, and Katharina Schilling. "Cham Saar: The First Syrian-German Cheese Manufacturer." In *Refugee Entrepreneurship: A Case-Based Topography*, edited by Sibylle Heilbrunn, Jörg Freiling, and Aki Harima, 39–53. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92534-9_3.

Hijazi, Nabila. "Bait Al-Mouneh: Traditional Syrian Homemaking as Roots for Women's Agency." *Constellations* (blog), September 5, 2024. https://constell8cr.com/issue-7/bait-al-mouneh-traditional-syrian-homemaking-as-roots-for-womens-agency/.

Hudson, Leila. "'They Gave Us Cheese Sandwiches': Foodways of War and Flight." *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East and North African Migration* 6, no. 2 (2019): 149–64.

Jalkh, Rita. "Mūne as a Culinary Heritage and Vector of Territorial Development in Lebanon: The Socio-Spatial Dynamics of the Preservation of Traditional 'Mūne' Foods by Women Cooperatives, an Application to the Case of the Beqā' Valley." PhD diss., Université Paul Valéry-Montpellier III, 2022.

Şahin, Gonca. "A Touch of Syria on the Table: Gendered Politics of Food and Reproduction in Displacement." *Gastronomica* 24, no. 2 (2024): 18–31.

Vandevoordt, Robin. "The Politics of Food and Hospitality: How Syrian Refugees in Belgium Create a Home in Hostile Environments." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 30, no. 4 (2017): 605–21. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fex017.

Talking Tokos: Translating Community, Belonging, and Global Migration in the Neighbourhood "Dutch" Grocery Store

Jehan Nizar

Introduction: The Toko of Nijmegen

It's six pm on a Tuesday evening in Nijmegen, the oldest city in the Netherlands. I wait impatiently at Taj Mahal Toko's checkout line, letting out a theatrical sigh to signal my annoyance to the woman in front of me, who seems oblivious to the snaking queue she is holding up. I feel a sharp pang of guilt upon realising that she is discreetly pleading with the cashier who tells her that she has exceeded the number of credit notes he can issue. He swats her away and removes the plastic divider separating my items from hers, proceeding to scan the contents of my cart. I can't help but stare at the modest basket of sweet potatoes, chicken thighs and jollof rice seasoning she has had to abandon, unable to ignore a gnawing sense of discomfort.

The act of grocery shopping in the Netherlands serves as a direct counterpoint to everything I have ever known. Within five months of moving here, I have come to understand that supermarkets do not welcome social interaction between customers and staff in the way that smaller independent stores do. They are fleeting points of transit. Whenever I recall the joys lost while weighing produce at a sterile supermarket chain, waiting for a machine to print out a price barcode sticker upon tapping a button that reads "Bon", I realise a visit to Toko Taj Mahal, a South Asian-owned grocery store, is overdue.

My tryst with Toko Taj Mahal began months before I arrived in the Netherlands in 2024 to embark upon a new life as a PhD candidate in Food Anthropology in Nijmegen – a city that prides itself on its "young spirit" thanks to hosting a vibrant student population. Toko Taj Mahal is the first place, amidst the unremarkable sprawl of a flat landscape that would be my home for the next four years, that I found myself eager to locate on an online map.

Like many before me, I have anticipated the inevitable gulf of longing I will feel for foods of a homeland left behind. Coming from the southern Indian city of Chennai, with no initiation into Dutch life, I did not expect to find the unlikely sense of community I do through my weekly visits to Nijmegen's only Indian store. Although prefixed by the word "toko" that is most likely a cultural loan word from the Indonesian language, Toko Taj Mahal, like many other tokos in the Netherlands today, has grown to accommodate a multitude of tastes that may not have been envisioned in its

original semantic scope. Tokos have now come to represent the everyday food needs of several communities, stretching from the Middle East and North Africa to the South Asian subcontinent, as well as the odd walk-in customer who is as motivated by the economical prices as by the array of exciting "ethnic" ingredients.

A stroll through Toko Taj Mahal's aisles demonstrates how food can engender a form of commensality that helps migrants to translate themselves in new settings while attempting to integrate on foreign shores. Viewed from a different vantage point, tokos serve as living archives of migrant culinary practices, embodying what the French historian Pierre Nora called *lieux de mémoire* or sites of memory, where any significant entity, whether material or immaterial, becomes a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of a community (Chowdhry 2021).

Figure 5 Indian and Pakistani spice blends and aromatics share shelf space. Photo by Jehan Nizar.

Family-owned tokos can also be viewed as spaces that provide the sort of geographical anchors that Ahmed and Bin Shabib (2019) state communities need to find their moorings and to be known, providing a sense of rootedness to both the customers they serve, as well as to the families who run them. Take for instance, third-generation Tijn Toko in Amsterdam, whose patriarch was born in Surinam where he owned a shop that sold imported foodstuff from China, before moving to the Netherlands in the 1970s and starting his toko.

While the usage of the word toko in its earliest sense was closely linked to its Indonesian roots and Dutch-Indonesian or "Indisch" history, Dutch-Indonesian food blogger Mieke writes about how tokos have, over the years, expanded their wares from limited Dutch-Indonesian and Indonesian imported wares in the early 1980s to covering most of East Asia as well as other parts of the world today (Mieke 2021). For Tijn Toko, the ushering in of a new decade saw its patriarch handing over the reins to his son who decided to diversify its offerings and introduce products from other cuisines with American, Mexican, Filipino and Japanese products making their presence felt. Today, in cities such as Nijmegen, tokos have become a safe haven for communities – both newly-arrived and naturalised – who are eager to be grounded by the familiar taste of home.

The History of the Toko: from China and Java to the Dutch World

Hung-yi Chien (2021) observes that place names bear witness to human interactions with places. We can study them as linguistic symbols that assign meaning to spaces and tell stories about how and where a language's speakers have moved. She points out how the

Figure 6 An assortment of Asian wok sauces and condiments reflects the East Asian history of tokos in the Netherlands. Photo by Jehan Nizar.

"toko", a word from the Hokkien language of unknown origin, can be traced back to a term used for the fireproof warehouses used in rural China in the fourteenth century. Hokkien-speaking migrants, who came from the southern Fujian Province in China, brought both this kind of warehouse and the word to Taiwan in the seventeenth century. With time the word "toko" expanded its meanings to describe locations and buildings across Taiwan and beyond, from Japan to Thailand, where Hokkien merchants traded. The etymology of the word along with its evolving use can therefore illuminate this history of trade and migration.

From the sixteenth century onwards, Hokkien sea merchants began to apply the word "toko" to other warehouses that they saw, as well as to trading posts that European traders set up in Siam and on the island of Java. The tokos established by the Europeans in Southeast Asia assumed roles: they provided accommodation and storage while serving as transshipment points for precious metals, spices, and other commodities that were circulating between Asia and Europe. The Kasteel van Batavia in present-day Jakarta, Indonesia, became one of the biggest and most important tokos among the early modern European traders and doubled as the residence of the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies. As the Dutch East India Company (VOC) expanded, the Dutch set up trading posts throughout East Asia, some of which were recorded in historical sources by Hokkien speakers as tokos (Chien 2012).

The Toko Today: "Ethnic" Grocery or Dutch Entrepot?

Having originally referred to a warehouse, and gradually growing to refer to a trading post, the word toko evolved still further until it reached where it is now – the Netherlands – where it refers to a neighbourhood grocery store. Once connected to China and Taiwan, and then to the places in Southeast Asia where the Hokkien traded, the word toko evolved to apply to Asia at large, and to territories in the maritime Dutch empire including the Caribbean. In the Netherlands today, the word toko has become synonymous with grocery stores that offer food products from Asia at large, sometimes extending to Suriname which hosts a large South Asian diaspora (Koopman 2022).

While tokos such as Toko Makassar – one of the oldest Indian tokos in the Netherlands, located in Amsterdam's Geuzenveld neighbourhood (Buursink and Lakbir 2022) – have deeply embedded themselves into Dutch society, serving as community anchors for people from many countries, they draw our attention to immigrant foodways. Who does the toko serve? What countries or regions does it cover? If we simply

Figure 7 Ingredients at Toko Taj Mahal catering to a West African clientele. Photo by Jehan Nizar.

Figure 8 Shelves at Toko Taj Mahal illustrating a unique display of gastrodiplomacy. Photo by Jehan Nizar.

call it an "ethnic store," are we homogenising the culinary cultures of many peoples and places, or is that process of homogenisation actually occurring as migrants assimilate into Dutch culture? Should we call any shop that sells "ethnic" foods a toko? And what is "ethnic," anyway? How does it come to be that at the Toko Taj Mahal in Nijmegen – named after an iconic monument in India dating back to Mughal times – rows of Indian spice blends and aromatics share shelf space with the entire range of masalas to have ever been conceived by the renowned Pakistani brand Shan, placing Indian and Pakistani goods in a food "family" in a way that they would not be in South Asia?

Canned fava beans and chickpeas from Lebanese brand Chtoura Garden rub shoulders with pre-made falafel mixes and green freekeh grains from Syrian producer Durra. The Turkish brand Nuh'un Ankara Makarnasi teases its European audience with an extensive dried pasta offering in many shapes and sizes just as Dari – that stalwart couscous brand from Morocco – reassures its diasporic Maghrebi population in the Netherlands with its presence. Could this motley assortment of goods model gastrodiplomacy for the people who shop there? And can they promote culinary culture to consumers (Hong 2024) – not only immigrants but naturalised or indigenous Dutch people – while hinting at its East Asian history through the provision of a few token wok sauces and condiments?

Conclusion

Reflecting on "my" toko in Nijmegen, I think about the interesting observations one might make if they were to study the baskets of customers closely enough. I mull over the possibility of a shared Muslim narrative that might emerge at Toko Taj Mahal with its in-house, halal-compliant *slagerij* (butcher) who inspires an implicit degree of trust, binding a clientele from the Middle East, North Africa, Turkey and the subconti-

Figure 9 Pantry staples such as pomegranate molasses, mango amba pickle, and tahina at Toko Taj Mahal. Photo by Jehan Nizar.

nent whose paths may not otherwise cross. I think of the Sri Lankan owner who isn't exactly warm but wordlessly hands me a fresh sprig of curry leaves every week, while I tell his wife how much I enjoy the potent heat of the Kenyan green chillies she plied me with on a prior visit. She laughs and tells me she uses about fifteen a day in her own cooking.

The migrant experience is somehow always frozen in time and infused with nostalgia. As I stand at Toko Taj Mahal's freezer section, I find myself smiling while taking in rows of cardboard pinwheel trays of La Vache Qui Rit cheese and glass jars of Puck cream cheese – processed tastes I outgrew in the early 2000s as a third-culture Indian teenager growing up in Dubai. I marvel at how through my weekly visits to the toko I feel more connected to the Middle East since I've moved to the Netherlands, caught in a time warp of products that have long since lost their appeal to a new wave of "expatriates" who have only ever known the glittering skyline of skyscrapers and malls in "New Dubai".

So much of the academic field of Migration Studies as it relates to food and foodways examines how people constantly move backwards and revisit the places from which they came. And yet, a focal part of the migrant predicament is about seeking the comforts of proximity but at a safe distance from the past. "Going back" is, in some ways, akin to not taking steps forward. The reality is that people may move back and forth; some migrants do return to the homelands of their imaginations; some leave permanently and others strike roots in their new homes.

Foods migrate, too: consider a green-and-gold tin of Gold Medal ghee, which has come to be my preferred brand in the Netherlands, and which was made here in the Netherlands and exported to Syria long before the post-2014 Civil War. People may find new Dutch treats in their tokos which become part of who they are; the children of, say, Indian, Syrian, or Moroccan immigrants who may develop a fondness for "Dutch" confections such as *spekkoek* – literally translating to bacon cake owing to the many layers present in this sweet cake featuring eggs, butter, sugar, flour and the secret ingredients of nutmeg and cardamom – with its own contentious origin story (Van Herwijnen 2024).

While the commonly circulated story is that *spekkoek* is a Dutch invention dating back to the colonies in "the Dutch East Indies" – where snacks such as *speculaas* were missed, resulting in the characteristic spices used in that much-longed for delicacy being replicated in *spekkoek* – it is important to note that *kue lapis legit*, a layered cake synonymous with Malaysian,

Indonesian and Peranakan Chinese culture, already existed. Claims of authenticity aside, the presence of *spekkoek* in tokos tells a more important story of "Dutch" culture today. This culture has been, and continues to be, influenced by historic waves of global trade and colonisation, absorbing influences courtesy of ancient maritime trade routes and present-day migrations prompted by circumstances as varied as forced displacement to a search for better jobs or a bid to start afresh.

FURTHER READING

Ahmed, Rashid, and Bin Shabib, eds. *Diaspora from the Middle East and North Africa: Communities, Architecture, Neighbourhoods*. Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2019.

Buursink, Jesper, and Fouad Lakbir. *Toko Makassar: Kroepoek, Gemberbier en Stampot*. Episode 2. Produced by Stratenmakers Audiocollectief, commissioned by BOEi. Podcast audio, 9:21. December 27, 2022. https://open.spotify.com/episode/6M6M8gU5kIOf8nTfzqz8U4.

Chien, Hung-yi. "Toko: A Local Concept that Traveled the World." *Kleine Schriften* 拙搞收集, 2021. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3476-5066.

Chowdhry, Pritika. "What are 'Sites of Memory' or 'Lieux de Mémoire'?" *Pritikachowdhry* (blog), December 16, 2021. https://www.pritikachowdhry.com/sites-of-memory.

Hong, Dan. "The Game of Gastrodiplomacy." *Vittles*, January 15, 2024. https://www.vittlesmagazine.com/p/the-game-of-gastrodiplomacy.

Koopman, Josephine. "The Toko's Smell and Image." *Odeuropa*, 2022. https://odeuropa.eu/the-tokos-smell-and-image/.

Mieke. "What to Get at the Asian Supermarket." *Dorothy Porker – Inconsistent Foodstuffs* (blog), May 28, 2021. https://www.dorothy-porker.com/what-to-get-at-the-asian-supermarket/.

Tjin's Toko. "About Us." Accessed June 2, 2025. https://www.tjinstoko.eu/en/service/about/.

Van Herwijnen, Emma. "The Battle of the Spekkoek: Which Country Can Claim to Be the Real Creator?" *Public History Amsterdam* (blog), September 26, 2024. https://publichistoryamsterdam.org/the-battle-of-the-spekkoek.

Sharing the Kugel: Commensality and Jewish Culture from Latvia and Lithuania to Jerusalem and the World

Artis Patriks Mazalis

Commensality is about sharing food at the same table, and the kugel – a kind of pudding, typically made from noodles or potatoes, often baked in a casserole dish – is a "sharing" food par excellence. Kugel has been a signature dish or culinary touchstone for Ashkenazi, that is, European, Jews for generations, and today one can also find it among Jews in the Middle East, North America, and other parts of the global diaspora. In a letter to a Jewish magazine written in 1825, the German poet Heinrich Heine wrote: "Kugel, this holy national dish, has done more for the preservation of Judaism than all three issues of the magazine" (Roden 1997, 153). Today, as the eminent food writer Claudia Roden observed, Kugel remains a staple dish during the Sabbath, the weekly Jewish day of rest, and is featured at the Passover Seder, in both sweet and savory forms.

As scholars, we can look to the Kugel as material evidence by tracking its various manifestations in cookbooks, blogs, restaurants, and home kitchens. The wide variety of recipes that we can find across various communities can give us a picture of how Jewish communities have interacted with others and how they have moved in the world while adapting to societies and environments around them.

Kugel comes from Yiddish and ultimately from the German word for "sphere." The dish, at its simplest, is a casserole that consists of starch, eggs, and fat. The starch can come from a noodle or potato base and can be sweet or savory. Typically, Jews from northern Poland, the Baltic region, or Belarus have preferred savory dishes, while southern Polish and Ukrainian Jews favored something sweeter. Originally, Kugel was typically made with an egg noodle called *lokshen*. If one comes away with the impression that it was inspired by the pasta of Italy, then it is true, Claudia Roden explained, as Central and Eastern European Jews learned of the recipe from Jews who came from Italy, even before pasta became popular in the lands of the Germans. The basic recipe used simple ingredients – *lokshen* noodles, onions, chicken fat or vegetable oil, and eggs. All ingredients were available to Jewish communities living in Central and Eastern Europe. But with the spread of the potato from the New World, which entered Europe in the sixteenth century, Jews slowly embraced this new ingredient. Many ultimately replaced *lokshen* in northeastern parts of Europe with the potato, as it was easy to grow in colder climates and gave a high yield during harvest.

Regarding commensality, relations between the Ashkenazi Jews and the dominant native communities of the countries in which they lived paint an interesting picture regarding shared foods. In different Baltic and Slavic communities, the Kugel became common, and to this day is often made, although it differs greatly in

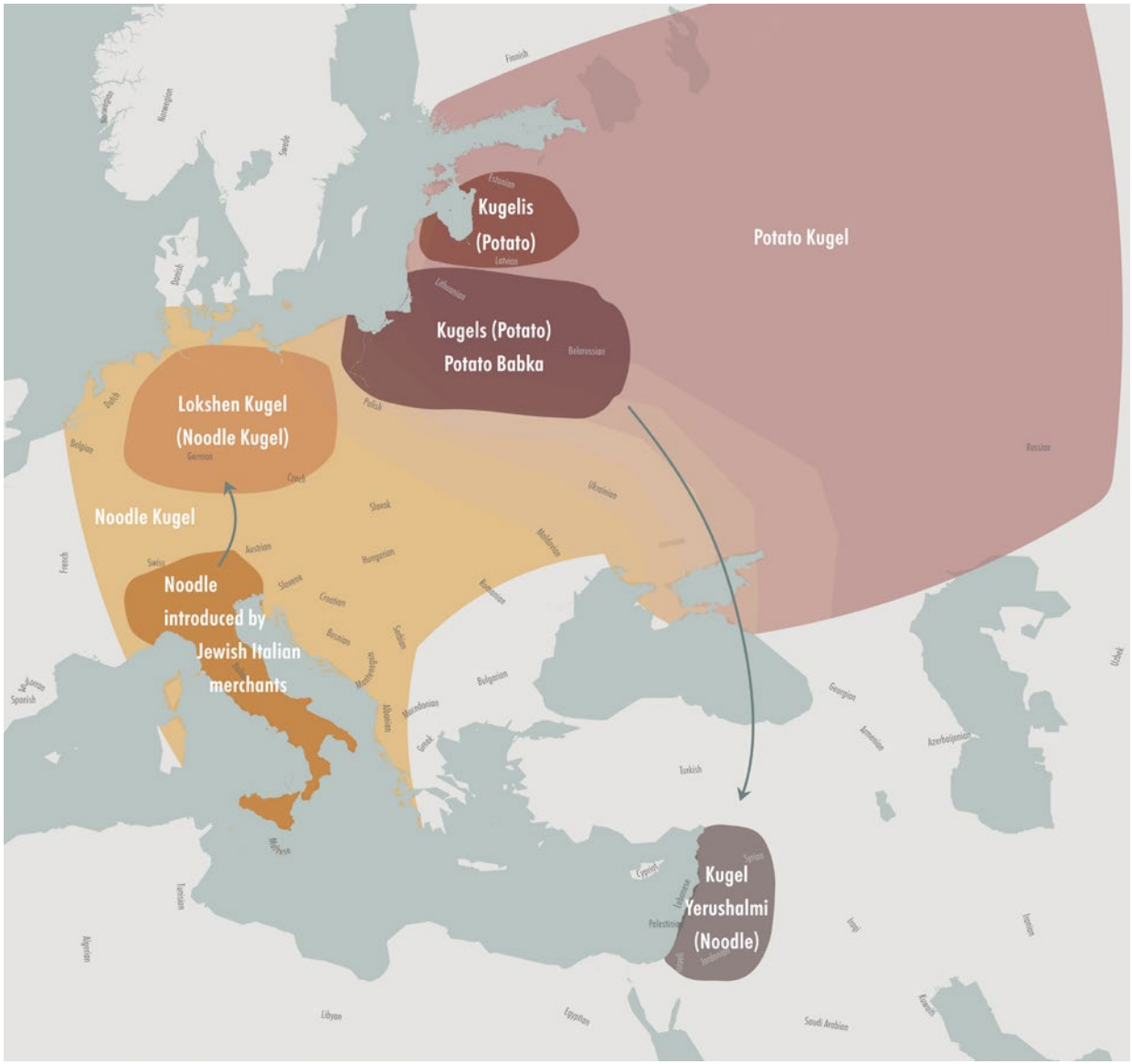


Figure 10 The existence of the various Kugel recipes across Central/Eastern Europe through the development of noodle-based to potato-based recipes.
Map by GeoDienst, University of Groningen.

ingredients. In Lithuania, for example, *Kuģelis* (also named *bulvių plokštainis* or potato pie) consists of a potato base cooked in oil, dried ham, milk, and onions (Taste of Lithuania, 2023). The Latvians also have their version of Kuģelis, which originated in the region of Latgale, but is now enjoyed throughout the country. This recipe does not use milk but uses eggs and consists of not only dried ham but also *mežacūkas cauraudze*, a type of wild hog meat where fat alternates with leanness (the closest translation in English can be the flitch or pork belly) (Krimuldas novada zemnieku saimniecība "Zutiņi", 2023). This pork product is easily available since the region is surrounded by woodlands and wildlife, and the populace has a hunting culture that has spanned many centuries. Both Latvians and Lithuanians today call Kuģelis their national dish, without mentioning Ashkenazi Jews, and sometimes even engage in debates about which territory can claim to have invented the Kugel (Taste of Lithuania, 2023) (Krimuldas novada zemnieku saimniecība "Zutiņi", 2023).

Northeastern Poland and Belarus also have a dish inspired by the Kugel named the *babka ziemniaczana* or Potato Babka. Just like the casseroles of the Baltics, Potato Babka consists of potatoes, onions, eggs, and, most importantly, bacon, which could be fried, baked, or smoked. The Polish Potato Babka can also contain sausages or *Kielbasa* made of beef or pork, lard, and different spices such as paprika. Since the main ingredient is the potato, these dishes are very recent in their current manifestations, since, again, the potato only came to Europe after the colonization of the New World and gained wide use only from the eighteenth century. To date, no scholars have explained how these communities interacted to create their versions of the Kugel. In some interviews regarding the Jewish community in the Latvian city of Aizpute, people mentioned that some Christian Latvians performed housework for Jews, who would share their dishes with them (Zvirgzds Zvirgzdiņš. 2008, 32), opening up possibilities to work out interactions between the Baltic communities and Jews in these memoirs. The most notable difference between the Kugel dishes of Christians and the Jewish Potato Kugel is the use of ham and milk, which goes against the Jewish dietary laws regarding what is kosher or *Kashrut*.

The Middle East has its own Kugel traditions. Indeed, the Kugel has traveled to the Holy Land of the Jews in the form of the Jerusalem Kugel or *Kugel Yerushalmi*, which Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants brought from Eastern Europe. It is believed that the followers of Lithuanian Jewish Talmudist Elijah ben Solomon Zalman (1720-1797), also known as *Vilna Gaon*, introduced the dish to local Jewish communities residing in Jerusalem in the eighteenth century. The followers of Vilna Geon came from Lithuania, and yet they came from the area of Eastern Europe where the savory kugel predominated. *Kugel Yerushalmi*, by contrast, is made with caramelized sugar, thus being sweet. It consists of a base of thin noodles resembling spaghetti. It could be that sweeteners, if not sugar, then perhaps date syrup, were more accessible in the Middle East as opposed to Eastern and Central Europe at the time, thus sparking a change from savory to sweet tones in taste. And as opposed to the previous Kugels, black pepper, which would have reached Jerusalem via the Indian Ocean spice trade, is the most important part of the *Kugel Yerushalmi*, which also plays a big

part in the belief that this Kugel has "healing abilities." It is sweet and spicy at the same time.

The Kugel has changed over history but remains a centerpiece of the Jewish table, as a food for sharing and for nourishment. In its various forms – with noodles or potatoes, sweet or savoury – it attests to the migration of Jewish peoples and the diasporic challenges and adaptations to various environments for the Jewish diaspora, to the links they have forged with their neighbors, and to the culinary heritage that has connected them to lands ranging from Latvia and Lithuania to Israel and North America, and beyond.

FURTHER READING

Koenig, Leah. *The Jewish Cookbook*. New York: Phaidon Press, 2019.

Krimuldas novada zemnieku saimniecība "Zutiņi." "Kartupeļu Kuģelis – Sens Latviešu Tradicionālais Ēdiens [in Latvian]." September 21, 2023. https://zutini.lv/kartupelu-kugelis-sens-latviesu-tradicionalais-ediens/.

Polonist Test Kitchen. "Babka Ziemniaczana: Polish Potato Babka with Bacon." January 16, 2022. https://www.polonist.com/babka-ziemniaczana-polish-potato-babka/.

Roden, Claudia. *The Book of Jewish Food: An Odyssey from Samarkand and Vilna to the Present Day*. London: Penguin Group, 1997 and 2022 (expanded edition).

Smith, Andrew F. *Potato: A Global History*. Edible Series. London: Reaktion Books, 2012.

Taste of Lithuania. "Kugelis (Lithuanian Potato Pudding)." August 1, 2023. https://tasteoflithuania.com/lithuanian-kugelis-potato-pudding/#kugelis-is-it-authentically-lithuanian.

Ungar, Carol. *Jewish Soul Food: Traditional Fare and What It Means*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2015.

Zvirgzdiņš, Jānis Zvirgzds. *Aizputnieku Stāsti par Ebrejiem*. Rīga: Starpnozaru Mākslas Grupa Serde, 2008. Preview available at: https://issuu.com/signepucena/docs/ebreji_burtnica_prewie.

Plates Without Borders: The Happy Fig Tavern and the Taste of Cypriot Unity

Seda Bahar Pancaroglu

In Cyprus, the act of coming together around food and cooking is embedded in the island's identity. Particularly in rural communities, the practice of sharing food bears a close relation to cultural values, communal living and agricultural practices. Whether for a wedding or the celebration at the end of the harvest, a feast is indispensable. Gathering around long tables of elaborately prepared food has defined the culinary and cultural landscape of the island. On such occasions, taverns function as social institutions that bring Cypriot people together.

As carriers of a generous and communal culinary culture, taverns hold significant importance in Cypriot life as spaces for community interaction, tradition, and memory. Deriving from the Latin *taberna*, the Greek word ταβέρνα originally referred to a shop or a place of business, evolving over time to mean a small restaurant, particularly one that serves simple, traditional food and drinks. Primarily located in Greece, Cyprus, and parts of Turkey, the tavern is an outstanding example of a locus for Mediterranean commensality. Central to its cultural significance is the tradition of serving *mezzes*, a range of hot or cold dishes, accompanied by staples such as bread, olives, and local beverages like wine or ouzo. With tables crowded with small plates of food intended for sharing, taverns offer spaces of commensality where people enter a dialogue through the shared language of food.

The 2021 novel *The Island of Missing Trees* by Elif Shafak sets out to explore the ramifications of the 1974 partition of Cyprus, contrasting it distinctly with the pre-partition era of *convivencia,* when Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots lived together. In her depiction of coexistence, Shafak imagines a tavern in pre-partition Nicosia, Cyprus, called "The Happy Fig," named after the fig tree residing in their midst. Two partners, a Greek Cypriot and a Turkish Cypriot, run the tavern together: These are Yiorgos and Yusuf, who defied the odds not only by opening the tavern in 1955 amidst growing inter-communal tensions, but who also became involved in a queer Romeo-and-Juliet-style love. Drawing a diverse crowd of Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Maronites, and UN soldiers, the tavern serves as a uniting force: "Between its walls, strangers turned into friends, friends into lovers; old flames rekindled, broken hearts mended or shattered once again. Many babies on the island had been conceived after a merry evening in the tavern."

The very name of this tavern, The Happy Fig, carries deep symbolic weight. The fig is a venerable fruit in the history of the eastern Mediterranean world and among Muslim and Christian peoples. It has often symbolized both peace and fecundity. As the novel suggests, the fig tree is even believed to be the one from the Garden of Eden, the tree bearing the forbidden fruit. With such a name, the tavern becomes a symbol of both common ground and the allure of forbidden temptation.

The author inserts a menu from The Happy Fig into her narrative. Such a detail not only makes the setting more tangible but also prompts the reader to

ponder regional influences and cultural interactions. The menu is above all the verbal expression of an attentive curatorial and identity-building process. The naming of the food, along with the main ingredients and the way they are prepared, conveys insights about cultural heritage while addressing the preferences of its customers (Lakoff 2006, 150-151). The playful insertion of a menu into the narrative opens up a new discourse on Cypriot heritage and meaning-making through food. Serving as a microcosm of the island, the menu of The Happy Fig captures the transcultural identity of the Cypriot culinary tradition, featuring delicacies like stuffed courgette flowers, charcoal-grilled chicken souvlaki, and oven-roasted figs paired with honey and aniseed ice cream, reflecting the unique combination of Mediterranean cuisine with Greek, Turkish and Middle Eastern influences.

Some of the items on the menu come with a bilingual naming choice which reveals how these dishes have integrated deeply into the linguistic patterns of both communities such as "Stuffed Bell Peppers (Dolmadakia/Dolma)," "Crushed Sour Wheat Soup (Trahanas/Tarhana)," and "Meatballs in Yogurt Sauce (Keftedes/Köfte)." A prevalent trend in menu construction is to give information on the origins of the dishes. This is another point that Shafak plays with in her fictive menu. For instance, her menu includes "The Nomadic Baklava," which connects the Cypriot culinary heritage to its long history in the broader eastern Mediterranean world. By giving baklava a nomadic feature, Shafak emphasises its cultural fluidity and movement, its mode of travelling across borders and through generations, adapting to different cultures and becoming part of diverse traditions. The menu enacts a uniting discourse around the well-known and long-debated dessert, describing its extensive geography as "Greek/Turkish/Armenian/Lebanese/Syrian/Moroccan/Algerian/Jordanian/Israeli/Palestinian/Egyptian/Tunisian/Libyan/Iraqi … Did we forget anyone? If so, please add," offering a common ground where people from different geographies or ethnic cultures can connect over similar tastes. The openness and eagerness to add more communities to the table bring commensality onto a high discursive plane. Another item that stands out in this fictive menu is "Tripe Soup with Garlic, Vinegar, Dried Lime, Seven Spices and Herbs." With the explanation: "(the oldest cure for hangovers across the Levant)," the dish places Cyprus within the larger culinary heritage and cultural sphere of the Levant.

Today, taverns still hold a prominent role in Cyprus, both for locals and for tourists, through their local menu. Offering regional specialities with local ingredients and a tangled history, Cypriot taverns serve as a common point of contact for Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, and Armenians Maronites. The menu that Shafak inserts serves as a reminder of a deep and broad culinary heritage and raises the prospect among readers – and among Cypriots – of gathering around the same table once again.

"Is Baklava Turkish or Greek?"

Seda Bahar Pancaroglu

The question of whether baklava is Turkish or Greek often becomes a passionate debate over "gastro-nationalism." Both Greeks and the Turkish claim baklava as part of their cultural heritage. Many people from different regions of the Middle East have also entered the debate over baklava. As a sweet pastry prepared with thin layers of dough mixed with pistachios or walnuts and sweetened with syrup, whose name comes from the Arabic word *balhalu* (بَلْهَلُو), meaning bundle or layered, baklava is a beloved sweet in many cultures, associated with festive occasions.

Figure 11 Pistachio baklava.
Photo by Seda Bahar Pancaroglu.

Many scholars have traced baklava's introduction to Cyprus to the Ottoman era, which began on the island in 1571. Ottoman elites traditionally served it to guests during significant festivities such as Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr. Some scholars have traced baklava back to the Seljuks, who ruled much of Anatolia between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. Others have argued that baklava likely originated in Central Asia as a result of cultural exchanges between the Turkish nomads and the settled Iranians. While the dessert's exact birthplace remains uncertain, baklava has undoubtedly migrated and evolved across history, moving into places like Cyprus that have added their own unique twists to the recipe, whether through the kind of nuts used (such as walnuts, pistachios, or hazelnuts), the syrup (made with honey or sugar, or infused with rose water), or the method of preparation (as in the number of dough sheets used to make the layers).

FURTHER READING

Akkaya, Aysenur, and Banu Koc. 2017. "Past, Present and Tomorrow of Baklava." *Uluslararası Kırsal Turizm ve Kalkınma Dergisi*1 (1): 47–50. https://turizmvekalkinma.org/index.php/irtadjournal/article/view/38.

Christofi, Alex. *Cypria: A Journey to the Heart of the Mediterranean*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024.

DeSoucey, Michaela. 2010. "Gastronationalism: Food Traditions and Authenticity Politics in the European Union." *American Sociological Review* 75 (3): 432–455. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122410372226.

Hatay, Mete. "The Levantine Legacy of Cypriot Culinary Culture." *The Cyprus Review* 18, no. 2 (2006): 129–142.

Hayden, Georgina. *Taverna: Recipes from a Cypriot Kitchen*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2019.

Jacob, Rashmi, and Alka Sharma. 2018. "Naming Food and Creating Identity in Transnational Contexts." In *Language and Literature in a Glocal World*, edited by Sandhya Rao Mehta, 99–113. Singapore: Springer.

Kalivas, Tina. "Remembering Cyprus: 'Traditional' Cypriot Cooking and Food Preparation Practices in the Memories of Greek Cypriot Emigrants." In *Dining on Turtles: Food Feasts and Drinking in History*, edited by D. Kirkby and T. Luckins, 171–187. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007.

Khan, Yasmin. *Ripe Figs: Recipes and Stories from the Eastern Mediterranean*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2021.

Kiazim, Selin. *Oklava: Recipes from a Turkish-Cypriot Kitchen*. London: Mitchell Beazley, 2017.

Lakoff, Robin Tolmach. 2006. "Identity à la Carte: You Are What You Eat." In *Discourse and Identity*, edited by Anna De Fina, Deborah Schiffrin, and Michael Bamberg, 142–165. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511584459.008.

Matalas, Antonia Leda, Varvara Yiangou, and Nikolaos Xirotyris. "Food Sharing in the Agricultural Communities of Cyprus." *Estudios del Hombre*, no. 35 (2016): 115–124.

Perry, Charles. "Grain Foods of the Early Turks." In *Food in Motion: The Migration of Foodstuffs and Cookery Techniques: Proceedings: Oxford Symposium 1983*, vol. 1: 11-22. Oxford Symposium, 1983.

Shafak, Elif. *The Island of Missing Trees*. London: Penguin, 2021.

Figure 12 Erma coffeeshop, Nicosia south.
Photo by S. Irakleos.

Figure 13 Rüstem coffeeshop, Nicosia north.
Photo by S. Irakleos.

Kitchen Geographies: The Politics of (Un)welcoming in a Turkish Refugee Kitchen

Imme Koster

In February 2025, I visited Nazli and Erdal Tüt in Gilze, a municipality located between Brede and Tilburg in southern Netherlands. Nazli is an educational psychologist and Erdal is an artist and sculptor who specializes in stone carving. They are both Kurds who left Diyarbakir, in eastern Turkey, in 2023 to seek asylum in the Netherlands. They have been living in a refugee centre in Gilze while waiting for the Dutch government to make a decision about their application. Located in a lovely forested area, this former concentration camp is now housing up to 1200 people from all over the world.

As I was welcomed into the home of Nazli and Erdal, the first thing I noted was the size of the kitchen. The space supposedly accommodates ten people, yet barely six could comfortably sit at the table. They told me about the residential dynamics, entailing complicated stories of both sitting and not sitting at the table with other residents. The reality is that in this shared housing, they seldom sit together around the table at all. They explained to me how they plan their meals in such a way that they can avoid gathering around the table with others. The Dutch system puts those with the same passport together in a home, without considerations for other cultural and political sensitivities. This policy has meant that this Kurdish couple has ended up under the same roof as some members of the Gülen movement, or Hizmat, whom they regard as

Figure 14 a Kitchen in the refugee centre in Gilze, the Netherlands. Photos by Imme Koster.

extremist Turkish nationalists. Needless to say, politics are not discussed when they do occasionally end up spending time with these Gülen adherents. "Keep it to small talk," Nazli repeated over and over again, when discussing her housemates, "and we watch what we are saying; they can hear and will listen to us talking." The distrust in her voice is understandable, as the Gülen align with the Turkish government when it comes to the Kurdish cause.

The topic of Kurdistan brings out more discussions around the meanings of commensality, and especially hospitality. Unwelcome and even treated with hostility in Turkey, many Kurds navigate a complicated geography of welcoming and unwelcoming spaces. Nazli

Figure 14 b

describes their honeymoon: a road trip through north-eastern Turkey and the Caucasus. While treated as potential terrorists in Kars and Erzurum, their Kurdish identity made it easier for them to cross the border into Armenia, where few Armenians, remembering the history of genocide, welcome Turks to the table. At the same time, they told me, they have helped Yezidi Kurdish children in refugee camps, who fled from the genocide committed by the Islamic State in Iraq between 2014 and 2017. They feel a sense of solidarity with all displaced and disowned Kurdish people, regardless of their national or religious status. The mood becomes heavier as our conversation turns to some of the unspeakable atrocities committed by the Turkish state: random beatings and arrests, the withholding of aid following the 2023 earthquake, and the systematic erasure of language and culture are just a few of the methods employed to "assimilate" Kurdistan and Kurdish people into the homogeneous whole of the republic. They tell me how the Nowruz festival, a holiday with Zoroastrian roots that not only Persian but also Kurdish and many Central Asian people celebrate, has turned into an event of resistance.

Figure 14 c

Chapter 2

Commensality, Cultural Heritage, and the Art of Food

Reconstructing Culinary Memory and Migration: Sephardic Jewish Heritage through Inquisition Tribunal Records

Hélène Jawhara Piñer

The Jews of the Iberian peninsula, also known as Sephardic Jews, more or less openly practiced their religion and customs and pursued livelihoods during centuries of Islamic rule. As Christian kingdoms expanded in the region, however, many faced expulsion or faced pressure to convert. This process culminated with the conquest of Granada, the last Islamic stronghold of Spain, in 1492, when Jews either fled or succumbed to conversion. Many scattered across the Mediterranean, from Morocco to Italy and into the eastern Mediterranean lands of the Ottoman Empire, as they carried not only their religious practices but also their culinary traditions. Those "conversos" who stayed in Spain, as ostensible Christians, or who emigrated to the Americas and especially Mexico, retained many culinary customs or foodways, along with religious practices that have led many scholars to recognize them in retrospect as "crypto-Jews" who were Jewish in secret.

Whether motivated by fear, mistrust, or resentment, some Spanish and Portuguese Christian authorities seized the opportunity or excuse of the Inquisition to root out conversos and charge them with heresy. Foodways became one of the most important grounds for persecution, as neighbors reported fellow neighbors who, for example, refused to eat pork or followed suspect "Jewish" practices such as eating eggplant (aubergine). Frequent references to food in Inquisition tribunal records of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries make these documents into valuable – if surprising – sources for the study of the Sephardic culinary heritage.

Inquisition Tribunal Records: A Window into Culinary Practices

Inquisition tribunal records, typically associated with religious persecution and suppression, may seem an unconventional source for culinary history. However, these records are a goldmine for understanding the food practices of Sephardic Jews. The testimonies, accusations, and confessions preserved in these archives reveal critical insights into daily life, particularly the dietary choices that became markers of cultural and religious identity. For instance, recurring references to forbidden foods or adherence to kosher practices as evidence of covert Jewish

observance were two recurring themes. Foods like *adafina*, a Sephardic Sabbath stew, made by "burying" (as the name suggests) a pot in the embers in a kind of pre-modern "slow cooker," or unleavened bread (as Jews ate during Passover) were often cited in accusations, as their preparation and consumption were key indicators of Jewish faith. The refusal to eat or even to touch pork or lard suggests how food could become a medium of resistance, a silent assertion of identity amidst forced conversions and inquisitorial scrutiny.

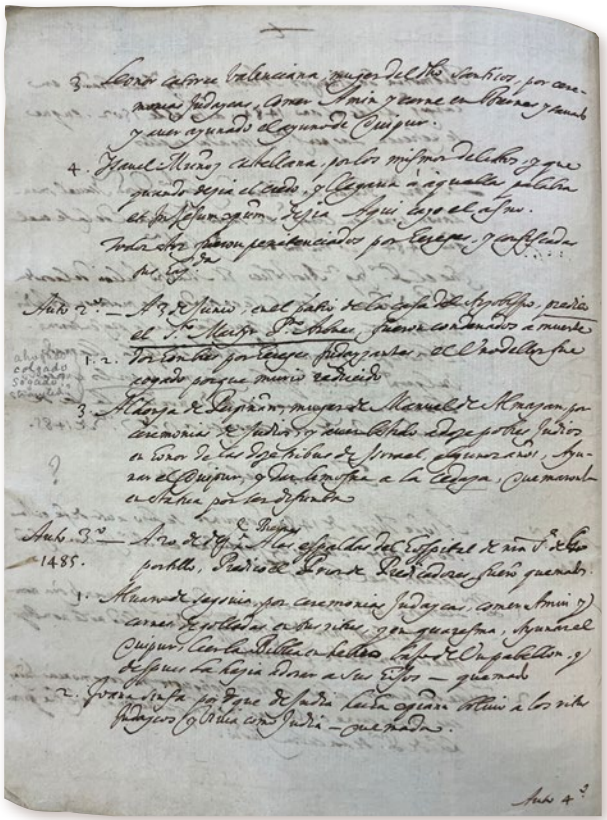


Figure 15 *Memoria de diversos autos* (Inquisition tribunal records), UPenn Ms. Codex 1484, fol. 1v. Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books, and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania Library. *Auto-da-fé* against Alvaro de Segovia, June 20, 1485. This extract cites his consumption of *amin* (also known as *adafina*), meat prepared following Judaic kashrut, eating meat during Lent, fasting on Yom Kippur, and reading the Hebrew Bible.

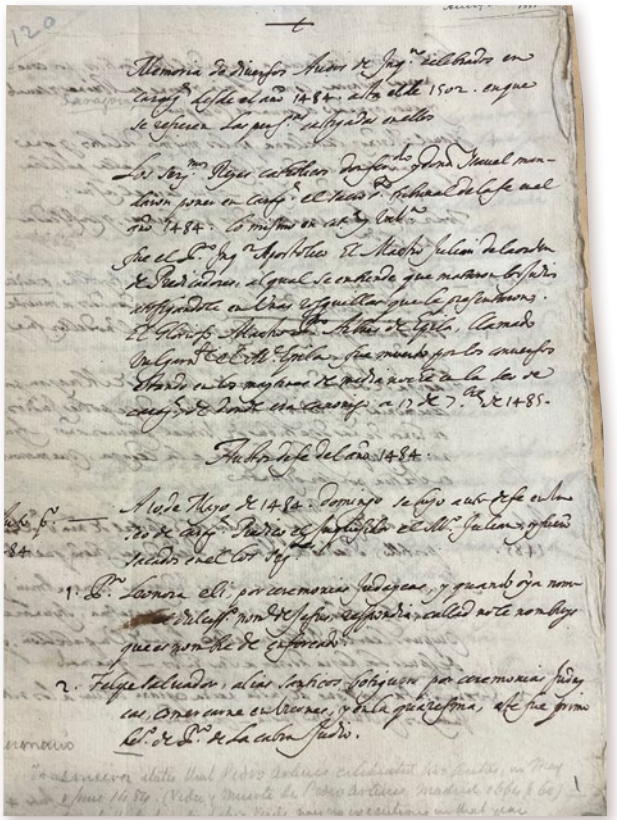


Figure 16 *Memoria de diversos autos* (Inquisition tribunal records), UPenn Ms. Codex 1484, fol. 1r. Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books, and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania Library. *Auto-da-fé* against Felipe Salvador, May 10, 1484. This extract records his consumption of meat on Fridays and during Lent, and observance of Jewish customs.

Inquisition records are also valuable because they highlight the everyday lives of ordinary people – individuals – who were members of marginalized communities. They show food as both a survival strategy and a mnemonic device, preserving collective memory in times of displacement. Food was a political tool. It shaped the food practices of the Sephardic Jews and, oppositionally, the formation of the cuisine of Spain's dominant Christian majority.

Memory and Migration: Culinary Heritage as a Tool of Continuity

The Inquisitorial courts that followed the establishment of crypto-Jewish communities, in Spanish towns such as Ciudad Real and Toledo, or in Italian towns, such as Rome and Venice, tracked food practices in their records. Records from Mexico are particularly striking when juxtaposed with their counterparts in Spain, because they suggest how migration shaped and diversified Sephardic cuisine, as people incorporated American ingredients, notably corn (maize) and chili, into their foods, while retaining symbolic connections to Iberian roots. For example, matzah, the unleavened Passover bread, evolved into a kind of corn tortilla in Mexico. There were other unleavened breads, too, with each going by a different name according to the places where Inquisition records were written: *pan cenceño, pão do judeos*, and *paalis*, for example, or *nuégados* (fried Spanish pastry), a sweet treat also known under the name *pignolata* in Italian Inquisition trials. Similarly, the introduction of chocolate, a quintessentially Mesoamerican ingredient, into Sephardic culinary traditions highlights how Sephardic Jews engaged with new culinary landscapes without losing sight of their heritage. These adaptations underscore the dual processes of preservation and innovation that often characterize diaspora foodways.

Sharing meals, or engaging in commensality, served as key sites of memory and belonging, while Sephardic feasts, often centered on religious holidays and life-cycle events, offered cultural anchors in unfamiliar settings. Through meals, Sephardic communities preserved a sense of cohesion, using food as a symbolic language of continuity amid geographic and cultural displacement. At the same time, the refusal to dine with "others" – non-Jewish people – in certain contexts (as, again, when people ate pork), or to use the same dishes, tangibly expressed Judaic practices.

Interdisciplinary Approaches: Creativity in Historical Reconstruction

Interdisciplinary approaches, combining history, culinary arts, anthropology, and the study of material culture, may yield exciting new insights, as the use of Inquisition records can show. We can see how Sephardic culinary practices evolved not only in time, from, say, the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, but also in place, as what people ate in Mexico City diverged from what people ate in a place like Seville.

Literary works and dictionaries can also help scholars to recreate historical recipes based on fragmentary descriptions in Inquisition records. Testing such recipes in the kitchen can bridge the gap between textual analysis and sensory experience. This approach not only brings historical narratives to life but also invites contemporary audiences to engage with the Sephardic heritage in sensory and "taste-able" ways. In my own research, I have implemented this experiential approach

Figure 17 "Isabel Veles' Stewed Pot of Chards with Cheese and Breadcrumbs," from *Matzah and Flour: Recipes from the History of the Sephardic Jews* by Hélène Jawhara Piñer (pp. 260–261). Image courtesy of the author.

to revisiting and reviving the Sephardic culinary heritage by developing recipes that feature in two cookbooks: *Sephardi: Cooking the History, Recipes of the Jews of Spain and the Diaspora, from the 13th Century to Today* (2021), and, focusing on bread, *Matzah and Flour: Recipes from the History of the Sephardic Jews* (2024).

Culinary Memory as Resistance and Revival

The resilience of Sephardic culinary traditions in the face of persecution and migration testifies to the power of food as a cultural marker, while showing how culinary practices can serve as acts of resistance against assimilation. For example, the clandestine observance of Passover and other Jewish holidays along with the maintenance of special culinary practices like the making of unleavened bread, or the symbolic use of herbs linked to Iberian Jewish identity, reveal how food became a site of cultural defiance in the era of the Inquisition. Generation after generation, this resilience created a dynamic interplay between memory, adaptation, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

In modern contexts, the revival of Sephardic cuisine has offered a way of reclaiming lost histories. Broader narratives of migration and identity enrich ongoing conversations about cultural preservation and transformation. The preparation of *adafina*, frequently referenced in Spanish Inquisition trials; *mufleta*, the sweet dish made by Moroccan Jews to celebrate the end of Passover; the donut called *isfeng*, to celebrate Hanukkah – all three of which trace origins back to thirteenth-century Spain – signify the continued transmission of culinary traditions and bear witness to the migration of cultural and religious identities through food. Cookbooks that

pair history with food practices such as my own books *Sephardi* and *Matzah and Flour* can help us all to remember and to appreciate Sephardic culture, regardless of our backgrounds, and offer a way to contribute to the transmission of the culinary heritage not only of Sephardic Jews but also of people from the Iberian peninsula, the Maghrib, Mexico, the countries of the eastern Mediterranean (formerly in the Ottoman Empire), and lands to which they all ventured.

Figure 18 *Matza and Flour*, cover of Hélène Jawhara Piñer book (2024).

FURTHER READING

Hasia R. Diner and Simone Cinotto (eds.), *Global Jewish Foodways: A History,* foreword by Carlo Petrini, University of Nebraska Press, 2018.

Carlos Alvar and Guillermo Alvar Nuño (eds.), *Normas de comportamiento en la mesa durante la Edad Media, Madrid:* Sial Ediciones, 2020.

Guillermo Alvar Nuño (ed.), *Food, Feasting and Table Manners in the Late Middle Ages*, Volume I: The Iberian Peninsula in the European Context, Routledge, 2023.

Hélène Jawhara Piñer. *Sephardi: Cooking the History, Recipes of the Jews of Spain and the diaspora from the 12th century to Today*, Boston: Cherry Orchard Press, 2021.

Hélène Jawhara Piñer. *Matzah and Flour. Recipes from the History of the Sephardic Jews*, Boston: Cherry Orchard Press, 2024.

Hélène Jawhara Piñer. *Jews, Food and Spain. The Oldest medieval Spanish cookbook and the Sephardic culinary heritage*, Boston: Cherry Orchard Press, 2022.

Coffeepot Roundabouts: Iconic Landscapes of Arabic Hospitality and Heritage in the Arab Gulf States

Florien Kroodsma

While driving through the Arabian Peninsula, one cannot help but notice the large number of roundabouts integrated into the road network. Most of these roundabouts – or as Americans might call them, "traffic circles" – were introduced from the 1950s, when the road infrastructure expanded following the discovery of oil. Large roundabouts along dual- or triple-lane roads answered the need for safer intersections. Their central spaces also provided room for decoration. In time, these roundabouts evolved into landmarks for public art, showcasing large sculptures of culturally significant objects or animal figures that welcomed residents and visitors while offering glimpses into the rich heritage of individual countries or of the region at large.

One of the objects often displayed in public spaces like these is the traditional Arabic coffee pot, the *dallah* – a symbol so deeply rooted in the region's heritage that many cities have chosen to enrich their urban landscapes with coffee pot-themed roundabouts. Monumental statues of the *dallah* have become one of the most recurring and recognizable elements featured on roundabouts, with notable examples found in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates.

The *dallah* has a distinctive form, consisting of a round, bulbous body that narrows at the center and flares outward again at the top, where it is capped with a lid adorned by a decorative finial. On one side is the gracefully curved handle. On the other side, the slender, crescent-shaped spout begins at the mid-base and extends upward, often reaching the height of the lid or even higher. It is typically open, allowing the coffee to be seen as it flows toward the cups. Surrounding monumental coffee pot sculptures, one sometimes sees sculptures of small handleless cups known as *finjan*s. Coffee was originally served from a ladle dipped into a glazed bowl, which was later replaced by small bowls – echoing Chinese tea customs – from which the modern *finjan* derives its form.

The recurrence of the coffee pot as a monumental sculpture is not a matter of mere whimsy, designed to appeal to tourists or locals. Rather, they function as symbols of and landmarks for cultural heritage. The

Figure 19 *Dalleh* (Coffee Pot).
Photo by Elph, Creative Commons license.

Figure 20 Sculpture of a *dallah*, Kuwait. Photo by Bram van de Woestijne.

dallah played an important role in Bedouin hospitality traditions and evolved into a communal symbol. It is connected to traditional serving rituals which involve, again, the *finjan* (coffee cup). These meanings have transformed the *dallah* from a practical object to a decorative item laden with symbolic power. The *dallah* represents the rich tradition of drinking coffee in Arab societies, along with values of generosity, hospitality, and even commensality – of people coming together at one table.

In 2024, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) inscribed Arabic coffee on its list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, underlining its significant role in Arab society as a "symbol of generosity." Serving coffee in the *dallah* has had particularly close associations with the culture of the Bedouin, that is, the pastoralist, desert-dwelling peoples of the Arabian Peninsula, among whom hospitality has been a cardinal cultural value.

Figure 21 Coffee Pot Roundabout, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates. Photo by Saar van de Woestijne.

Figure 22 Coffee Pot Roundabout, Fujairah, United Arab Emirates. Photo by Saar van de Woestijne.

The practice of coffee-drinking originated from Yemen and slowly spread to the Arabian Peninsula and the wider Ottoman Empire in the beginning in the fifteenth century. The rise of trade routes from 1489 onward marked the beginning of the global spread of coffee. Yet, the specific customs of drinking Arabic coffee remained characteristic of the Arabian Peninsula. Customs or "foodways" associated with the drinking of coffee emerged in generations and centuries that followed. These customs could vary depending on who one was drinking with, the occasion, the place or time of day, the preparation of the beans and brew, the choice of added spices (especially saffron, cardamom and cloves), and the way of serving the beverage. Each part of this process can carry meaning.

The act of drinking coffee has served as a source of communion and dialogue – a means for building relationships and camaraderie between hosts and drinkers. Traditionally, hosts would prepare and serve coffee in front of guests, and would continue to replenish it until a guest signaled by wiggling their cup that they had had enough. Drinking Arabic coffee traditionally occurred at all kinds of social events, such as tribal gatherings, reconciliation meetings after conflicts, matchmaking negotiations, weddings, and funerals. Many observers have noted the power of coffee-drinking to ease tensions, build connections, foster heart-to-heart conversations, and offer opportunities for community building.

The importance of coffee-drinking to the societies of Arab culture explains, in short, why the "coffee pot roundabout" has had such an emotive and symbolic force – a power that is more significant to locals, who understand its cultural valence, than to visitors. And yet, the *dallah* is becoming less of an everyday object, as the coffee-making process is increasingly simplified, replaced by electric *dallah* sets and plastic coffee pots (thermos *dallah*s), altering traditional preparation methods. As a result, the classic *dallah* has become more of a decorative object than a functional one – something seen on a shelf, in a museum, as a textbook illustration or, indeed, on a roundabout, as the anthropologist Amal Sachedina noted in a study about the politics of coffee-drinking in Oman. Metalsmiths traditionally made the *dallah* from thick layers of copper, silver, or brass, and often decorated them with inscriptions, with their shapes differing slightly depending on the specific region where they were made. Over the years decoration has become more salient, sometimes to the extent of making the *dallah* less utilitarian or functional. With the thermos *dallah*, plastic versions of the coffee pot now appear, mimicking the traditional shape of the *dallah* while being incapable of sustaining traditional methods of coffee preparation. Nevertheless, as a symbol of the coffee culture and its associated values of generosity, the *dallah* retains its force.

The *dallah*, in short, is totemic or even iconic, and serves as a regional or national symbol reflecting the cultural identity of Arabian peoples and of the individual states of the Gulf region. The *dallah* can represent the cultural heritage of Arab peoples, reminding locals of coffee's power to unite tribes and clans during occasions when they sip the beverage together. In recent times, on a more large-scale level, the symbol of the *dallah* continues to unite societies by preserving the act of generosity embodied in coffee rituals. Coffeepot roundabouts can remind people, as they drive past these statues, to take heed of the values they share.

Figure 23 Coffee Pot Roundabout, Oman. Photo by Barteld van der Roest.

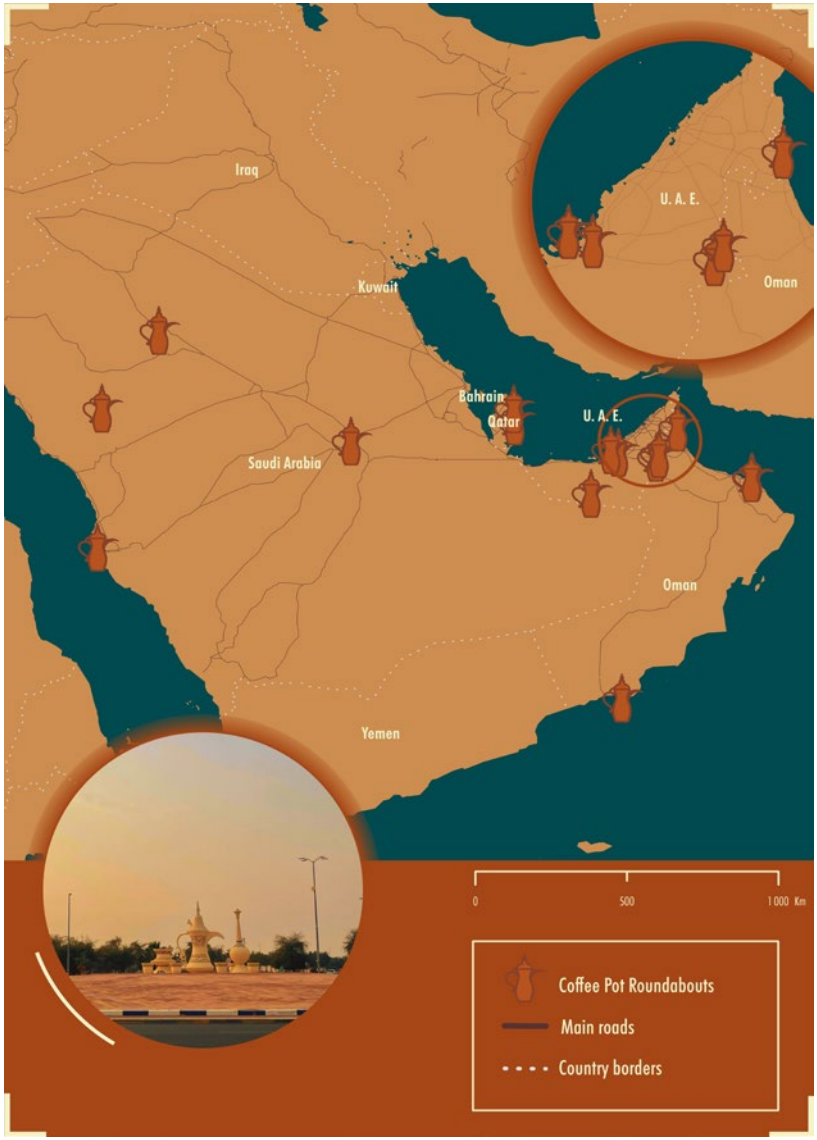


Figure 24 Map, Coffee Pot roundabouts on main roads in the Gulf (Source: Geodienst; Photo in the map: Coffee Pot Roundabout, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates. Photo by Saar van de Woestijne.

FURTHER READING

Abraham-Barna, Corina Georgeta. 2013. "The Term of Turkish Coffee: A Semasiological Approach." *Journal of Agroalimentary Processes and Technologies* 19 (2): 271-75.

Araujo, Geysa. 2010. "Dallah, Gahwa and the Senses." *DESI 602 – Advanced Design Seminar*. https://gdvaport.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/dallah-gahwa-and-the-senses_final.pdf.

Naidoo, Amelia. 2018. "Disappearing Works of Art in the UAE." *Gulf News*, September 15, 2018. Accessed February 22, 2025. https://gulfnews.com/uae/disappearing-works-of-art-in-the-uae-1.860541.

Sachedina, Amal. 2019. "The Politics of the Coffee Pot: Its Changing Role in History-Making and the Place of Religion in the Sultanate of Oman." *History and Anthropology* 30 (3): 233–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2019.1594803.

Temir, Hakan. 2022. "Arabic Qahwa and Its Serving as an Element of Cultural Heritage." *Harran Ilahiyat Journal* 48: 1-18. https://doi.org/10.30623/hij1114573.

UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. n.d. "Arabic Coffee, a Symbol of Generosity." January 2025. https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/arabic-coffee-a-symbol-of-generosity-02111.

From Belonging to Resistance: The Role of Food in Post-Earthquake Antakya

Anna Maria Beylunioğlu

Six months had passed since devastating earthquakes struck Turkey in February 2023, affecting eleven cities, including Antakya (Antioch). I was conducting a preliminary interview as part of a project with an earthquake survivor from this town who had relocated to Mersin. The focus of the interview was on the cultural heritage of Antakya and the damage it had suffered after the earthquake. It was impossible, however, *not* to ask her about her experience of the earthquake.

She told me that just after the earthquake struck, and after securing their son, she felt breathless as they made their way to their neighbors' side by walking through the rubble. There were no doors as all the walls were destroyed. As she was telling me her story she paused and asked, "You know what we did? Don't ask me why," she continued, "I really don't know, but we made coffee – I really needed it." As an academic and co-founder of Nehna, a platform that highlights the strong identity and cultural heritage of Antiochian people, I have spent considerable time thinking, writing, and teaching about the importance of food to politics and society. Food has never been merely a source of nutrients to sustain our daily lives. Beyond its nutritional value, our food and drink choices reflect our culture, social class, gender, religion, and nationality as well as how we have survived by passing these elements down through generations.

Being an Antiochian myself, it has been easy to recognize the central role food plays in Antiochian society. However, even for me, it was difficult to fully grasp how profoundly food can become embedded in the experience of survival, as expressed by this earthquake survivor.

Food as a Unifying Element for the People of Antakya

One of the most important indicators of Antakya's deep connection to its food culture is found in the commensality of religious food rituals across its diverse communities. Food plays a prominent role in the religious festivals of the various groups living together in Antakya. For instance, the most distinctive cultural element that sets the Jews of Antakya apart from their counterparts in Istanbul is the region-specific delicacies they prepare during the holidays (Cemel 2022). Similarly, during the Ğadir Hum religious festival, Arab Alevis in the region prepare a dish called *Hrisi*, which combines meat and wheat (Can 2023). This dish is not only a significant part of their celebration but is also made by many other communities in the area as a way to honor and remember their deceased loved ones. Arab Alevites also dye eggs during the Sabağtaş holiday (Avcı 2023), similar to the tradition of egg-dyeing at Easter among Christians. For the Orthodox community, Easter preparations begin at least three months in advance with the raising of *Ferğun*, also known as *Beç* chicken, and the testing of its eggs. Salty and sweet *kahke*s (cookies), *lebeniye* soup (yoghurt soup, a must-have during Easter), and the tables set up in church courtyards on Easter night or early in the

morning after the service—these are all key elements of the festive celebrations for various communities in the region. Similarly, the numerous dishes prepared on Christmas Eve serve as concrete expressions of how identity and memory are passed down through generations, reinforcing cultural continuity in daily life.

For the people of Antakya, foods like *zahter*, *sürki* (spiced and aged cheese), the local *sarmaiç* (similar to tabbouleh), and *suvari* coffee (dark coffee served in Turkish tea glasses) are not just meals and drinks—they are moments of connection to the city, transcending ethnic and religious distinctions within the town. One interview I conducted with an Antiochian who had lived in another city for many years left a lasting impression. She shared a story to preserve the cultural diversity of Antakya and its food culture. Although these efforts were interrupted for a time after the earthquake, preserving the town's cultural heritage and food culture became even more important in the post-earthquake period. It can be said that the relationship Antakya has established with food, and the discussions surrounding it, have come to the forefront in solidarity efforts after the earthquake.

Figure 25 Suvari Coffee. Photo by A.M. Beylunioğlu.

First and foremost, the many soup kitchens that civic activists established in the region after the earthquake not only helped to avert a food crisis but also anchored people after their trauma. These kitchens held significant meaning for the people of Antakya. For those who had always been deeply connected to life through food, these kitchens became a source of hope and comfort in the face of unimaginable pain and anxiety. Additionally, the presence of some of these kitchens in church courtyards symbolized the unique culture of coexistence that has long defined Antakya.

The relationship Antakya has with food was also evident in the discourses expressing both hope and longing for a return to the city. Many people from Antakya are familiar with accounts following the earthquake that described how those who had sought safety elsewhere stopped eating and drinking. They refused to consume food that wasn't made with ingredients from their hometown, highlighting the deep connection they have with the flavors and culture of Antakya. One interview I conducted with an Antiochian who had lived in another city for many years left a lasting impression. She shared a story about visiting an earthquake survivor who had relocated to her city after the disaster. He felt

uneasy about not being able to serve her Antiochian coffee because he didn't know where to find it anymore. He became deeply emotional when she arrived later that day with half a kilogram of it, and he welcomed her with open arms, hugging her warmly in gratitude.

The gathering of Antiochian Orthodox people around *slika*, a type of halva traditionally made for the commemoration event organized by Nehna in Istanbul, became an important meeting point for many Antakya residents on the fortieth day after the earthquake – with the number forty being a date of high

Figure 27 Soup kitchen in Samandağ.
Photo by A.M. Beylunioğlu.

Figure 26 Soup kitchen in Samandağ Antakya: Hrisi, a dish made as a memorial for people we lost in the earthquake.
Photo by A.M. Beylunioğlu.

Figure 28 Community bazaar in Istanbul.
Photo by A.M. Beylunioğlu.

significance for Eastern Christian funerary observations. Similarly the community bazaars set up after the earthquake, which primarily sold food products from Antakya, became a significant gathering space for the displaced community. These events further demonstrated that for the people of Antakya, food is a powerful element of identity tying them to their homeland.

Today, people from Antakya are rebuilding their lives by preparing and selling traditional Antakya dishes at home and participating in food culture festivals across Turkey. When asked whether they want to return, they express a deep desire to do so but also share their concerns about feasibility, given the extent of the destruction. In this context, preserving the food culture that defines Antakya has become a form of resistance – a way to remain Antiochian in the post-earthquake period, even without being in the city. Particularly after the earthquake, food continues to serve as the glue of social solidarity, and more importantly, as an existential tool, reaffirming once again that food transcends its role as mere nourishment and helps to make people who they are.

Figure 30 *Haytalı*, a bright-pink pudding made from cornflour and rosewater. Photo by A.M. Beylunioğlu.

Figure 29 Slika – individual portions for the post earthquake relief. Photo by A.M. Beylunioğlu.

FURTHER READING

Avcı, Özcan. "Deprem, Ğıd el Sabatağsh, Yeniden Yaşam." *Nehna*, April 4, 2023. https://nehna.org/deprem-gid-el-sabatagsh-yeniden-yasam/

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984.

Can, Şule. "Yas, İnanç, Direniş: Yıkımın Ardından Somut Olmayan Mirası Yeniden Düşünmek." *Nehna*, October 15, 2023. https://www.nehna.org/post/yas-inanc-direnis-yikimin-ardindan-somut-olmayan-mirasi-yeniden-dusunmek

Cemel, Liza. "Antakya Lezzetleri Pesah'da Bir Başka Güzel." *Nehna*, April 15, 2022. https://nehna.org/antakya-lezzetleri-pesahta-bir-baska-guzel/

Colas, Alejandro, Jason Edwards, Sami Zubaida, and Jane Levi, eds. "Identity: Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Religion." In *Food, Politics, and Society: Social Theory and the Modern Food System*, 135–162. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018.

Counihan, Carole. "Introduction: Food and Gender—Identity and Power." In *Food and Gender: Identity and Power*, edited by Carole Counihan and Steven L. Kaplan, 1–8. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Cypriot Culinary Heritage Across the Greek-Turkish Divide: The Case of *Flaounes* and *Pilavuna*

Seda Bahar Pancaroglu

Many associate Cyprus with Greece or Turkey, and, indeed, those connections are strong. However, the foodways of Cyprus also attest to cultural contacts and exchanges that have occurred with people from other western Asian, North African, and European lands who have reached its Mediterranean shores. The seascapes and landscapes of Cyprus shaped its cuisine, too. With coastal shores on one side and mountainous terrain on the other, Cyprus has a diverse geography which has yielded a broad range of ingredients. Moreover, over the centuries, Cyprus has attracted different travelers, traders, and invaders, including ancient Greeks, Phoenicians, and Romans, as well as Venetians, Ottomans, and Britons, who altered the island's culinary identity. Each introduced new agricultural techniques, spices, cooking methods, and food-related customs. This layered heritage produced many dishes that are unique to the island's cuisine.

The Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities have lived apart since the partition in 1974, but before that they coexisted on the island, often in mixed neighborhoods. Colonial administration and instability afterward may have strained their relations, but they have a rich history of cultural, social and economic connections, as well as shared meals. One of the distinctive dishes of Cyprus – and one that transcends the political divide that now separates the island into Greek and Turkish regions – is the flaky and savory stuffed pastry which Greek speakers call *flaounes* and which Turkish speakers call *pilavuna*. While there are variations depending on the region or personal preferences, the basic process of making flaounes/pilavuna goes as follows: One mixes grated cheese (*halloumi* in Greek, *hellim* in Turkish) with eggs, yeast, spices, and raisins, then leaves it to ferment overnight. One then divides the dough into balls and rolls it into thin disks, leaving the top uncovered. Before baking, one brushes beaten eggs and sesame seeds on top, and bakes the pies (traditionally in wood-fired ovens) until golden brown. The result is a savory pastry with a subtle sweet flavor from the raisins, ready to be shared.

The cheese used in flaounes/pilavuna, that is, the halloumi or *hellim*, is part of what makes it so special and unique to the island. Scholars debate the origins of halloumi/hellim but have found references to something that sounds very similar in Venetian texts that date from before the onset of Ottoman rule on the island in 1571. Recent studies link the origins of halloumi to the Roman Empire and ancient Egypt. Regardless of the exact timing, one thing is very clear: the tradition of halloumi/hellim cheese-making in Cyprus precedes the formation of separate Greek Orthodox and Muslim Turkish communities by centuries, perhaps even millennia.

Another intriguing ingredient in flaounes/pilavuna, which is again quite distinct to Cyprus, is mastic, which

Greek and Turkish Aegean cuisines rarely use in savory recipes. Mastic (Μαστίχα/*mastika*) is a resin extracted from the mastic tree, a kind of pine found on the island of Chios. Within the Aegean, mastic is used in a variety of desserts, such as ice cream and pudding, where it gives an earthy aromatic flavour. Its use in savoury dishes is characteristic of Levantine cuisine, particularly in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Cypriot recipes for flaounes/pilavuna frequently call, too, for mahleb (a spice made from the ground seeds of a cherry tree), cinnamon, and mint, creating a flavor profile that is also more Levantine than Aegean. The same spices appear in other traditional Cypriot dishes such as *dolmadakia/koupepia/sarma* (stuffed grape leaves), and *keftedes/köfte* (meatballs).

Where did the recipe for flaounes/pilavuna come from? The word *flaouna* is believed to derive from the ancient Greek term *παλάθη* (pa'lathe), which referred to a flat fruit cake associated with religious celebrations of spring and harvest. The word also has had connections to the Old High German *flado*, a pastry made with eggs, milk, cheese, and sometimes fruit, typically prepared for Easter. Over time, *flado* made its way into Latin and then into French, where it evolved into *flaon*. In both Latin and Medieval French, *flaon* referred to a pastry made with eggs and cheese or butter, maintaining its association with Easter festivities.

Perhaps what is most interesting about flaounes/pilavuna is how the recipe has been maintained across the two communities, even while serving social functions distinct to the Greek and Turkish communities. For Greek-Cypriots, flaounes are iconic Cypriot Easter cheese pies. Traditionally prepared on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter, and consumed after the midnight mass on Easter Day, this pastry marks the end of the fifty-day Lenten fast, when Orthodox Christians abstain from meat and dairy. Turkish-Cypriots, however, make these pastries during Ramadan or specifically during Eid al-Fitr. Sometimes Turkish-Cypriots consume them as a breakfast treat as well.

Figure 31 Golden-baked pilavuna (flaounes), a traditional Cypriot pastry filled with cheese, raisins, and herbs, symbolising the island's rich culinary heritage and the warmth of festive gatherings. Photo by Seda Bahar Pancaroglu.

Like a thread tying the island's culinary heritage together, flaounes/pilavuna transcend linguistic and religious divisions, which otherwise remain pronounced in Cyprus. This particular recipe becomes something to connect over, despite religious and political differences. In the future, as a reminder of common heritage, it may be able to help Greek and Turkish Cypriots find a common ground, or perhaps we could say, a common table, in ways that may someday lead to greater reconciliation.

The idea of sharing food as a cultural touchstone is not so far-fetched. Others have looked before to the consumption of flaounes/pilavuna as a tool for peacebuilding. In 2002, during a series of peace talks conducted for the island, the late Rauf Denktaş, then president of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), included pilavuna among the dishes offered to the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. Similarly, in 2004, a film titled *Flaouna-Pilavuna: A Common Pastry for Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots* was produced as part of a rapprochement initiative. Funded by the Bi-Communal Development Programme of the European Commission, an initiative which aims to facilitate reunification of the island, the film showcases a Greek Cypriot and a Turkish Cypriot woman making similar flaouna recipes in an attempt to underline the common values and traditions that unite people.

Across the generations, people often preserve memory and heritage through food. In Cyprus, the shared pastry which Greek Cypriots call flaounes and which Turkish Cypriots call pilavuna forms part of a shared culinary heritage that may help the island's residents to cultivate mutual respect and overcome political divisions.

FURTHER READING

"Acil çözüm baskısı." *Milliyet*, May 16, 2002. https://www.milliyet.com.tr/dunya/acil-cozum-baskisi-352068.

Charalambidou, Anna. "Tradition, Authenticity and Expertise in and through Cypriot Easter Flaounes." *Food & History* 17, no. 2 (2019): 41–73.

Çavuşoğlu, Mehmet, and Olena Çavuşoğlu. 2018. "Gastronomi turizmi ve Kıbrıs sokak lezzetleri üzerine bir araştırma." *Güncel Turizm Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2 (Ek1): 637–651.

Osam, Necdet, and U.M.K. Kasapoğlu. 2010. "Hallumi: The Origin Analysis of a Cultural Entity." *Milli Folklor*, no. 87: 170–180.

Özçil, İhsan Erol. 2024. "The Importance of Street Food in Gastronomy: North Cyprus Street Tastes." *Turizm Çalışmaları Dergisi* 5 (2): 1–12.

Patapiou, Nasa. 2006. "Leonardo Donà in Cyprus: A Future Doge in the Karpass Peninsula (1557)." *Cyprus Today: A Quarterly Cultural Review of the Ministry of Education and Culture* April–June, 3–18.

Yılmaz, İlkay, and Mehmet Balyemez. 2024. "Kıbrıs Türk Mutfak Kültürünün Tarihine Dair Nitel Bir Araştırma." *Journal of Gastronomy, Hospitality and Travel* 7 (1): 265–275.

Commensality: The Form of a Gathering

Erdal Tüt

In January 2025, the Winter School at the University of Groningen on "Commensality and Cultural Heritage in the Middle East and Its Diasporas" explored the boundaries of collective production and sensory perception. As part of the program, the workshop entitled *Let Your Hands See* invited participants to move beyond visual perception and shape forms solely through touch while sitting around the same table. Each participant began with a sphere of clay, molding it from tactile memory before passing it to the next person. Through this process, each form carried the imprint of twelve hands, continuously evolving into a dynamic structure. This experience brought the concept of commensality into a material dimension via collective creation. Beyond individual interventions, these forms – built through shared touch – revealed that artistic production is not just the work of an individual but a dynamic process of collaboration. Inspired by this interaction, I sought to convey this message through my sculptural practice by creating a work entitled *Commensality: The Form of a Gathering*. Carved and polished from a raw block of marble, with a base made from basalt, and ultimately measuring 20×19×7 centimeters in circumference, the indentations and fluid lines on the stone's surface embody the unseen connections between individuals, while the form itself becomes a testament to accumulated tactile memory over time. This workshop demonstrated that artistic production is not only a space for individual expression but also a practice of multisensory interaction and collective discovery. Commensality is not just about gathering around a table; it is a process in which touch, transformation, and shared experience create a common memory.

Figure 32 Commensality: The Form of a Gathering. Photo by E. Tüt.

Figure 33, 34, 35 Commensality: The Form of a Gathering. Photos by E. Tüt

Chapter 3

Capturing the Past: Foodways and Material across History

Home Is Where the Hearth Is: Exploring the Fuel Economy of Traditional Ovens and Cooking Installations (*ṭābūn*, *ṣāj*, and *zarb*) in Jordan

Annette M. Hansen and Frits Heinrich

Introduction

Commensality does not begin once we are seated at the table; it already starts in the kitchen. This may be quite literal, with table companions sharing communal cooking facilities, pooling resources such as cooking-fuel or ingredients, or preparing the meal together. More figuratively, commensality may presuppose a shared culinary identity among table companions accompanied by a somewhat standard curriculum of dishes. The choice for specific dishes may likewise be intricately linked to the cooking installations with which they are made and the economics of operating them. In ethnography, ethnobotany, and archaeology, scholars have been interested in how the availability of ingredients and fuel within the landscape alongside the behavior and lifestyles of people interacted with the choices for cooking installations and foodstuffs (e.g., Jaussen 1908; Dalman 1935; Miller 1984; Palmer 2002; Akashi 2017). We aim to contribute to this discussion by showcasing an example of the semi-nomadic Bedouin and sedentary farmers, whose culinary traditions evolved in the same area in the Southern Ghors region of Jordan, but which resulted in different types of cooking installations and accompanying dishes. We will show how their different practical approaches to cooking, fuel economy, and dishes represented an optimal outcome for their respective ways of life and resulted in different culinary identities. As this essay was written as a diptych alongside the essay by Hansen and Al Shqour in this volume, we will primarily focus on breadmaking and ovens and look at three types of cooking installations: the *ṭābūn*, *ṣāj*, and *zarb*.

The *Ṭābūn*

The *ṭābūn* (pl. *ṭāwabīn*) is a bread oven with a tradition dating back to the Iron Age (McQuitty 1984) that some people are still using today. It is a shallow-domed oven built of clay and cereal crop processing by-products. These ceramic ovens are built into the ground and can be used for several years (Hansen and Al Shqour, this volume). The use of *ṭāwabīn*

is often communal, with multiple families together constructing and sharing the oven and pooling the fuel resources needed (cf. Ali 2008). The night before baking, a lid is placed over the opening of the oven and animal dung cakes are piled on top of it and left to burn overnight (Figure 36). Traditionally, people used a type of dung cake called *zibl,* comprised of chopped straw and chaff (*ḳaṣwal*) mixed with animal manure (Dalman 1935, 76; Hansen et al. 2017, 61-63), though today blocks of industrial chicken manure are more common. As the ash of the burnt dung cakes serves as insulation, the oven stays hot most of the next day. When ready to bake, the ash above the lid is brushed aside and the *ṭābūn* is opened (Figure 36). Leavened dough balls are kneaded and formed into round, thick flatbreads, and laid on the layer of pebbles that line the base of the floor of the oven. The lid is then placed back onto the opening, with ash swept over the lid, and the bread is baked for about 10 minutes, after which one can repeat the operation to produce as many batches as needed. During baking, a characteristic undulating pattern forms on the bread from the impression of the pebbles (Figure 37). If kept dry, these flatbreads can be stored for a long time and be remoistened (for instance with water or olive oil) before consumption. Sometimes people use the residual heat of the ash to hard-boil

Figure 36 Top Left and Center: The dung cakes on top of the *ṭābūn* are lit the day before use.
Top Right and Bottom Left: The dung cakes have burnt to ash on the day the *ṭābūn* is used.
Bottom Center and Bottom Right: Ash is swept aside from the lid before it can be opened, and the bread is placed inside the oven. Safi, Jordan, 2018.
Photos by Annette M. Hansen and Frits Heinrich. Photo editing by A.J. Bronkhorst.

Figure 37 Top Left, Center, and Right: The dough balls are kneaded and formed into round flatbreads. Bottom Left and Center: The flatbreads are placed inside the *ṭābūn* on top of the pebbles at the base. Bottom Right: The crispy, golden *ṭābūn* breads are removed from the oven and rest in a baking tray, showing the undulating pattern from the pebbles. Safi, Jordan, 2018.
Photos by Annette M. Hansen and Frits Heinrich. Photo editing by A.J. Bronkhorst.

eggs. *Ṭāwabīn* were traditionally common in sedentary communities, as the installations themselves are immobile and their creation requires an investment of time and resources. Moreover, to take advantage of the high fuel efficiency the *tābūn* offers, larger amounts of dung cakes need to be collected and stored to use all at once, while large numbers of breads are baked per session and subsequently stored. While *ṭāwabīn* are culturally significant, they are now becoming rarer.

The *Ṣāj*

The *ṣāj* (pl. *ṣājāt*) is a traditional cooking installation that (semi-)nomadic Bedouin communities have used in Jordan and across the Levant. In appearance, the *ṣāj* is similar to a large, inverted wok pan of which the convex side is used for baking a thin flatbread called *shrak* (Figures 38-39). Scholars have hypothesized that the *ṣāj* originated from similar installations made of clay or stone slabs in the Levant since antiquity (Jaussen 1908, 64; Dalman 1935, 41-45). When baking bread, one first makes a small fire. Fuel, firewood from acacia trees which dot the landscape, is now common, as families that identify as Bedouin, but that are no longer engaged in pastoral activities, can obtain it locally. Traditionally, brushwood (*khatab*) and dung pellets from goats, sheep, and camels were also important (Palmer 2002, 179). The *ṣāj* is then placed on top of larger stones surrounding the fire, while longer

branches of firewood are slowly shoved into the fire as needed during cooking, to use the fuel economically (Figure 39). Then dough balls, similar to those used for *tābūn* breads, although typically unleavened, are "thrown" (spun and spread-out by a circular motion of the hands, as one would a pizza, but without tossing it into the air) and quickly put onto the *ṣāj*. The bread is later flipped onto the other side using a stick-like wooden spatula (Figure 38). The paper-thin breads are baked for only a few minutes and then left to cool on a cloth sheet. After sufficient breads have been baked and the *ṣāj* is removed, families can use the fire and embers for preparing other parts of the meal, often dishes with vegetables and meat, or for making tea (Figure 39). *Shrak* bread often accompanies the meal, with pieces torn off and used to pick up and eat the

Figure 38 Top Left: The dough balls for the *shrak* bread are formed. Top Right: The dough balls are kneaded and coated in flour. Bottom Left: The dough balls are thrown and spun into a broad, thin, and circular shape. Bottom Right: The *shrak* is placed on the hot *ṣāj* and baked on both sides for a few minutes until done. Safi, Jordan, 2018.
Photos by Annette M. Hansen and Frits Heinrich. Photo editing by A.J. Bronkhorst.

Figure 39 Top Left: The *ṣāj* is heated above a fire of acacia wood.
Bottom Left: Branches are shoved underneath the *ṣāj* as needed to maintain the fire and cooking temperature.
Top Right and Bottom Right: After baking is completed, the *ṣāj* is removed from the embers, which can be used for making tea and cooking the rest of the meal. Safi, Jordan, 2018.
Photos by Annette M. Hansen and Frits Heinrich. Photo editing by A.J. Bronkhorst.

other food – creating a perfect marriage of ingredients and flavours. As *shrak* bread is soft, it does not keep well and must be prepared almost daily. *Ṣāj* installations and *shrak* bread are part of traditional Bedouin bread culture. As Dalman had already inferred, the immobile *tābūn* was much less practical for the Bedouin than the easily transportable and sturdy iron *ṣāj* (1935, 41). Moreover, transporting large amounts of prepared breads and dung for fuel would have been impractical for the lifestyle of the Bedouin. Using small amounts of firewood and brushwood and dung pellets from their herds, collected as they traversed the landscape, preparing bread piecemeal was a better fit (cf. Palmer 2002, 179 who observed that more settled Bedouin sometimes constructed *ṭāwabīn*). *Shrak* bread is still popular, not only within the region, where industrially produced supermarket versions are now commonly available and restaurants make *shrak* with professional grade electrical *ṣājāt*, but also among diaspora populations abroad, who use consumer-grade electrical *ṣājāt*, keeping this culinary heritage alive in a new way.

Figure 40 Outdoor setup with three *zurūb*. Top Left, Center, and Right: After slow-cooking is complete, the sand is swept away from the lid of the *zarb*, in this case a *ṣāj*.
Bottom Left, Center, and Right: The étagère with cooked meat, vegetables, and rice is carefully lifted out of the *zarb* and later presented and served to guests. Safi, Jordan, 2018.
Photos by Annette M. Hansen and Frits Heinrich. Photo editing by A.J. Bronkhorst.

The *Zarb*

The Bedouin used the *ṣāj* for baking bread, but they had other cooking installations as well; in fact, they invented the *zarb* (pl. *zurūb*), which is sometimes referred to as an "underground barbecue". The early 20th century ethnographies by Antonin Jaussen and Gustaf Dalman (1908, 65; 1935, 33, 111, 414) attested to this oven's use. The *zarb* is an underground oven that in its most basic form consists of a broad circular pit. Today, a metal drum is placed inside as a casing, though in the past flagstones (good for heat retention) would be used (Jaussen 1908, 65). At the bottom of the pit, a small wood or charcoal fire is lit to heat up the oven, in which the surrounding soil acts as insulation, ideal for maintaining a constant temperature. As the fire dies down, an étagère (a metal rack with multiple shelves) with different foods (cuts of chicken, lamb, or goat, and in the past also fish and game like gazelle, Dalman 1935, 414), vegetables, and a pan of rice) is then placed inside. The *zarb* is then closed off with a lid, nowadays the lid of the drum or traditionally a *ṣāj*. Sometimes a blanket is placed on top, after which it is covered with sand. Depending on the types of food, the oven is then left to slow-cook the food for several hours, after which the sand is swept aside, the *ṣāj* removed, and the étagère is removed (Figure 40). The *zarb* combines aspects of both the *ṣāj* and the *tābūn*: it incorporates the former (as a lid) and has the same advantage of using collected firewood rather than stored dung cakes. It does not require a large investment in time and resources to build, like a *tābūn*, but it is a fuel-efficient oven. Culturally, the *zarb* epitomizes Bedouin hospitality and commensality and is meant to produce food for sharing with family, friends, and guests, often for special occasions with larger groups of people. It is a common feature in tourism contexts (especially in Wadi Rum), while many people construct

multiple *zurūb* near their house or farm for parties, continuing a long tradition of commensality and hospitality.

In this essay we have explored three traditional ovens or cooking installations from Jordan, the *ṭābūn*, *ṣāj*, and *zarb,* the contexts in which they are used, and how each demonstrates optimized convenience and fuel-use for their users. They testify to human culinary ingenuity, facilitating cooking and baking at any time of the year, whether at home or on the move, while creating distinct food cultures.

Acknowledgments

This essay presents findings from the ethnoarchaeobotanical fieldwork the authors undertook in Safi, Jordan in 2018. The authors would like to thank the Department of Antiquities in Jordan for their ongoing support of our ethnobotanical and archaeobotanical work in Jordan. We would like to thank Dr. Jamila Ishtaywi, the Director of the Museum of the Lowest Place on Earth in Safi, Jordan, for welcoming us to her family homes to interview her and her family members, particularly about the *ṣāj* and *zarb* discussed in this paper; Yousef Sawalha, for sharing an anecdote from his childhood about hard-boiling eggs in the ash of his family home's *ṭābūn*; and all the farmers, cooks, and bakers who shared their knowledge and expertise with us during our visit in Safi. Thanks are also due to Dr. Konstantinos Politis of the Hellenic Society for Near Eastern Studies for hosting us at Safi; Remco Bronkhorst for creating and digitizing the figures in this essay; and Professor Karène Sanchez Summerer (University of Groningen) and Professor Heather J. Sharkey (University of Pennsylvania) for their invitation to participate in this volume and for helpful comments and feedback on our essay.

FURTHER READING

Akashi, Chie. "Fuel choices in ethnography and archaeobotany." *Al-Rafidan* XXXVII (2017): 89-94.

Ali, Nabil. 2008. "Ethnographic Study of Clay Ovens in Northern Jordan" In *Modesty and Patience. Studies and Memories in Honour of Nabil Qadi, "Abu Salim"*, edited by Hans Georg K. Gebel, Zeidan Kafifi, and Omar al-Ghul. Yarmouk University, Jordan and ex Oriente, 8-16.

Dalman, Gustaf. *Arbeit und Sitte in Palastina. Band IV: Brot, Öl und Wein*. G. Olms Verlag, 1935.

Hansen, Annette M., Bethany J. Walker, and Frits Heinrich. "'Impressions' of the Mamluk agricultural economy. Archaeobotanical evidence from clay ovens (ṭābūn) at Tall Ḥisbān (Jordan)." *Tijdschrift voor Mediterrane Archeologie* 56 (2017): 58-69.

Jaussen, P. Antonin. *Coutumes des Arabes au pays de Moab.* Librairie Lecoffre J Gabalda Cie, 1908.

McQuitty, Alison. "An ethnographic and archaeological study of clay ovens in Jordan." *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 28 (1984): 259-267. https://publication.doa.gov.jo/Publications/ViewChapterPublic/2119

Miller, Naomi F. "The use of dung as fuel: an ethnographic example and an archaeological application." *Paléoorient* 10/2 (1984): 71-79.

Palmer, Carol. "Milk and Cereals: Identifying Food and Food Identity among *Fallāḥīn* and Bedouin in Jordan." *Levant* 34 (2002): 173-195.

Baking and Breaking Bread at the Khans of Aqaba Castle (Jordan): Insights into Cereal Upcycling from a Medieval *Ṭābūn*

Annette M. Hansen and Reem Al Shqour

Baking and breaking bread are at the core of Middle Eastern food culture and heritage. The myriad of baked goods that we now categorize as "bread" first began in this region. Many Middle Eastern bread types have long traditions. While some of their attributes and ingredients changed over time, we can see the continuity in these traditions by examining historical and archaeological evidence. As an illustrative example we can look to the Levantine flatbread called *ṭābūn* bread and the eponymous shallow-dome clay ovens called the *ṭābūn* (plural *ṭāwabīn*) in which it is made (Figures 41 and 42). These ovens, with the earliest examples dating to ca. 12th-11th centuries BCE, during the Iron Age, are about one meter in diameter at the base and have a wide opening at the top. They are built into the ground and formed with clay slabs from the base to the rim. Upon completion they are fired in place like pottery. *Ṭāwabīn* can be used for years before being replaced, often with a new oven built in the same location (McQuitty 1984). Multiple families pool resources to communally build and exploit the oven, illustrating that commensality is present from farm to fork.

Written as a diptych together with the essay by Hansen and Heinrich, which also appears in this volume, this essay discusses the *ṭābūn* breadmaking process. We explore the construction and use of *ṭāwabīn*, which have been a culinary constant in the region for millennia, from the perspective of circularity and upcycling in food preparation practices. Upcycling refers to using the "waste" or "by-products" from one process as an input

Figure 41 In situ modern *ṭābūn*, Safi, Jordan, 2018.
Photo by Annette M. Hansen and Frits Heinrich. Photo editing by A.J. Bronkhorst.

into another process to create more value. Though circularity may be a recent concept, many historical and traditional food related practices seem to have naturally adopted this approach. We will tell this story through a humble yet valuable archaeological find of a rim sherd of an archaeological *ṭābūn* from the medieval Aqaba Castle in what is now Jordan.

Figure 42 Fresh *ṭābūn* breads from the oven, Safi, Jordan, 2018.
Photo by Annette M. Hansen and Frits Heinrich. Photo editing by A.J. Bronkhorst.

Ṭāwabīn

Over the past decades, *ṭāwabīn* have been intensely studied both ethnographically and archaeologically, with pioneering work by Alison McQuitty, which was later complemented by Noor Mulder-Hijmans, Nabil Ali, Jennie Ebeling, and others. This work has allowed us to better assess archaeological *ṭāwabīn* and draw comparisons between archaeological and modern ethnographic examples, while offering important insights into how these ovens were made and used (McQuitty 1984; McQuitty and Falkner 1993; Mulder-Hijmans 2002 and 2008; Ali 2008; Ebeling 2012; Ebeling and Rogel 2015; Hansen et. al., 2017).

Historical references to *ṭāwabīn* include the work of al-Muqaddasī from the 10th century CE, that of Ibn Kannān who lived during the 17th and 18th centuries CE, and the early 20th century CE ethnographic study by Gustaf Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palastina.* These works describe different features of the *ṭābūn*, how it was made and prepared for baking, and how important this oven was in villages of the historical region of *Bilad al-Sham* (the modern Levant) (Hansen et al., 2017).

Many archaeological examples of these ovens, though not always preserved in a complete state due to disrepair after abandonment or being built over, have been excavated throughout the Levant. The archaeological *ṭāwabīn* from Jordan that have been studied so far hail from Iron Age Pella, Deir Alla, Jerash, and Tell Irbid (McQuitty), Mamluk Khirbet Faris (McQuitty), Tall Abu Sarbut (Mulder-Hijmans), and Tall Hisban and Khirbet ash-Sheikh ʻIsa (Hansen). A beautifully restored Mamluk period *ṭābūn* from Khirbet ash-Sheikh ʻIsa is on display in the Museum of the Lowest Place on Earth in Safi. In this essay we will explore the remains of another medieval *ṭābūn* from Aqaba Castle (*Qalʻat al-ʻAqaba*) in the southernmost part of Jordan (Figures 43 and 45).

The Archaeological Site and Context

Aqaba Castle is a Mamluk (1250-1517 CE) and Ottoman (1517-1918 CE) period fortified *khan* or *caravanserai*, meaning a roadside inn with facilities for travellers, traders, and pilgrims, located on the Egyptian *hajj* route to Mecca and Medina in the Arabian Peninsula. *The Islamic Aqaba Project* (2005-2009), directed by Dr. Reem Al Shqour, investigated the occupational history of the khans at Aqaba and the various

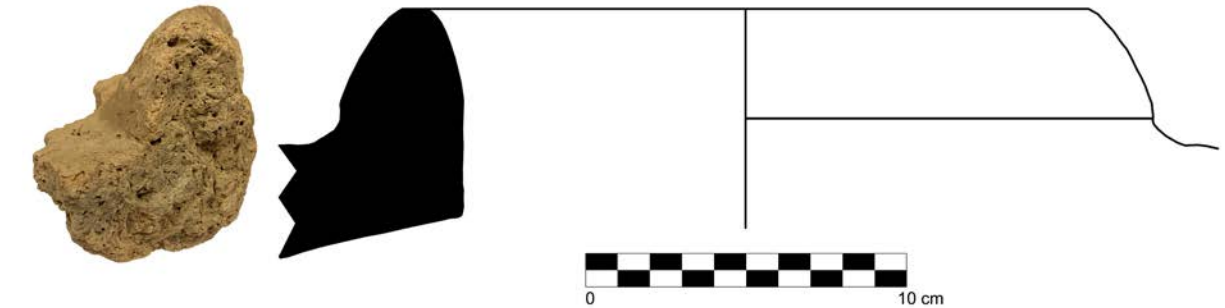


Figure 43 Profile of *ṭābūn* rim sherd (left) and drawing of the sherd (right).
Photo by Annette M. Hansen; drawing by Reem Al Shqour, 2009. Photo editing and digitization by A.J. Bronkhorst.

Figure 44 Archaeological context of the *ṭābūn* at Aqaba Castle (Square A9, Locus 37).
Photo by Reem Al Shqour, 2009. Photo Editing by A.J. Bronkhorst.

economic and domestic activities that took place within them, while placing these results within the broader context of trade networks in Jordan. During this project, Shqour's team documented 11 occupational phases, Phases 1a to 8 (Shqour 2019, 235-249). The *ṭābūn* we study within this essay was excavated during the 2009 field season. It was uncovered in Square A9 Locus 37, an area in front of the mosque in the southern wing of the khan dating to Phase 3a (14th century CE) (Figure 44). This area relates to the reorganisation of the first khan and the building of the second khan (Shqour 2019, 241-243). While flattened by the weight of the structures that were later built on top of it, the *ṭābūn* was identifiable and both body and rim sherds were recovered. The complete rim would have measured 22cm in diameter and the base of the *ṭābūn* would have measured 1.34 m in diameter. Many impressions of cereal straw and other plant remains were present on the sherds, especially on the surface, but also within the clay-matrix. Therefore, it was selected for archaeobotanical analysis – the study of archaeological plant remains – to establish the function of the plant material and reconstruct how they ended up in the rim (Figure 45).

Cereal Crop processing By-products and Medieval Upcycling

Cereals were not just important for providing the seeds that people milled and baked into bread, but also for providing other plant parts that functioned in numerous capacities. In the Levant and North Africa, there is a millennia-long tradition of building with mudbrick architecture, including mudbricks, plasters, mortars and floors. Builders often "tempered" architectural elements by adding other materials for structural integrity, such as cereal awns, glumes, rachis, palea/lemma (chaff) and straw. This material was also used as fodder or as a binder in dung cakes, an important fuel source. Historically, "crop processing waste" is therefore a misnomer: instead, these materials represent valued by-products of food processing and preparation that could be upcycled for other uses (Hansen et. al., 2017; cf. Van der Veen 1999).

The different categories of fine and coarse crop processing by-products became separate commodities for specialized uses. The study by Dalman, for instance, records that the finer category was called *tibn* in Arabic and was mainly used for fodder and temper, while the coarser category was called *ḳaṣwal*, and was used as a fuel source by itself or as a binder for dung cakes. Some of the terminology appears to have changed over time, while some words, such as *ḳaṣwal,* have fallen out of use. As we noted in recent interviews with Jordanian farmers, currently the term *tibn* is used to describe all cereal crop processing by-products. This may be because after the mid-20th century "Green Revolution", cereals with short stems have become dominant; they only provide small amounts of straw, likely explaining why *ḳaṣwal* has disappeared as a resource (Hansen et al. 2017).

Impressions of Crop Processing By-products on *Ṭāwabīn*

In and on the rim sherd of the *ṭābūn* from Aqaba Castle, many plant impressions of cereal straw are visible (Figure 45). These impressions yield important information on the processes that took place from harvesting cereals to building the *ṭābūn*. After harvesting, cereal processing steps included threshing, winnowing and

sieving to separate the seeds from other plant materials. The largest material, the straw, would be chopped, and then two categories based on coarseness or fineness would be sieved and sorted out. Individuals seeking to build a *ṭābūn* would have first collected *tibn*, which they would have mixed with clay and shaped into the form of a *ṭābūn*. *Ḳaṣwal* would be mixed with animal dung to make dung cakes that would be tightly stacked on top of and pressed into the clay oven. This means that plant materials on the outside of the dung cakes, by being pressed into the soft clay, could also make impressions. The fuel would then be lit to fire the oven. During burning, the plant remains in the dung cakes would be reduced to ash, and the plant materials on the surface of the clay dome would be burned away, leaving behind impressions (e.g., straw, Figure 45). Sometimes, suboptimal sorting led to the accidental inclusion of partial ears or grain kernels in *tibn* or *ḳaṣwal*, leaving impressions or charred plant inclusions behind; this is undesirable, as the ears and kernels would have been intended

Figure 45 Multiple angles of the *ṭābūn* rim sherd. A: External face; B: Internal face; C: Top view; D: Base. Photos by Annette M. Hansen. Photo editing by A.J. Bronkhorst.

for human consumption (Hansen et al., 2017). As these were not encountered in the Aqaba Castle *ṭābūn,* this might suggest effective sieving and sorting.

In this essay we have illustrated how the impressions of cereal straw and other crop processing by-products on *ṭāwabīn* can help illuminate how people in traditional and historical societies sustainably managed resources with respect to preparing their daily meals. This evidence can also provide information on the foods that people consumed. Besides the often communal construction and exploitation of *ṭāwabīn,* this medieval example highlights a circular approach to resource management, in which upcycling food production waste was pivotal to both construction and the fuel economy. Cereals provided not only the grain for baking breads, but also the materials to build and fuel the ovens in which they were baked.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Department of Antiquities in Jordan for their permission to study the material presented in this essay and for their ongoing support. Dr. Reem Al Shqour would like to thank Ghent University (Belgium), the Unité Mixte de Recherche 4856 of the CNRS (Lyon, France), and Andrews University (USA) for supporting the *Islamic Aqaba Project.* The authors would also like to thank Professor Frits Heinrich (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) for providing comments on earlier versions of the text and Remco Bronkhorst for creating and digitizing the figures in this essay. Lastly, the authors would like to thank Professor Karène Sanchez Summerer (University of Groningen) and Professor Heather J. Sharkey (University of Pennsylvania) for their invitation to participate in this volume and for their helpful comments and feedback on our essay.

FURTHER READING

Ali, Nabil. "Ethnographic Study of Clay Ovens in Northern Jordan." In *Modesty and Patience: Studies and Memories in Honour of Nabil Qadi, 'Abu Salim'*, edited by Hans Georg K. Gebel, Zeidan Kafifi, and Omar al-Ghul, 8–16. Irbid: Yarmouk University Press, and Berlin: ex Oriente, 2008.

Al Shqour, Reem. *The Aqaba Khans and the Origins of the Khans in Jordan: An Archaeological Approach*. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2019. https://doi.org/10.31826/9781463239541.

Ebeling, Jennie. "Traditional Bread Making in Northern Jordan." YouTube video, 2012. Part 1: https://youtu.be/up7nC_bVD3M Part 2: https://youtu.be/TaVca6KkMZQ

Ebeling, Jennie, and M. Rogel. "The Tabun and Its Misidentification in the Archaeological Record." *Levant* 47, no. 3 (2015): 328–49.

Hansen, Annette M., Bethany J. Walker, and Frits Heinrich. "'Impressions' of the Mamluk Agricultural Economy: Archaeobotanical Evidence from Clay Ovens (Ṭābūn) at Tall Ḥisbān (Jordan)." *Tijdschrift voor Mediterrane Archeologie* 56 (2017): 58–69.

McQuitty, Alison. "An Ethnographic and Archaeological Study of Clay Ovens in Jordan." *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 28 (1984): 259–67. https://publication.doa.gov.jo/Publications/ViewChapterPublic/2119

McQuitty, Alison, and Robin Falkner. "The Faris Project: Preliminary Report on the 1989, 1990 and 1991 Seasons." *Levant* 25 (1993): 37–61.

Mulder-Heymans, Noor. "Archaeology, Experimental Archaeology and Ethnoarchaeology on Bread Ovens in Syria." *Civilisations* 49 (2002): 197–221.

———. "The Bread Ovens of Tell Abu Sarbut." In *Sacred and Sweet: Studies on the Material Culture of Tell Deir 'Alla and Tell Abu Sarbut*, edited by Margreet L. Steiner and Eveline J. Van der Steen, 211–30. Leuven: Peeters, 2008.

Van der Veen, Marijke. "The Economic Value of Chaff and Straw in Arid and Temperate Zones." *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 8 (1999): 221–24. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02342721.

Eating in Aetolia Is No Feast: An Ethnoarchaeological Approach to Foodways in Ottoman Rural Greece

Joanita Vroom

How can ethnographic or ethno-archaeological fieldwork provide new insights into foodways in rural, non-elite settlements of lands that once formed part of the Ottoman Empire? Why is it important to go beyond elite dining customs and explore these eating practices? In previous publications, I have aimed to explore the foodways of Ottoman cities (among them Istanbul, Athens, and Thebes) by utilizing historical documents (including cookbooks and travel accounts), pictorial evidence, and excavated archaeological artifacts. However, it is equally important to introduce alternative methods and diverse sources for research. One such approach entails applying ethnographic or ethnoarchaeological fieldwork to historical study in combination with citizen science, the last being a practice where non-professionals participate in scientific investigations. Beyond examining dining customs within elite contexts in Ottoman cities, it is also essential to explore eating practices in rural, non-elite settlements.

Addressing this goal, this case study examines foodways in a peripheral rural region of what is now Greece, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Specifically, this study draws on ethnoarchaeological fieldwork in Aetolia, an isolated mountain landscape in western central Greece, which formed part of the Ottoman Empire until the Greek War for Independence in the 1820s, and where the pre-modern level of technology seems to have remained unchanged between the early Middle Ages and the 1950s. During the 1980s and 1990s, approximately 350 structured village interviews were taken in this region, as part of the Aetolian Studies Project, a multidisciplinary research venture under the auspices of the Netherlands Institute at Athens aimed at studying the *longue durée* history of habitation and "genre de vie," of this rugged Greek district (Bommeljé et al. 1987; Vroom 1998). During interviews with elderly inhabitants of the small rural communities, attention was paid to pre-World War II food networks, domestic utensils, and culinary dishes, which seem to have existed with few variations during the entire modern era, roughly from the sixteenth century onward. The results of the interviews were combined with information from research by the Greek ethnographer Dimitris Loukopoulos (1874–1943) conducted in Aetolia in the early twentieth century regarding foodways and the intra-regional exchange of food (which was not influenced by the industrialization and extension of modern infrastructures in the rest of Greece), as well as with archaeological data from the extensive archaeological surface survey carried out fifty years later by the Aetolian Studies Project, documenting evidence of habitation from prehistory to pre-modern times.

For the village interviews, a structured questionnaire was used, which contained questions for local elderly villagers and farmers on aspects of economic and domestic life in the pre-World War II period. In

most mountain villages a surplus of animal produce and dairy products existed, while there were structural shortages of olives or olive oil, grains (such as wheat) and fruits. Vegetables, wine and fruit were exclusively produced for the household. In most lower-lying villages a small surplus of agricultural products existed, although there were structural shortages of animal and dairy products. An intra-regional exchange of foodstuffs took place between higher- and lower-lying villages. The insights gained from these village interviews conducted by the Aetolian Studies Project provide a regional perspective that complements the local ethnographic research in the same area. In a volume published in 1925, the Greek ethnographer Loukopoulos examined the production and consumption of food and beverages using specific vessels within the rural villages of this mountainous region (Loukopoulou 1984; see Figure 46). He documented a total of eighty-one domestic utensils, with the majority manufactured from metal (37%), followed by wood (29%) and textile (10%). Only 6% of the artifacts were made from earthenware (Figure 47a).

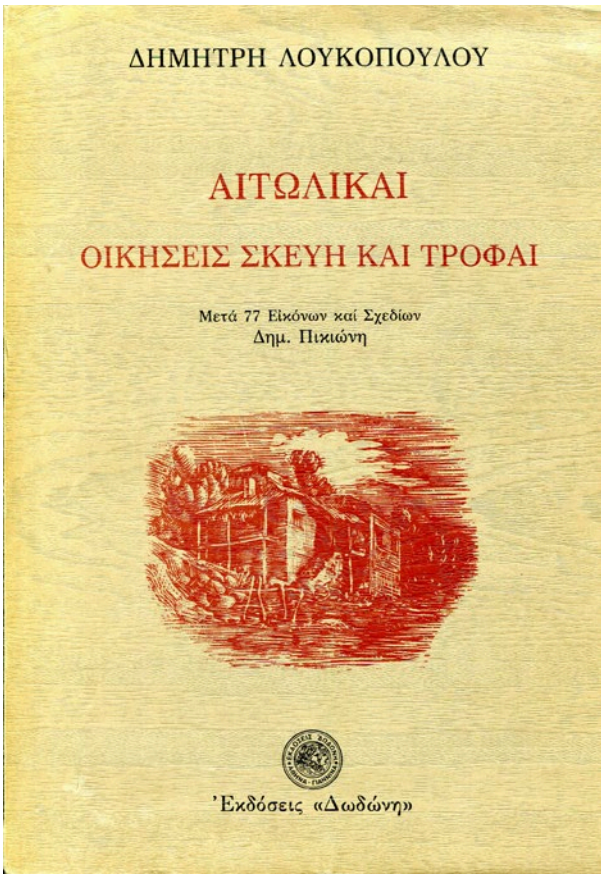


Figure 46 Cover of the book written by Dimitris Loukoupoulos with ethnographic data on Aetolia in Greece (Loukoupoulou 1925).

The utensils used in the Aetolian households served various functions, including food processing (37%), storage and transfer (24%), food and beverage service and consumption (15%), and a range of household activities such as washing and lighting (Figure 47b). Across all villages, there was a distinctly basic level of technology and material possessions. In many mountain villages, ceramic cooking utensils were scarce; instead, copper kettles and wooden dishes or plates were commonly utilized. During particularly difficult times, onion peels were even repurposed as spoons. It is worth noting that wood and copper do not typically survive in archaeological contexts, leading to what are referred to as "sherdless sites" (Vroom 1998).

In terms of food products associated with domestic utensils, the Aetolian villagers primarily identified liquids (33%) and cereals (21%), followed by dairy products (17%) and meats and fish (10%). Sweets and fruits (7%), flavors (7%), as well as vegetables and legumes (5%) were reported to be less commonly

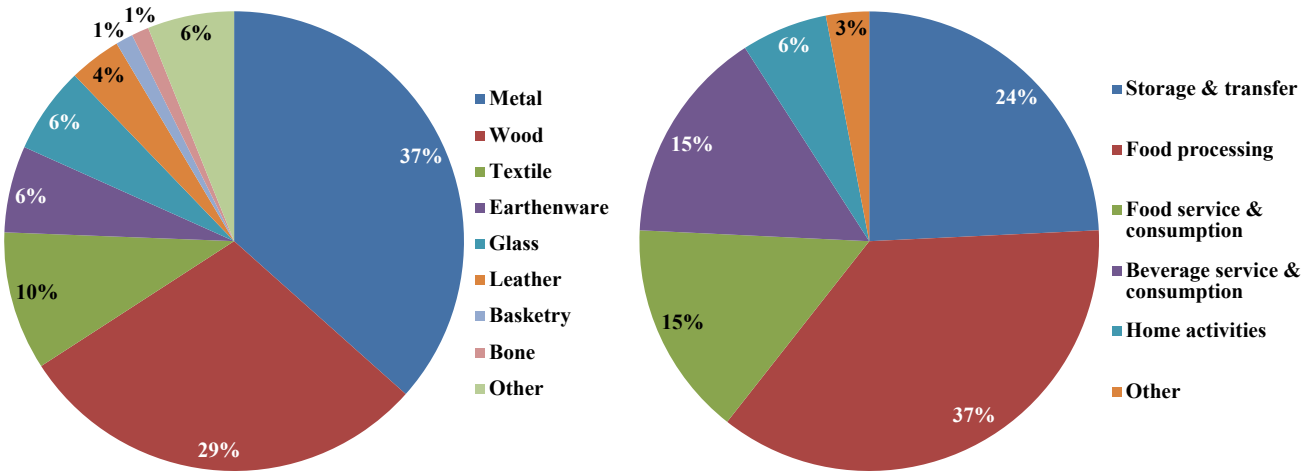


Figure 47 (a) Materials of domestic utensils used in Aetolia (Greece) in percentages; (b) Functions of domestic utensils used in Aetolia (Greece) in percentages. Pie charts by author, 2021.

present (Figure 48a). The findings of Loukoupoulos align with the data from the Aetolian Studies Project, indicating that in these mountainous villages, the focus was on a subsistence strategy aimed at survival in a challenging environment. This necessitated the preservation and storage of food for as long as possible. Since the milk from goats and sheep could not be stored, it was rarely consumed directly but was instead processed immediately into cheese and butter.

Loukopoulos identified approximately fifty-five ingredients commonly used in food dishes prepared in Aetolian households. The meals tended to be simple, if not basic, with the ten most frequently used ingredients being olive oil, meat, flour, butter, eggs, cheese, salt, onions, rice, and pepper (Figure 48b). Apart from the olive oil, these are comparable to ingredients found in a nineteenth-century Turkish cookbook called, in English translation, *Refuge for Cooks*, which provides essential insights into Ottoman cuisine.

Additionally, the five most commonly utilized domestic utensils for preparing ingredients in Aetolian households were predominantly metal, often made of copper. These utensils included a baking tin or pan (*tapsi*), a portable lid/oven (*gastra*), a cauldron or cooking pot (*chytra*), a frying pan (*tigania*), and a double-handled frying pan or casserole (*sagani*) (Figure 49). Among these, the portable copper *gastra* proved to be more user-friendly and easier to clean than traditional large ovens. Their smaller size made them quicker and more cost-effective alternatives for outdoor baking of bread or other dishes, requiring less firewood in the process.

In summary, ceramic cooking vessels began to be supplanted by metal (copper) alternatives in rural Ottoman settlements. This transition became particularly evident by conducting ethnoarchaeological and ethnographic research in the mountainous region of Aetolia in central Greece. Historically, in the Ottoman

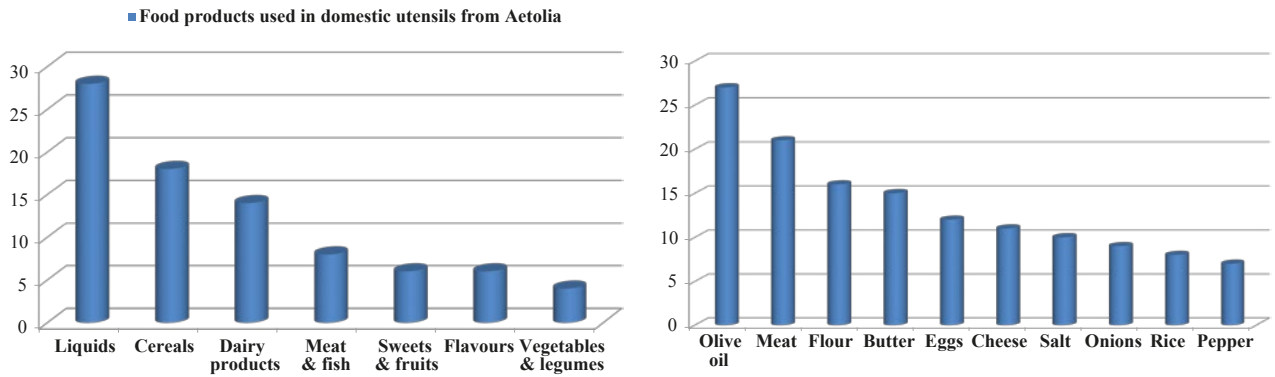


Figure 48 (a) Ingredient groups used in Aetolian food dishes; (b) Ten most used ingredients in Aetolian food dishes. Graphs by author, 2021.

era, in this economically remote district, the preference for more affordable and durable metal vessels formed part of a subsistence strategy, as earthenware pottery proved less suitable for local food preparation. The meals prepared were straightforward, consisting primarily of basic ingredients such as olive oil, meat, flour, butter, eggs, and cheese. Consequently, archaeologists have had limited ceramic findings. Nevertheless, despite the scarcity of Ottoman pottery in this peripheral region of the empire, ethnographic research and results from citizen science through village interviews still allow archaeology to shed light on long-term strategies for human survival in a challenging environment, far removed from the vibrant city of Istanbul. The findings are simple and offer lessons for our times: across the generations and centuries, people in Aeotolia, in what is now central Greece, devised foodways – a culinary heritage – from the constrained resources and materials that they could access in the landscape around them.

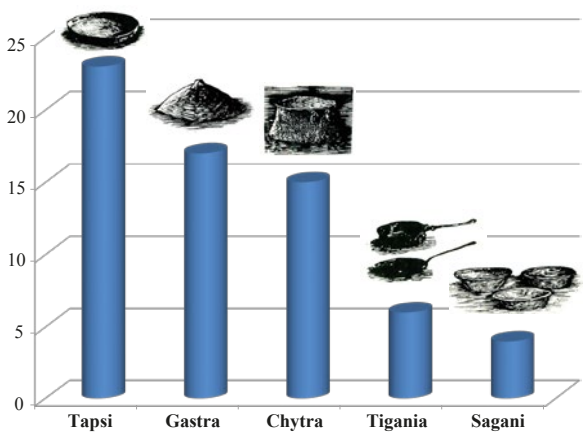


Figure 49 Five most used domestic utensils for food processing in Aetolia. Graph by author, 2021; images: Loukopoulou 1925, figs. 32, 33, 35-37.

FURTHER READING

Bommeljé, S., P. K. Doorn, M. Deylius, J. Vroom, Y. Bommeljé, R. Fagel, and H. van Wijngaarden. *Aetolia and the Aetolians: Towards the Interdisciplinary Study of a Greek Region (Studia Aetolica I)*. Utrecht: Parnassus Press, 1987.

Loukopoulou, D. *Aitolikai Oikiseis, Skevi kai Trophai* [in Modern Greek; English trans. *Aetolian Settlements, Utensils and Food*]. Athens and Ioannina: Dodoni, 1984. Reprint of 1925 edition, Athens: P. D. Sakellariou.

Vroom, Joanita. "Early Modern Archaeology in Central Greece: The Contrast of Artefact-Rich and Sherdless Sites." *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 11 (1998): 3–36.

——. "Byzantine Garlic and Turkish Delight: Dining Habits and Cultural Change in Central Greece from Byzantine to Ottoman Times." *Archaeological Dialogues* 7 (2000): 199–216.

——. "Byzantine Garbage and Ottoman Waste." In *Thèbes. Fouilles de la Cadmée II.2: Les Tablettes en Linéaire B de la 'Odos Pelopidou'. La Céramique de la Odos Pelopidou et la Chronologie du Linéaire B*, edited by E. Andrikou, V. L. Aravantinos, L. Godard, A. Sacconi, and J. Vroom, 181–233. Pisa & Rome: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 2006.

——. "'Mr. Turkey Goes to Turkey,' Or: How an Eighteenth-Century Dutch Diplomat Launched at Topkapı Palace." *Princeton Papers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 16 (2011): 139–75.

——. "The Global Ottomans." In *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization*, edited by T. Hodos, 899–917. London & New York: Routledge, 2017.

——. "Broken Pots from Ottoman Athens: A New View from the Agora Excavations." In *Ottoman Athens: Archaeology, Topography, History*, edited by M. Georgopoulou and K. Thanasakis, 179–212. Athens: The Gennadius Library, American School of Classical Studies at Athens, and The Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation, 2019a.

——. "Data Atlas of Byzantine and Ottoman Material Culture: Archiving Medieval and Post-Medieval Fieldwork Data from the Eastern Mediterranean (600–2000 AD), Phase 1." *Research Data Journal for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (2019b): 1–12.

——. "'They Were Just Eating to Live': The Social Archaeology of Ottoman Foodways and Ceramics." *Historical Archaeology* 57, no. 4 (2023): 1231–53. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41636-023-00476-2.

Fig. 50 The use of metalware (sagani) in food preparation/serving in an Aetolian household. from: Aetolian Earth, Discover its Worth!, published by the Municipality of Nafpaktia, n.d., p. 39.

Visualizing Foodways: Capturing Commensality through Historical Photographs in the Early 20th-century Levant, a Methodological Reflection

Karène Sanchez Summerer

In recent research on the early 20th century and interwar Levant and foodways, historical photographs remain understudied. Yet, they emerge as more than illustrative material – they are crucial sources for capturing the complex entanglements between food, identity, and social change. Photographs do not merely reflect reality; they frame, stage, and preserve specific ways of seeing the everyday. As historians explore how food has been produced, consumed, and shared across time and space, these images offer a vital lens for understanding lived experiences and cultural imaginaries.

Visual documentation of food practices allows us to access scenes otherwise absent from written records. Photographs of open-air markets, street vendors, or domestic kitchens document not only what people ate, but how food was prepared, traded, and integrated into daily life. In particular, such images make visible the tools, techniques, and settings of food production: women grinding wheat, fishermen mending nets, or children selling fruits on urban corners. These moments, often ephemeral and routine, are frozen in time through the camera's eye.

Photographs also reveal how food intersects with identities – ethnic, religious, regional, and national. In archival images of communal meals during feasts, food is embedded within ritual practice and symbolic meaning. Dining scenes at weddings, funerals, and harvest festivals visualize belonging and difference, and illustrate the performative nature of commensality. By attending to clothing, architecture, body language, and arrangement of space in these photographs, we are able to reconstruct not just what is eaten, but how people situate themselves and others through food.

Importantly, photographs expose underlying social hierarchies and systems of power. Who sits at the table? Who serves? What kinds of tableware are used, and by whom? A photograph of a colonial official dining on porcelain in a manicured garden contrasts sharply with images of workers eating communally in agricultural fields or labor camps. Through such visual juxtapositions, we can trace class distinctions, gender roles, and labor divisions encoded in acts of consumption.

The images also document wider processes of modernization, commercialization, and globalization. Advertisements, packaging designs, and displays of food in markets for example, are evidence of emerging food industries and marketing strategies. Photographs of cafés, imported products, or processed foods speak to changing tastes, urban habits, and new consumer

identities. In tandem with these developments, the visual archive captures moments of disruption – famine, war, displacement – when food becomes scarce and deeply politicized. Relief distribution, rationing, and improvised meals appear in stark contrast to scenes of abundance, underscoring the vulnerability of food systems.

Methodologically, these historical photographs can be approached not as neutral records but as constructed objects, shaped by the photographer's gaze, the context of production, and the intended audience. The analysis of the composition, mise-en-scène, and visual codes, alongside written documentation, oral histories, and material culture reveal important aspects of the history of commensality. This triangulation allows a more nuanced understanding of food's role in shaping and expressing cultural heritage across generations and geographies.

Ultimately, historical photographs offer an indispensable entry point into the study of Middle Eastern foodways and commensality. They allow us to visualize the ordinary and the extraordinary, the private and the public, the local and the transnational – all through the shared human act of eating.

Our Daily Bread? Beyond Biblical Orientalism and Foodways in Early Mandate Palestine. Snapshots from the Frank Scholten Collection (Palestine 1921-1923)

Karène Sanchez Summerer

European photography in the Holy Land, from the end of the nineteenth century until approximately the 1930s, often framed local food practices through the lens of *Biblical Orientalism*, a visual discourse that sought to collapse the temporal distance between ancient scripture and the modern Middle East. Photographers, particularly those affiliated with missionary, colonial, or ethnographic institutions, repeatedly sought to document "authentic" scenes that echoed the Biblical past. Bread, in this context, was not simply a staple food but became a symbolic artifact. Images of women kneading dough, peasants harvesting wheat, or families breaking flatbread were staged or selected to evoke the Lord's Prayer's invocation of "our daily bread," anchoring modern Middle Eastern life in a timeless, scriptural frame.

This aesthetic strategy aligned with broader Orientalist projects: to depict the region as unchanging,

pastoral, and spiritually resonant. By emphasizing simplicity and pre-modern subsistence, such photographs often erased the complexities of contemporary life, including technological change, colonial settings, class differentiation, or intercommunal interactions. Food and commensality were essential to this visual theology. Communal eating, especially among peasants or Bedouins, was idealized as a performative return to early Christian or Hebrew lifeways. These scenes offered European audiences a way to consume the Holy Land visually and morally – framing modern Arabs as living witnesses to a Biblical past rather than political agents in the colonial present.

Photographs that reinforced sacred archetypes were preserved and circulated, while images that depicted urban modernization, and political upheaval, for example, were marginalized. "Our daily bread," then, becomes both a motif and a metaphor: it reflects a European desire to naturalize a particular vision of the Middle East, one grounded in religious nostalgia and imperial endeavours, while overlooking the diverse foodways of a region undergoing rapid transformation.

Frank Scholten (1881-1942), a Dutch amateur photographer who traveled to Palestine between June 1921 and November 1923 in order to produce an illustrated Bible, stayed more than two years in Palestine and left a vast photographic collection consisting of more than 22,000 photographs. Beyond producing some photographs in the same vein as other European travelers, he also offered a more nuanced and intimate view of some of the people's foodways, as suggested in the selection of the snapshots below. Only a few images in his collection depict individuals from different religious communities eating together – engaging in literal commensality. While archival images sometimes show food-related rituals within each community or show public spaces with food and beverage carts, very few photographs capture intercommunal meals. This absence is not merely coincidental but might reflect more broadly the politics of visibility in Palestine. Where coexistence was lived but seldom photographed, the visual archive offers a fragmented portrait of commensality in the region.

All photographs from the Frank Scholten collection are Open Access: https://collectionguides.universiteitleiden.nl/repositories/2/resources/746

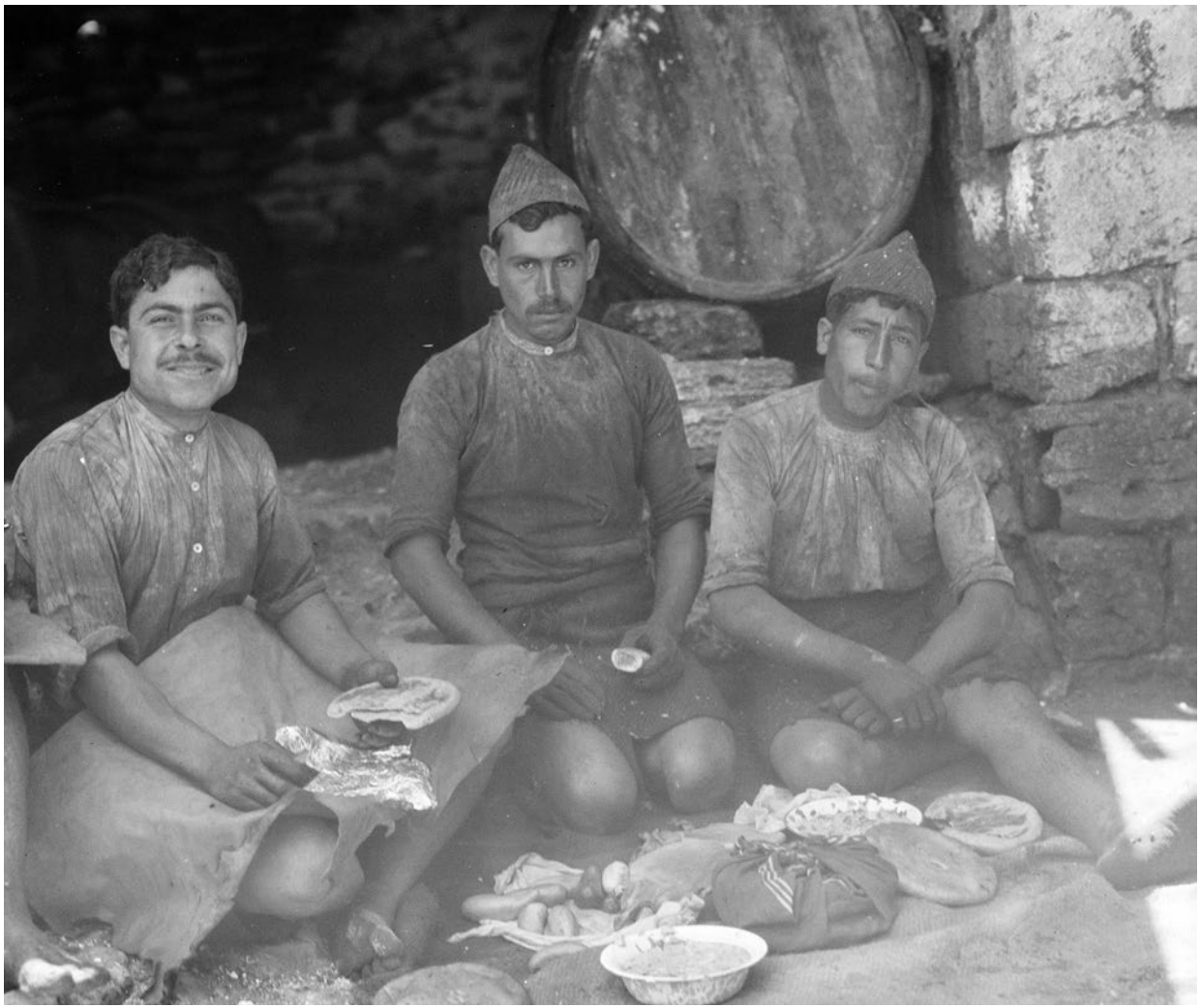


Figure 51 Three men eating in front of a workshop, NINO, Frank Scholten collection, photographic print 19: 0504.

This photograph captures a group of men gathered on the ground, sharing a communal meal in the shade of a street in Jaffa. Their relaxed posture, shared dishes, and outdoor setting offer a powerful image of everyday conviviality. Scholten's ethnographic eye frames the scene as both documentary and intimate, emphasizing the bodily gestures and unspoken rituals of collective eating.

Figure 52 Ice cream cart, NINO, Frank Scholten collection, photographic print 04_0083 (Album Jaffa -Tel Aviv- Sarona).

This striking photo captures a moment of local street life: an ice cream vendor stands beside his decorated cart, accompanied by two boys. The cart, shaped like a boat, bears inscriptions in Arabic and Latin script, notably the hybrid phrase "Eis Kream." This blend of German (*Eis*, the German word for ice cream) and English (a phonetically Anglicized "Kream") reflects both transnational commercial influences and the presence of German-speaking communities in the region. The image was likely taken near Sarona, a settlement established in 1871 by German Templers, Protestant pietists. The appearance of German loanwords in visual and material culture was part of a broader semiotic landscape shaped by colonial entanglements, missionary education, and commercial exchange. It embodies a moment when local vendors engaged in visual and linguistic bricolage to appeal to diverse urban audiences: Arabic-speaking locals, European visitors, and possibly even German settlers. The photograph reveals the entangled foodways and symbolic economies of a multi-imperial city.

Figure 53 Men in field, NINO, Frank Scholten collection, photographic print 18: 108.

This moment of shared music, food, alcohol and juice, during a picnic, is an interesting evocation of commensality. Picnics of the same period are described in the memoirs of Wasif Jawariyyeh (Tamari & Nassar 2014, 60-62). Jawariyyeh gives rare details of the "Yahudia Picnic": "There are two caves in the quarter of Sheikh Jarrah in Jerusalem, near the lands of Abu Jubna's mortmain which Jews believe to be the graves of Shimon. I think Jews visited these graves twice a year, spending the day under the olive trees. Most of them were Eastern Jews who observed the Eastern traditions, the country's Arab traditions in particular. They had string bands. I remember Haim, the oud player from Aleppo who had a voluptuous high voice and sang Andalusian muwashah mostly. And so, everyone spent the entire day singing songs and uhzujas (ditties). The Christian and Muslims of Jerusalem celebrated with Jews, and families went along to take part in what is known to the Arabs as the Judea Festival. That part was therefore crowded all the way down to the valley with local and ambulant sellers." He also evokes picnics in the Saad-wa-Said neighborhood where Christian and Muslim families would "remain there until sunset, smoking water pipes, eating with their children, drinking arak or wine (those of them who were Christian), buying sweets, nuts, grilled green chickpeas, cookies, and the like from ambulant sellers."

Figure 54 Men engaged in bread-making in a courtyard, framed by stone walls and shuttered wooden doors. NINO, Frank Scholten collection, album Jaffa-la-Belle, 051-100_0035.

A large tray of round flatbreads rests in the foreground, positioned for drying. Though partially obscured by white masking tape from the original proofing process by Scholten himself, the tray remains central to the visual narrative. Scholten's composition places the bread as both subject and symbol, indexing daily sustenance, embodied labor, and cultural continuity. Scholten's photograph exemplifies the tension between ethnographic observation and aesthetic construction. His lens offers valuable visual data on food preparation in early 20th century Palestine while simultaneously framing it through a European gaze shaped by Biblical Orientalism.

FURTHER READING

Dorani, Mona. "From Kitchen to Community: Food and Palestinian Marriage Rituals in the Ethnography of Hilma Granqvist." *Jerusalem Quarterly* 99 (Autumn 2024).

Mejcher-Atassi, Sonja. *An Impossible Friendship: Group Portrait – Jerusalem Before and After 1948*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2024.

Nassar, Issam. *European Portrayals of Jerusalem: Religious Fascinations and Colonialist Imaginations*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006.

Sanchez Summerer, Karène, and Sary Zananiri, eds. *Imaging and Imagining Palestine: Photography, Modernity and the Biblical Lens, 1918–1948*. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

Sanchez Summerer, Karène, and Sary Zananiri. "Unsilencing Palestine 1922-1923: Hundred Years after the Beginning of the British Mandate – The Frank Scholten Photographic Collection Revisited." *Contemporary Levant* 9, no. 1 (2024): 16–32.

Tamari Salim and Issam Nassar, eds. *The Storyteller of Jerusalem. The Life and Times of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, 1904-1948.* Northampton MA: Olive Branch Press, 2014.

Tamari, Salim, Issam Nassar, and Stephen Sheehi, eds. *Camera Palaestina: Photography and Displaced Histories of Palestine*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022.

Zananiri, Sary. "Indigeneity, Transgression and the Body: Orientalism and Biblification in the Popular Imaging of Palestinians. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 42 (6), 717–737.

Ice Cream in Tel Aviv, Circa 1921: Photography, Culture, and Consumption in Mandate Palestine

Lars Baumann

There are a few things more enjoyable than ice cream. A tasty treat on a hot summer day, it has a universal appeal. If we look closely at the image featured here in Figure 54, however, we can see that ice cream – or rather, this ice cream shop as it appears in this photograph – is a cultural artefact which shows some of the historical, social and economic realities of the society that it portrays. The image serves as not just a snapshot but a sort of time capsule, yielding insights into the history of Jewish life and popular culture in British Mandate Palestine during the decade that followed World War I.

This photograph was the work of Dutch photographer Frank Scholten (1881-1942), a traveler who came to Palestine in 1921, initially with the goal of producing an illustrated Bible, and stayed for two years. Like legions of travelers before and after him, Scholten found the idea of the Holy Land fascinating. But the longer he stayed, the more interested he became in the bustling society around him and in all the peoples of Palestine. As he explored the region, Scholten often focused his lens on everyday street and village scenes, as well as on local inhabitants in their everyday lives, including long-standing Arabic-speaking residents and recent Jewish immigrants.

Scholten captured this particular image in Tel Aviv, which was developing as a new Jewish city beside the much older city of Jaffa. We can see an ice cream and cold-drink kiosk. Three men stand behind the counter, and one boy in front holds a sign. Signs in both Hebrew and English promote the products on sale. Tel Aviv, originally built as a Jewish suburb north of the port city of Jaffa in 1909, was developing into an important city – eventually becoming the capital city following the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. The "mythic city" of Tel Aviv was portrayed by the British authorities and many members of the Jewish communities as a "symbol of national revival and Zionist restoration", and as evidence of the "creative power" of the Jewish people of Mandatory Palestine.

Scholten's photograph is both documentary and interpretive, as it portrays modern consumer culture emerging under colonial conditions. The storefront functions as a microcosm of broader cultural negotiations. Scholten's photographs were often more than observational; he subtly captured the intersections of tradition and transformation, providing valuable visual commentary on the modernisation process in Jewish settlements and urban centres like Tel Aviv. The power of an image like this one to speak to the past helps to explain why historians have begun to appreciate the value of Scholten's work.

Reading the Signs: Cultural and Linguistic Change in Mandate Palestine

Mandatory Palestine, under British colonial rule from 1920 to 1948, was a politically tense and socially dynamic environment. The British exerted a strong military presence, and many British veterans of World

Figure 55 Frank Scholten's photo of two men and a boy at an ice cream shop in Tel Aviv, between June 1921 and November 1923, NINO, Frank Scholten collection, album Tel Aviv, 11:45.

War I also went to the region for rest and rehabilitation, influencing consumer habits in the process. We may be able to detect this influence in this photograph, through the bilingual signage that includes English.

The Hebrew signage is also important. The Hebrew text dominates in a context where Jewish immigration to Palestine was increasing, and where language activists were trying to revive and standardize Hebrew as a modern language and integral part of a broader Zionist cultural project. The absence of Yiddish – historically the lingua franca of Eastern European Jews, many of whom, as immigrants to Palestine, would have been

the target customers of this ice cream stand – demonstrates a conscious move toward a national identity. Yair Wallach notes that Zionist activists in Jerusalem championed making Hebrew into not only a language of holy scripture, but a "tongue of everyday speech". The presence of English signage, such as the partially visible placard referencing "The Best British Ice Cream," hints at an international or at least a heavily Anglophone clientele, which could possibly include the British soldiers or tourists mentioned earlier. This bilingualism reinforces the idea that the stall catered to a diverse city – and one, moreover, that had fallen to British influence, and not French influence as in Lebanon to the north.

What is also striking is that the photograph includes the word "Gazoz" written in Hebrew. Gazoz, a carbonated drink of Ottoman and Turkish origin, represents the region's deeper cultural continuities – and attests to the fact that Jewish immigrants were coming not only from central and eastern Europe, but also from the Ottoman world. This small detail showcases the hybridity of Tel Aviv's consumer culture and Jewish communities in the plural – a merging of local traditions with modern commercial practices. It reminds us that the cultural landscape was not only shaped by Western influence but also by regional interconnections, reflecting on the wide ranging consumer market in this region (Halperin 2015).

Ice Cream, Refrigeration, and the Leisure Economy

We can look to Scholten's photograph for insights into culinary, technological, and material culture, too – in this case, for what it can say about ice cream. Modern ice cream, as we know it today, has its roots in the Middle East, where frozen drinks called Sherbet (from the Arabic word for "drink" or "beverage") had been served since the medieval period as European travelers to the region experienced. Sir Thomas Herbert (1606-1682), a contemporary of the English king Charles I, left a fantastic account of the ingredients that Middle Eastern peoples used in sherbet: "fair water, sugar, rose-water, and juice of lemons mixed, and sugar confected with citrons, violets or other sweet flowers; and for the more delicacy, sometimes a mixture of amber." His account suggests that Europeans were very enthusiastic about this new drink, which he described as "a drink that quenches thirst and tastes deliciously."

Until today, the Middle East has offshoots of old ice cream cultures of their own that remain very successful, such as Salepi Dondurma. Clearly ice cream in the region has a long history.

However, the ice cream on offer in the ice cream stand pictured here was likely of the European variety; it was a milky or creamy concoction, not an iced floral and citrus drink, and required access to dairy projects and chilling at the same time. In a potentially hot climate like Mandatory Palestine's, cold desserts required refrigeration or cooling technology, marking them as luxuries of an industrial age. Historian Jonathan Rees notes that refrigerated foods, available across global climates, became "potent symbols of globalization". While many may have associated refrigeration,

which tended to depend on electricity, as a European or American phenomenon in this period, it quickly reached urban centers of the Middle East East, too. In this sense, the ice cream stand functioned not just as a place of leisure but a technological and cultural signpost of modern life. In addition, the presence of the glassware, metal dispensers, and neatly uniformed vendors reflects a commitment to hygiene, presentation, and urban sophistication. Hygiene was critical and reflected understandings of germs and bacteria that were still gaining ground in the opening years of the twentieth century. This aesthetic mirrors Western consumer spaces, suggesting that Tel Aviv's residents aspired to – and enjoyed a degree of – local or regional modernity.

Finally, Frank Scholten's photograph of this ice cream stand – like other images in his collection – testifies to the growth of a leisure economy and the affluence of the people who went to the public park where this picture was taken and who had enough money to buy from the stand. Ice cream, after all, is a luxury, not a staple. It points to a degree of prosperity among those who were able to share in its pleasures.

Frank Scholten's image of this Tel Aviv ice cream stand captures a moment where modernity, colonialism, identity, and cultural exchange were converging. By viewing ice cream as both commodity and symbol, we gain a richer understanding of everyday life in Mandatory Palestine — simultaneously local, colonial, and globally connected.

FURTHER READING

Azaryahu, Maoz. *Tel Aviv: Mythography of a City. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2020*. Accessed April 26, 2025.

Even-Zohar, Itamar. "The Emergence of a Native Hebrew Culture in Palestine 1882-1948." In *Essential Papers on Zionism*, edited by Reinharz, Jehuda & Anita Shapira, 727-744. New York & London: New York University Press, 1996.

Halperin, Liora R. *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism, and Language Diversity in Palestine, 1920-1948*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015.

Irving, Sarah. "'This Is Palestine': History and Modernity in Guidebooks to Mandate Palestine," *Contemporary Levant* 4, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 64-74, https://doi.org/10.1080/20581831.2019.1594613.

Quinzio, Geraldine M. *Of Sugar and Snow: A History of Ice Cream Making*. California: University of California Press, 2009.

Rees, Jonathan. *Refrigeration Nation: A History of Ice, Appliances, and Enterprise in America*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2013.

Wallach, Yair. *A City in Fragments: Urban Text in Modern Jerusalem*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2020.

Chapter 4

Culinary Identities, Gastrodiplomacy

Mistrusting the Meats: Lessons from the Feast of Alexios Komnenos and Bohemond of Taranto (1097)

Weston Kennedy

Commensality refers to the practice of sharing a table with others. By sharing food, people can come together in ways which foster companionship, friendship, and general friendliness. However, what do we do when someone we neither like nor trust is seated at the table? What do we do when a meal requires fulfilling an obligation more than enjoying the food? From the eleventh-century Byzantine Empire, we can consider one historical episode in Constantinople (now Istanbul) for a lesson about the limits of commensality, or what one could call "contingent commensality."

The case in question revolves around two main figures: Alexios Komnenos (c. 1057-1118), the Byzantine emperor, and the Norman prince, Bohemond of Taranto (c. 1054-1111). In 1148, the emperor's daughter, Anna Komnene (1083-1153) wrote a chronicle of her father's life called *The Alexiad*. This impressive volume focuses on the emperor's life, including his initially chaotic rise to power, his run-ins with the Turks entering Anatolia, and his continuing struggles with and against the soldiers of the First Crusade (1096-1099).

Once the First Crusade began, Crusaders worked alongside the Byzantines to move their army towards the Holy Land. Coming mostly by land from what are now France, Belgium, Germany, and Italy, the Crusaders traveled until they reached Constantinople, where the Byzantines ferried them across the Bosphorus to Anatolia. In one passage, Anna Komnene describes a series of feasts that her father hosted as each member

Figure 56 Miniature manuscript painting of Byzantine Emperor Alexios Komnenos, from a 12th-century copy of Euthymios Zigabenos' *Panoplia Dogmatica* (Vat.gr.666). Public domain.

of the crusading nobility entered their capital. Alexios required each noble to swear him an oath of fealty, whereupon he hosted them lavishly at feasts and even chatted with them (something Byzantine emperors did not do among their own subjects). Alexios' goal with these feasts was to dazzle the knights, allowing logistical and strategic discussions to take place in a congenial environment (Komnene, X.XI).

The feasts were generally amicable, since there was no particular bad blood between Alexios and the Crusaders. However, one particular feast included Bohemond of Taranto, who had invaded Alexios's territories roughly fifteen years earlier. Knowing that Bohemond might not trust any meal that he offered, Alexios provided two options: Behemond could enjoy the normal feast, with foods prepared by the imperial chefs, or receive the raw ingredients, which he could cook for himself as he liked. Portraying Bohemond as mistrustful, full of deceit, and afraid of being poisoned, Anna Komnene noted that Bohemond opted for the raw ingredients and made his own meal rather than accept the proffered feast. Anna Komnene added that Bohemond gave the emperor's cooked food to his followers without mentioning his concern about poison, while having his own food prepared for him solo (Komnene, X.XI).

Unlike previous feasts, which succeeded in building trust between hosted knights and the Byzantine emperor, this feast between Bohemond and Alexios confirmed their mutual mistrust in ways that continued to sour relations in years ahead. Could it or would it have gone differently if Bohemond had accepted Alexios's meal, assuming that Alexios did not try to poison him? Probably, but Bohemond may have thought that he was just, as the expression goes, "playing it safe."

After concluding his stay in Constantinople, Bohemond joined the rest of the Crusaders as they trekked to the Holy Land, where they captured the large cities of Antioch and Jerusalem. Although in Constantinople Bohemond had promised to take Antioch for the Byzantines and hand it over after the capture, he went back on his word. He refused to hand over the city to the Byzantines, instead making himself prince of Antioch and ruling over the city (France, p. 24).

Figure 57 Bohemond of Taranto released from Turkish captivity. Illumination from a 1337 manuscript of William of Tyre's *Historie d'Outre Mer* (Français 22495). Public domain.

This episode between Alexios Komnenos and Bohemond of Taranto points to what I call the "contingent" nature of commensality, which means that sharing a table is likely to "succeed" only if people approach the same table with goodwill. This episode also offers a case study in gastrodiplomacy, involving food and meal-sharing as a mode of building relations between political agents. Here, however, the story of Alexios Komnenos and Bohemond of Taranto functions as a cautionary tale – a tale about what happens when relations (if not actual dishes) are poisoned. In sum, this passage from Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* offers a window into the role of commensality and gastrodiplomacy on a close personal scale, and reminds us of the important role that food-based pageantry and performance can play in cultivating relations between powerful individuals. Conspicuous feasting gains extra importance when important leaders meet in less-than-friendly conditions. History suggests that leaders can come together at a table and find common ground through commensality, by putting aside differences in the course of a meal, or continue their fights, starting with food.

FURTHER READING

Comnena, Anna. *The Alexiad*. Translated by E. A. S. Dawes. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1928. (Originally published in 1148.)

France, John. "Anna Comneno, *The Alexiad*, and the First Crusade." *Reading Medieval Studies* 10 (1984): 20–38.

Coffee Routes, Migration, and Ottoman-Brazilian Gastrodiplomacy, 1858-1912: Brewing a Shared History

José Rafael Medeiros Coelho

A Century-Old Coffee Route, a Shared Cup, a Shared Past

In Autumn 2024, I returned to document the last traces of the Christian diaspora of Antakya (Antioch), a historically Arabic-speaking town that formed part of Syria until 1938 when it passed to the Republic of Turkey. In February 2023, a devastating earthquake struck Antakya, and the town was still reeling from its effects. In the course of my research, I searched for family archives, letters, and photos left by the few remaining families of this once-thriving Christian Arab community. Some of the documents I found had come from Brazil, where many Antiochians had settled for work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as part of a larger Syrian diaspora formed during this period. Some materials came from people who had returned to Antakya, or from migrants in Brazil who had mailed things to their loved ones who had stayed. Now, these remnants lay buried beneath the rubble, at risk of being lost forever through the obliteration of the earthquake.

But there were some structures that did survive the earthquake. Amidst the ruins of the *Uzun Çarşı* ("Long Bazaar"), Corc's jewelry shop still stood, a quiet refuge. The proprietor greeted me warmly, his hands busy at his workbench. On a nearby shelf sat an old photograph: a woman with an infant, six children, and a man. Faded ink on the back read, "*Miryam Granny and Children*" (see Figure 58). I remembered when he first showed it to me.

"That's my aunt," Corc said, softening.

"My grandmother's daughter."

I flipped the photo. '*São Paulo?*' The back held a date: 1927.

Corc smiled. "Yes, *habibi*, São Paulo. Just like you, in our own way."

As I took an image of his aunt's portrait – a photograph of a photograph for the sake of digitization – a coffee vendor's call rang out – "*Kahve*!" The rich aroma filled the air.

Corc nodded, bought two cups, and placed one in front of me.

"*Buyurun*," he said, inviting me to drink. Smiling, he added, "*Bir fincan kahvenin kırk yıl hatırı vardır*" ("A cup of coffee carries forty years of memories").

This saying reflects a drinking custom across Turkish and Antiochian cultures – a belief that a shared cup of coffee is a bond that transcends time, creating cherished memories and a deep sense of gratitude.

We sipped in silence, the weight of those words hanging in the air.

I glanced down at my cup, which in Antakya is often served in a slender, curved glass, similar to tea. The dark, rich brew – double-brewed, strong, and unfiltered – was prepared in the traditional Süvari Antiochian style (see Figure 59).

Corc turned to me. "Do you like the coffee?"

I assured him I did.

Figure 58 "Miryan Granny and Children," 1927, São Paulo. Courtesy of Stephan Family.

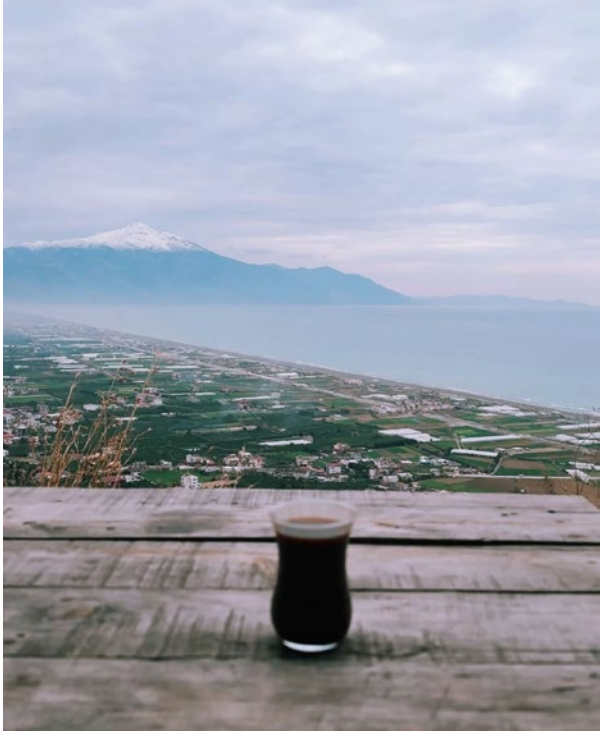


Figure 59 Envisioning coffee routes, a cup of Antiochian Süvari rests, with the sight of Jebel Aqra and the Mediterranean Sea. Courtesy of Bora Selim Gül, 2024. Samandağ.

"Here in Antakya, coffee is more than a drink," he said. "It's a ritual, a tradition passed down through generations. And the beans? They come from Brazil – nothing else compares."

I looked at my cup, suddenly aware of the journey it had taken – from Brazilian soil to Antakya.

"So, coffee doesn't just carry memories – it traces routes too," I said.

"Indeed," he replied.

As Corc says, "And the beans? They come from Brazil – nothing else compares." He is not just talking about taste; he is referring to a century-old transatlantic connection shaped by trade routes, diplomacy, and migration. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Antiochian families like Corc's migrated to Brazil, becoming part of a larger wave of Ottoman migration, with Brazil a key destination. Driven by economic and social challenges within the Ottoman Empire, the French Mandate, and the Republic of Turkey, and by the perception of opportunities abroad, these migrations saw Antiochians carrying their food traditions as they migrated. At the same time, new influences, such as Brazilian coffee, began to flow into Antakya, slowly transforming local drinking culture.

In fact, coffee had been entering the Ottoman Empire since the sixteenth century, originally from Yemen, giving rise to coffeehouse culture in urban centers like Istanbul. However, the arrival of Brazilian coffee in the late nineteenth century brought a significant shift. It provided a more consistent, mass-produced supply that gradually replaced other sources in the Middle East, while also expanding global trade networks through which coffee circulated (Karam 2025).

Since approximately 1900, Brazilian coffee has been shipped directly from Santos to Iskenderun (Alexandretta), the port of Antakya, establishing a direct trade route between Brazil and the city. Over time, this influx of Brazilian coffee became a central element of Antiochian coffee culture, lowering prices, increasing consumption, and shaping a new popular imagination about Brazil – a transformation that continues to resonate today. This growing exchange, marked by the movement of both coffee and people across the Atlantic, emerged from larger geopolitical and economic shifts, such as the signing of the Ottoman-Brazilian Treaty of Friendship, Residence, Commerce, and Navigation in 1858 (Dostluk, İkamet, Ticaret ve Seyr-i Sefain Antlaşması).

A Bitter Brew: Ottoman-Brazilian Gastrodiplomacy, Coffee, and Migration (1858-1912)

The Treaty of Friendship, Residence, Commerce, and Navigation, comprising eleven articles, established firm diplomatic ties between Brazil and the Ottoman Empire during the period from 1858 to 1912 (see Figure 60). Brazil set up consulates in Ottoman cities like Cairo and Jaffa, while Ottoman authorities reciprocally opened consulates in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. This arrangement reflected the era's emphasis on international cooperation and aligned with the Ottoman Empire's broader strategy of strengthening relations with emerging global powers during the era of the Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876). The treaty granted merchants from both empires the right to trade in key ports and cities and addressed provisions on taxation, inheritance rights, military exemptions, and judicial matters, solidifying the economic and diplomatic foundations of the agreement (Temel 2002).

The treaty coincided with a crucial period in global trade, as coffee emerged as a dominant commodity alongside the rise of global capitalism. Leaders of Brazil, which was a key player in this economic shift, used coffee as a symbol of its growing economic power, promoting it at international exhibitions as a means of gastrodiplomacy (Rockower 2012). As the abolition of slavery approached, Brazil established the *Hospedaria dos Imigrantes* (Immigrant Hostel) in São Paulo in 1887, marking the start of state-supported labor migration policies. By the late nineteenth century, coffee had become central to Brazil's economy, driving the demand for a large labor force. When Brazil transitioned from empire to republic in 1889, the government –heavily influenced by the coffee elites, large landowners controlling coffee production –launched campaigns targeting workers from Europe, Asia, and the Mediterranean to expand the labor force. This initiative sparked a wave of migration, with nearly five million immigrants, including many from the Ottoman territories of Greater Syria and the Balkans, lured by promises of work and prosperity.

The Ottoman-Brazilian relationship continued to evolve with significant migration from the Ottoman Empire to Brazil. Between the late 1890s and 1914, over 100,000 Ottoman Syrians migrated to São Paulo, prompting the Ottoman government to expand its diplomatic presence in Brazil (Genç & Bozkurt 2010). In 1876, as a token of the treaty, Emperor Dom Pedro II visited the Ottoman Empire and received a warm

Figure 60 Treaty of Friendship, Residence, Commerce, and Navigation. Library of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Itamaraty, Rio de Janeiro. Courtesy of Roberto Khatlab.

welcome from Sultan Abdulhamid II, as documented in contemporary archives and newspapers. Emperor Dom Pedro II became one of the first South American leaders to visit the imperial capital of Istanbul, as well as Ottoman Greater Syria and Rumelia (Khatlab 2025). However, despite these growing ties, the Ottoman Empire abruptly terminated its treaty with Brazil in 1912 after more than half a century of its signing, and three years after the overthrow of Sultan Abdulhamid II. This unexpected decision, made without clear reasoning or prior explanation, raised questions about the Ottoman Empire's shifting diplomatic priorities during this period. The treaty's termination had wide-ranging consequences: it not only deprived Brazil of the privileges established in the 1858 agreement but also limited its diplomatic reach, preventing the opening of consulates in key Ottoman cities like Istanbul and Beirut. An insightful report found in the Ottoman Foreign Ministry Archives, authored by Münir Süreyya Bey (1871-1932), the Baş Şehbender (Chief Consul) of the Ottoman State in São Paulo, in 1913, sheds light on the concerns that may have contributed to the termination of the treaty (see Figure 61). Süreyya Bey emphasized the São Paulo government's growing obsession with coffee cultivation, describing it as "a matter of life" for the region. He also observed that Brazil's government used aggressive propaganda – "The government's first weapon to achieve this goal is propaganda" – to attract farmers, promoting an idyllic life through postcards, maps, and banquets featuring raw beans and roasted coffee. As Süreyya Bey remarked, the government sought to "persuade the poor people to go to Brazil."

This strategy is mirrored in the 1891 pamphlet titled *Special Conditions and Jobs for Those Who Will Work in Coffee Growing in Brazil, in São Paulo*, which details the Secretary of Agriculture of the Government of São Paulo's organized immigration plan to support the coffee industry (see Figure 62). The pamphlet explained that immigrants would travel from the Port of Patras to the Port of Santos, then take a train to São Paulo, where they would stay at the *Hospedaria dos Imigrantes* for eight days with free food and lodging. Afterward, landowners would provide housing and work training. The pamphlet promised emigrants free transportation, accommodation, food, training, and financial rewards, with the potential to earn up to 12,000 Francs annually after five years. It also set strict eligibility criteria, including agricultural expertise, political loyalty (no ties to anarchist or socialist movements), and medical clearances. Additionally, the pamphlet highlighted the

role of local actors, such as the General Agency in Patras, in facilitating migration, underscoring Brazil's strategic use of propaganda to attract suitable workers for São Paulo's plantations while maintaining political control over the labor force. The pamphlet's content aligned closely with Süreyya Bey's concerns, which he articulated almost fourteen years later. His concerns extended beyond the Ottoman Syrian population to other groups from Ottoman Rumelia, including the Balkans. He warned that if Brazil's representatives sought to bring over large numbers of Ottoman citizens, they would be acting as "puppets" for the São Paulo government. He emphasized that mass migration should not proceed without sufficient protections for the rights of the immigrants, reflecting his deep concern about the exploitation and political manipulation involved in the migration process. While Süreyya Bey framed his concerns around the exploitation of migrants, the timing of his report – coinciding with the Ottoman Empire's intensifying need for conscripts during the Balkan Wars – suggests that broader state anxieties about out-migration of potential military conscripts and laborers may have also informed the government's stance (Fahrenthold 2016).

Despite the severance of diplomatic ties, the coffee trade continued to thrive, sustaining the ports of the Eastern Mediterranean. With the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, new connections were forged, while migration from post-Ottoman countries such as Syria also persisted. Today, approximately twelve million Brazilians trace their ancestry to Arab communities, accounting for six percent of Brazil's population (ANBA, 2020). This enduring presence affirms Münir Süreyya Bey's early concerns, as he foresaw the scale of migration the Ottomans had not fully grasped – one that unfolded through the entanglements of coffee, migration, and trade. This transnational history, extending beyond a single cup of coffee, is deeply embedded in Ottoman-Brazilian gastrodiplomacy, and is also reflected in the shared rituals of coffee drinking across Brazil and the Middle East, which continue to bind diasporic communities to their homelands – from São Paulo to Antakya.

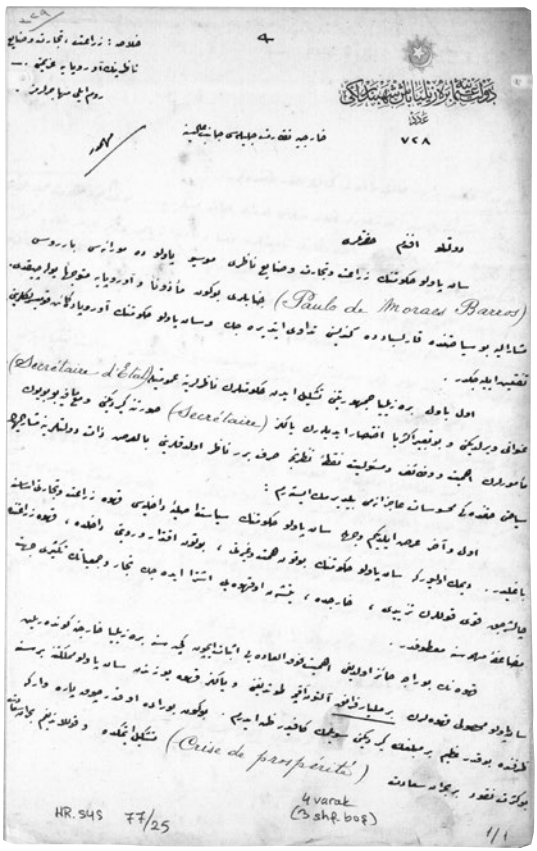


Figure 61 Münir Süreyya Bey, Chief Consul of the Ottoman State in São Paulo, Brazil. Report, 15th April 1913. BOA. HR.SYS.77/25.

Brewing the Archives

In 2023, in the post-earthquake landscape of Antakya when I was conducting ethnographic fieldwork, my encounter with Corc, his aunt's photograph, and our shared cup of coffee led me to reconsider how coffee had influenced Ottoman migration to Brazil. Familiar with migration waves from Antakya in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I was prompted to reflect on coffee's role in this process. I began to see glaring gaps in how Brazilians tell their history – gaps that overlook the role of coffee in Ottoman Arab migration. While many studies have examined migration from countries like Italy, Portugal, and Spain to Brazil in light of the coffee economy, few have studied Ottoman migration at all. Those who have commented on it have tended, instead, to regard it as an individual entrepreneurial pursuit – an outgrowth of a peddler economy – without considering broader economic or social contexts or taking account of Ottoman archives.

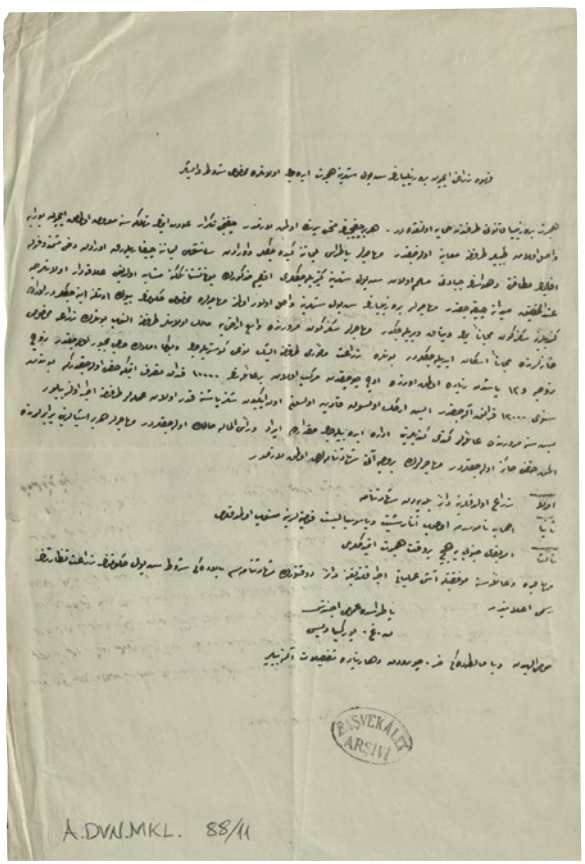


Figure 62 1891 pamphlet, *Special Conditions and Jobs for Those Who Will Work in Coffee Growing in Brazil, in São Paulo.* BOA, A. DVN. MKL, 88/11.

Building on this insight, and in the course of my developing research at the University of Groningen where I am pursuing a PhD, my exploration of Ottoman archives has revealed different perspectives. Münir Süreyya Bey's report from the Ottoman Foreign Ministry records highlights an Ottoman awareness of Brazil's coffee-driven migration policies. Rather than portraying Ottoman migrants as independent actors, the documents expose a government-organized, structured migration initiative. Keywords – such as *kahve* (coffee), *muhacir* (migrant), *zirrat* (agriculture), and *Brezilya* (Brazil) – can help us to map coffee routes and uncover a coordinated Brazilian government effort to promote migration.

These findings underscore how coffee, as a global commodity, played a pivotal role in shaping migratory mobilities across the Eastern Mediterranean, linking the Ottoman Empire's former territories, including Greater Syria and Rumelia, to Brazil. Had I not consulted these records, I would have missed the deeper, state-organized migration initiatives shaped by Brazil's coffee policies and associated trade routes. Brewing the "silences" within these archives is crucial for scholars

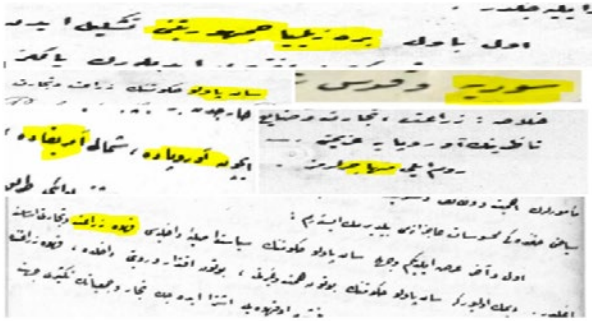


Figure 63 Sipping the Silences: A Collage of Ottoman Keywords – *Kahve*, *Ziraat*, *Muhacir*, *Brezilya*, *São Paulo*, *Suriye*. J.R.M. Coelho, 2025.

engaged in food and diaspora studies, as it enables a critical reassessment of prevailing historical narratives. This approach reveals the intersecting histories of Ottoman migration to Latin America. It also reveals the circulation of global commodities, gastrodiplomacy, and cultures of commensality at work and sheds new light on migration and foodways.

FURTHER READING

ANBA. "Arabs, Descendants Are 6% of Brazil's Population: Survey." *ANBA*, June 18, 2020. https://anba.com.br/en/arabs-descendants-are-6-of-brazils-population-survey/.

Bercito, Diogo. "Teaching Islam to African Muslims in Brazil: An Ottoman's Nineteenth-Century Travel Account." *International Journal of Latin American Religions* 8, no. 1 (2024): 107–22.

Fausto, Boris. "Expansão do Café e Política Cafeeira." In *História Geral da Civilização Brasileira: O Brasil Republicano: Estrutura de Poder e Economia (1889–1930)*. São Paulo: Difel, 1989.

Fahrenthold, Stacey D. "Former Ottomans in the Ranks: Pro-Entente Military Recruitment among Syrians in the Americas, 1916–18." *The Journal of Global History* 11, no. 1 (2016): 88–112.

Fahrenthold, Stacey. *Unmentionables: Textiles, Garment Work, and the Syrian American Working Class*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024.

Genç, Hüseyin, and İbrahim Bozkurt. "Osmanlı'dan Brezilya ve Arjantin'e Emek Göçü ve Göçmenlerin Sosyo-Ekonomik Durumu (1850–1915)." *Marmara Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi* 28, no. 1 (2010): 86–87.

Gualtieri, Sarah. *Arab Routes: Syrians of Southern California*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019.

Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE). *Brasil: 500 Anos de Colonização*. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2000.

Karam, John Tofik. "A Cultural Politics of Entrepreneurship in Nation-Making: Phoenicians, Turks, and the Arab Commercial Essence in Brazil." *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 9, no. 2 (2004): 319–51.

Karam, John Tofik. "Arab/ica Brezilya: Bir Küresel Güney Peşrevi." *Toplumsal Tarih* 373 (2025): 70–75.

Khatlab, Roberto. *As Viagens de D. Pedro II: Oriente Médio e África do Norte, 1871 e 1876*. São Paulo: Benvirá, 2015.

Rockower, Paul S. "Recipes for Gastrodiplomacy." *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 8, no. 3 (2012): 235–46.

Temel, Metin. "Osmanlı-Brezilya İlişkileri: 19. ve 20. Yüzyılın Başlarında Osmanlı Arşiv Kaynaklarına Göre." *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 19, no. 2 (2002): 167–89.

ARCHIVES & SOURCES CONSULTED

A Fundação Biblioteca Nacional:

Relatórios do Ministério das Relações Exteriores (RJ) 1891-1928.

Newspapers

O Correio Paulistano, "O Consul da Turquia", 15 de agosto de 1908.

Jornal Gazeta de Notícias, "Os Sírios," 22 de fevereiro de 1910.

Correio Da Noite, "A Colonia da Syria no Brazil, Um Rapido Progresso", 4 de março de 1914.

Library of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Itamaraty, Rio de Janeiro: Treaty of Friendship, Residence, Commerce, and Navigation, 1858. Courtesy of Roberto Khatlab.

Ottoman Archives of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye: BOA, HR.SYS, nr. 77/25.

BOA, A. DVN. MKL, 88/11.

"Coffee People" and "Tea People" in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey: The Intimate Economies and Politics of Sociability

Patrick Lewis

The Ottoman Coffeehouse

In the sixteenth century, a new culture of coffee consumption emerged in the Ottoman Empire, before spreading across the globe over the next three hundred years. Originating in Ethiopia, coffee – a beverage brewed from the processed, roasted, and ground beans of the *Coffea* plant – entered Ottoman territories from Yemen in southern Arabia where it was then shipped through Egypt to reach all corners of the empire by the middle of the century (Hattox 2014). By the late sixteenth century, hundreds of coffeehouses operated in the Ottoman capital of Istanbul alone (Kömeçoğlu 2005). Contemporaries there and beyond left accounts attesting to the tremendous popularity of this hitherto exotic beverage, as well as the growing importance of the coffeehouse, or *kahvehane*, as a site of public sociability operating outside the control of state and religious authorities. A hundred years before merchants and traders popularized the coffeehouse in western Europe, inspired by their own experiences in comparable Ottoman establishments, the Ottoman coffeehouse generated new possibilities for the mixing of people (albeit almost exclusively men) from different sectors of Ottoman society, while circulating new discourses and ideas about science, religion, and politics (Ellis 2008; Hattox 2014; Kömeçoğlu 2005).

Some state and religious elites worried that this new drink – and perhaps more importantly the new


ذیب جاله

بسم الله الرحمن الرحیم

الحمد لله علی نعمائه والصلوة والسلام علی سیدنا محمد
طب القلوب ودوائه وعلی اله وصحبه اجمعین بعد ذا مکتوبکز
حرم شریفی مدیر لکندن متقاعد وحضور کعبهٔ معظمه ده اختیار
شرف مجاورت له مأمور مأمورهٔ دینویه دن متباعد بولنان
بوحقیر وفقیر لطف صمدی (سید محمد عزت) ابن احمد حمدی که
اوتوز سنه یی متجاوز مدتدر کمال اعتنا ایله چای استعمالنه
مداومه بولندیغی احبا وآشنا سی عندلرنده معلومدر اثنای
مدت مداومتده حصوله کلان نتیجهٔ تجارب ومشاهدات
دلالتیله چای استعمالنه دوام حفظ صحت وعافیته مدار تمام

Figure 64 Cover of Seyyid Mehmed İzzet Efendi's (1878) *Çay Risalesi* "Tea Pamphlet." Creative Commons.

social venue of the coffeehouse – could have a corrupting and subversive influence, and yet efforts to curtail consumption were fleeting, erratic, and ultimately unsuccessful (Hattock 2014). Coffee only grew in popularity over the following three centuries, as did tobacco, which was introduced to the empire from the Americas around the same time that coffee became popular. Indeed, pipe smoking and coffee drinking often went together in coffeehouses, while tobacco and coffee beans ranked among a new class of consumer goods that were in demand across the Empire. Thus, while coffee emerged as an important commodity in the formation of an early-modern Ottoman imperial trade network – connecting producers in the Indian Ocean world and the Red Sea corridor to consumers in the Ottoman territories of southeastern Europe, western Asia, and North Africa – coffee also acquired important cultural meanings as a symbol of new forms of public sociability, as well as private hospitality and intimacy (Karababa and Ger 2011; Kirli 2015).

Tea and the Turkish Nation-State

The precipitous decline of Ottoman power in Egypt, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean during the nineteenth century, coupled with the massive influx of cheap coffee from new producers in the Americas and principally Brazil by the end of the century, transformed the Ottoman coffee market (see Coelho, this volume). However, it was the introduction of a new beverage – tea brewed from the processed leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* plant – and its popularization beginning in the late nineteenth century that ultimately led to the usurpation of coffee as a primary medium of public and private sociability in modern Turkey.

The reasons behind this new preference for tea in late Ottoman and Turkish society are many and cannot be put down to economic factors alone (Lewis 2023). Aside from difficulties in comparing the exchange values of tea and coffee across time and space, the price of coffee in the Ottoman Empire fell in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – excluding moments of acute political or economic crisis, or periods of high tariff regimes – mirroring larger trends in the rest of the world. So cost alone cannot account for this shift in consumption.

Other factors included broader, contemporaneous shifts from coffee to tea drinking across western Asia, including Iran, where tea became an object of mass consumption earlier than in the Ottoman Empire (Matthee 1996). Partly driving this change was Russian imperial expansion into the Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as British imperial expansion in the Levant and Indian Ocean. Britain, in particular, pursued a policy of promoting tea cultivation in its colonial possessions in South Asia for export to Britain, British colonies, and other global markets beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. Another factor was the material affordances of tea itself, namely the comparative ease of tea's preparation and service in comparison to coffee, which made it cheaper to prepare in the coffeehouse and less labor intensive and time-consuming in the household. Tea just needed steeping in boiled water and was ready to go; kept dry, it also had a long shelf life. Tea, unlike coffee, also came to be associated with sugar, with which it was often served, and whose transformation into a mass consumer good also occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially following the expansion of the sugarcane industry in

Figure 65 Tea Garden in Fındıklı, Rize. Photo by P. Lewis.

the Caribbean. Observers attested to this shift from coffee to tea drinking at the turn of the century, especially among Ottoman religious minorities – Christians and Jews – who had ties to European merchants who were living in major cities in the empire. It occurred as well among communities in eastern border regions like Ottoman Kurdistan (Lewis 2023).

Boosting the spread of tea relative to coffee, finally, was the development of a domestic tea sector along the Black Sea in northeast Anatolia in the years immediately following the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the wake of World War I (Ansel 2024; Hann 1990). Tea cultivation expanded rapidly in Turkey during the first three decades of the republic, from the 1920s to the 1950s. Tea thereby became a home-grown good whose cultivation symbolized the country's national economy. By the late 1950s, tea had overtaken coffee in popularity in every corner of Turkey, as tariffs and a currency crisis reduced coffee imports to negligible levels. In the process, tea acquired many of the social functions and cultural meanings formerly associated with coffee, while also imbuing the latter with novel meanings and social significance. Whereas tea became a "democratic" drink – emblematic of Turkey's post-war egalitarian sensibilities and the primary medium of everyday sociability (Lewis 2023; Wohl 2017) – coffee became something more rarefied: a token of *haute* hospitality, a gesture to mark special social occa-

sions like wedding engagements or the arrival of a beloved guest, or a medium for fortune-telling and divination. Harder to get and more expensive to buy, coffee became prestigious.

Coffee People, Tea People, and Neoliberal Consumers

Economic liberalization beginning in the 1980s – exemplified by the privatization of large swaths of the domestic tea sector after 1984 – led not only to the entry of new domestic and foreign tea brands into the Turkish market but increasingly competition from coffee. Initially, this was mostly limited to the resurgence of "Turkish coffee" – imported but now marketed with nostalgia for the Ottoman past – as an ordinary consumer item, albeit one still imbued with a greater degree of social prestige (and higher cost) than tea (Korkman 2015). The resurgence of coffee also resulted from the wider availability of instant coffee brands like Nescafe, which attested to Turkey's ever-closer ties to western European and global markets. Beginning in the 2000s, there emerged so-called "second wave" coffeeshops serving Western European-style coffees, such as espresso and latte – a new type of establishment captured by the Turkish distinction between the *kahve*, "coffeehouse" and *kafe*, referring to a modern second-wave "cafe" like Starbucks. These outlets began to appear in upscale neighborhoods in Turkey's largest western cities, before becoming popular everywhere in Turkey after roughly 2015 – a period during which coffee imports to Turkey more than tripled in value in US dollar terms despite the weakness of the Turkish lira at the time.

Figure 66 Çaykur Çay Müzesi (Çaykur Tea Museum), opened in 2022 (along with the new Rize-Artvin airport where it is located). The museum focuses on the history of the tea sector in Turkey with special emphasis on Çaykur – the state tea corporation (once a government monopoly and now semi-privatized). Photo by P. Lewis.

Figure 67 Panel on the various teas, Çaykur Tea Museum, Rize. Photo by P. Lewis.

New consumer habits and preferences are again shifting the cultural and social meanings of coffee and tea. Whereas in Turkey the two drinks have historically been associated with different social occasions or uses, they are now increasingly associated with different types of consumers, as reflected in popular discourses about imagined differences between "tea people" and "coffee people" and the contrasting social personas and values of those who consume them. Although the ultimate direction of these trends remains unpredictable, the meanings of coffee and tea in contemporary Turkey remain in flux, both driven by and driving changing patterns of consumption. These trends remind us that food may not be "about" just money or taste (here referring to both flavor and perceptions of quality) but may carry political and symbolic values as well.

Figure 68 Display of historical Çaykur tea brands in the Tea Museum, Rize. Photo by P. Lewis.

FURTHER READING

Ansel, Esra. "Bureaucrats into Merchants: Tea, Capitalism and the Making of the Republican Bourgeois." *Middle Eastern Studies* 60, no. 3 (2024): 385–400.

Ellis, Markman. "An Introduction to the Coffee-House: A Discursive Model." *Language & Communication* 28, no. 2 (2008): 156–64.

Ger, Güliz, and Olga Kravets. "Special and Ordinary Times: Tea in Motion." In *Time, Consumption and Everyday Life*, 189–202. London: Routledge, 2020.

Hann, Christopher M. *Tea and the Domestication of the Turkish State.* Working Paper No. 1, 1990.

Hattox, Ralph S. *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014.

Karababa, Eminegül, and Güliz Ger. "Early Modern Ottoman Coffeehouse Culture and the Formation of the Consumer Subject." *Journal of Consumer Research* 37, no. 5 (2011): 737–60.

Kirli, Cengiz. "Coffeehouses: Leisure and Sociability in Ottoman Istanbul." In *Leisure Cultures in Urban Europe, c. 1700–1870*, 161–82, edited by Peter Borsay and Jan Hein Furnee. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015.

Kömeçoğlu, Uğur. "The Publicness and Sociabilities of the Ottoman Coffeehouse." *Javnost – The Public* 12, no. 2 (2005): 5–22.

Korkman, Zeynep K. "Fortunes for Sale: Cultural Politics and Commodification of Culture in Millennial Turkey." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no. 3 (2015): 319–38.

Lewis, Patrick Charles. "Signs of Solidarity and Difference: Kaçak Tea, Samimiyet, and the National Public in Turkey." *Signs and Society* 11, no. 3 (2023): 318–42.

Matthee, Rudi. "From Coffee to Tea: Shifting Patterns of Consumption in Qajar Iran." *Journal of World History* 7, no. 2 (1996): 199–230.

Wohl, Sharon. "The Turkish Tea Garden: Exploring a 'Third Space' with Cultural Resonances." *Space and Culture* 20, no. 1 (2017): 56–67.

Food, Gender, and Femininity in the Iranian Diaspora

Amir Sayadabdi

In the Iranian diaspora of New Zealand, food and commensality have close ties to gender roles and carry the emotional weight of migration. While cooking remains largely gendered, with women doing most of the work, its meanings have shifted in migratory contexts, transforming from a duty to an act of personal and cultural affirmation. Women's cooking practices, though sometimes reinforcing traditional gender norms, also enable agency and provide a source of nostalgia and connection. Preparing familiar dishes not only bridges the distance between the "old" and the "new" home, but also offers comfort and a sense of belonging. Through food, women navigate continuity and change, using cooking and commensality to sustain families while redefining roles, relationships, and identities in a new cultural landscape.

In ethnographic research I conducted among the Iranians of New Zealand between 2015 and 2022 on food and identity, I discussed with my interlocutors food culture in Iran. My female interlocutors typically brought up the familial and societal pressures and expectations that they felt "traditional" or "patriarchal" values imposed upon them and criticized the unfair division of labor. They felt *obliged* to do the housework, including cooking, and as a result many reported that cooking felt like oppression, routine, or drudgery. It felt like a job, rather than a task, that is, a "second shift" of unpaid work and employment, as the sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild famously put it in 1989.

My female interlocutors reported that expectations about gender roles eased somewhat after migration as they faced less societal and familial pressure to be as *responsible* for domestic work and care as they were in Iran. They stated that their husbands had become more "open" in their views regarding the division of domestic labor and that husbands occasionally helped in the kitchen.

These women's accounts suggested that despite some post-migratory changes in gender norms and practices, the division of domestic labor including foodwork within diasporic Iranian families in Aotearoa/New Zealand was, for the most part, strikingly similar to that in Iran. It was still clearly gender based, with women expected to carry a disproportionate share of responsibility for the kitchen and other domestic spaces. However, in the Iranian diaspora in New Zealand, Iranian women did not necessarily or consistently perceive this arrangement as unfair, unlike in Iran where they often described it as such. In fact, women in the "diasporic kitchen" sometimes even welcomed men's relative lack of participation to the extent that some women reported that they would now prefer to be in charge of the kitchen.

Sometimes women cited men's general lack of culinary skills and knowledge as the reason for not wanting

them in the kitchen, noting that men's culinary ineptitude would add to their work or slow them down. However, the practical aspects of efficient and effective domestic foodwork did not dominate women's reasoning; rather they emphasized personal and individual choice. They stated that cooking for them in New Zealand had become "less of a burden" and that it was, in part, for their own interests, enjoyment, and sense of self and social worth that they now cooked.

Women cooked as part of caring work, conveyed through feelings of devotion, pressure, and limitation, but also pleasure, enjoyment, self-construction, and agentic control. Through cooking, especially cooking what Iranians considered "proper meals," women brought together families that tended not to socialize as often as they had done before migration. Gathering for meals, if only on special occasions, represented an effort to ensure their physical, mental and socio-emotional well-being in what many perceived as the threatening and disrupting food culture of the host society. However, in doing this, the Iranian women to whom I spoke also subordinated their tastes and preferences to those of their spouses and children, reproducing historically dominant ways of "doing" femininity. The majority of my female interlocutors stated that the dishes they cooked most often since moving to New Zealand were those that their husbands and children favored, and that they seldom or no longer cooked their own favorites. In this sense, my interlocutors associated enjoyment with whether or not the final outcome facilitated the desires and expectations of intimate others and whether their families or guests liked or appreciated what they made. This became clearer when a number of women stated that if they were "alone," they would stop cooking and would make themselves "convenient meals" instead. Such subordinating food practices point to what the sociologist Kate Cairns and others have called the "long-standing tendency for women to define their own food identities through the imperative to cook for others" which may contribute to women's oppression.

However, these same practices can also give women an opportunity to express themselves in a migratory context like New Zealand. Quite simply, it gives many Iranians in New Zealand a sense of comfort, since the familiarity of Iranian food connects them to both Iran and their new homes. Several women told me that whenever they missed "home," by which they meant Iran, making food gave them some solace. Some found comfort by cooking *familiar dishes.* As one of my interlocutors, Azi, observed: "It gives me joy especially when I miss home to make traditional Iranian foods from scratch [...] I feel, at least for me, it's not only about cooking the meal; it's about remembering who I am, who I was, where I come from, all that."

Others drew comfort by engaging with familiar practices. As a woman named Effat told me,"Pickling and jamming are almost therapeutic when I feel homesick… I enjoy every step of it from buying the ingredients, chopping, drying in the sun, sometimes even waiting for it to age." Others generated a sense of home by making dishes that they associated with things that they longed for. Along these lines, Atena observed, "One food that I really like to cook when I long for home is *lasagna* which was like my signature dish when hosting parties at home. It was also the first recipe my mother taught me… And you can't believe how comforted that makes me. I forget for a second

where I am. It would take away the sorrow of exile (*gham-e ghorbat*) almost completely."

Food and the sharing of food, or commensality, have the power to convey senses of cultural heritage, community, and comfort among those who are remembering and remaking their homes.

REFERENCES

Avakian, Arlene, and Haber, Barbara. 2005. "Feminist Food Studies: A Brief History." In *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women and Food,* edited by Arlene Avakian and Barbara Haber. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Cairns, Kate, Josée Johnston, and Shyon Baumann. 2014. "Caring about Food: Doing Gender in the Foodie Kitchen". In *Foodies*, edited by Josee Johnston and Shyon Baumann. New York: Routledge.

Hochschild, Arlie. 1989. *The Second Shift.* New York: Viking Penguin.

Afterword

At the Table, a Bridge: Sculpting Commensality in Clay and Community

Imme Koster

Commensality was one of the unifying themes of the Winter School which was held at the University of Groningen in January 2025. Commensality refers to the practice of coming together at the same table with the implicit idea of sharing food. Most of the workshop, which was entitled, "Commensality and Cultural Heritage in the Middle East and Its Diasporas," focused on interdisciplinary approaches to food studies, from the vantage points of history, anthropology, archaeology, and more. The final exercise was a communal sculpting session, meant to materialize commensality in a form that was not simply symbolic – and not centered on actual food – but nevertheless formed by collective engagement. Participants literally sat around a common table and shaped and shared balls of clay.

Two artists led the group: Erdal Tüt, a Kurdish sculptor who works primarily in stone carving, and his partner Nazli Tüt. Both had come to the Netherlands seeking refuge from Türkiye. For them, commensality was more than just the act of sharing food – it was a mode of survival and solidarity. They spoke of how they found support, not through official structures of the Dutch state, but within communities they joined in the Netherlands. They reframed commensality not as an abstract ideal but as something deeply entangled in social, political, and material conditions.

The session began with clay. Before shaping could begin, we had to prepare the clay: pressing, slapping, stretching, and pounding it against the table. The clay resisted the force exerted by our hands, creating an almost rhythmic, synchronized movement. The repetitive actions created a shared sensory experience, aligning participants in a process of mutual engagement.

Next, we rolled the clay into balls and moved them out of sight – passing them blindly beneath the table from one person to another. Each participant had to alter the clay based on touch alone, without the guidance of sight or control over the final outcome. What resulted were collectively shaped objects that had passed through multiple hands, transformed by everyone, yet "belonging" to no one. This exercise emphasized the unpredict-

ability of material engagements and the way meaning and form emerge through process rather than predetermined intent.

The final stage brought the participants together around an evolving collective sculpture. At first, individuals began shaping their own pieces, working separately within the same space. However, Erdal and Nazli urged the group to resist fragmentation – to think beyond individual contributions and instead build something together. This negotiation mirrored broader dynamics of commensality: should it be understood as a collection of separate acts, or as something that only exists through shared, interdependent formation?

Eventually, a collective decision emerged: we would create a sculpture together and give it the form of a table, which would also function as a bridge. The table would symbolize the act of gathering and sharing in an open space of hospitality and exchange. It would be not simply a metaphor but also a material demonstration of commensality as a physical and relational structure. Laden with food that we shaped from the clay, the table would represent abundance, valuing the importance of hospitality and care over *haute cuisine* and the content of dishes. The bridge would extend this idea, signifying connection across difference, an ongoing process of negotiation and inclusion. Our goal was not to impose these forms – the table, the bridge – onto the clay, but rather to let these forms, and ideas, emerge through the interactions between material and makers.

The final sculpture did not merely represent commensality; it *produced* commensality through its defining features of interaction, negotiation, material agency, and collective formation. The clay was not a passive medium

Figure 69 Clay workshop (here with only some of the participants), with artists Nazlı Çiçek and Erdal Tüt, Winter school, Commensality and Cultural Heritage in the Middle East and Its Diasporas, University of Groningen, 23 January 2025 (organized by Karène Sanchez Summerer and Heather J. Sharkey).

but an active participant, shaping the process as much as we did. The workshop showed that commensality is not just a human act or a single event, but an assemblage that includes materials and movements, action and resistance, and perhaps some compromise. In this way, the final gathering was not just about sculpting an object but about understanding how relations between humans and nonhumans create meaning and experience.

Notes on Contributors

(In the order of appearance in the chapters)

Heather J. Sharkey (ed.) is Professor in the Department of Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures at the University of Pennsylvania (USA). During the 2024–25 academic year, she was a senior fellow in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Groningen and an Oliver Smithies Fellow at Balliol College, University of Oxford. Her books include *Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (University of California Press, 2003); *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2008); and *A History of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2017). She is currently writing a book on global microhistory in the Nile Valley.

Karène Sanchez Summerer (ed.) is Professor and Chair of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Groningen (The Netherlands) and co-director of the Centre for Historical Studies. She specializes in the relational cultural and social history of the Ottoman- and Mandate-era Levant, with a special focus on Greater Syria, Palestine and its communities. She is currently investigating foodways, Biblical orientalism and photographs in Mandate Palestine. Her last publications include Sarah Irving and Karène Sanchez Summerer (2024), 'Orthodoxy and solidarity: Niqula Khoury's journey to the League of Nations', In E. Freas (ed.), *Palestine's Christians and the Nationalist Cause: The Late Ottoman and Mandatory Periods* (Routledge 2024).

Joud Alkorani is Assistant Professor of Islam, Politics, and Society at Radboud University in the Netherlands. An anthropologist with a background in Middle Eastern and Islamic studies, she earned her PhD at the University of Toronto and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the Orient-Institut Beirut. Her research, tracing the aftermath of the Arab Spring, engages with Islam, migration, subjectivity, neoliberalism, gender, and food.

Jehan Nizar is a PhD candidate in the Department of Islam Studies at Radboud University in the Netherlands. Her research lies at the intersection of food, migration, religion, and gender. She is currently conducting ethnographic research on the act of food-making within the Mappila Muslim community from the South Indian state of Kerala. She explores these foodways as a form of culinary placemaking that contributes to the construction of a transnational communal identity. Jehan has a background in long-form food journalism, with bylines in international publications such as *PEN America*, *Vogue India*, *Gulf News*, *Good Food Jobs*, *Whetstone Magazine*, *The Wire*, and *Firstpost*. From 2019 to 2024, she was a full-time faculty member at The Asian College of Journalism – one of Asia's leading journalism schools – where she taught courses in feature writing, creative nonfiction, and storytelling.

Artis Patriks Mazalis is a Master's degree student in Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Groningen. He has a background in International Relations, with strong interests in the Middle East, and has professional experience in journalism. His current research focuses on regime security and the use of sectarian narratives by the government of Saudi Arabia in relation to the Iraqi political crisis of 2021–2022. Outside academia, he enjoys listening to and playing music on various instruments.

Seda Bahar Pancaroglu is a PhD candidate in English Literature and Cultural Studies at Çankaya University. Her research focuses on the intersections of memory and space in Anglophone literature, particularly narratives relating to Cyprus's partition. She has presented at numerous international conferences and contributed chapters to edited volumes addressing literature, heritage, and ecology in post-conflict societies.

Imme Koster is a Research Master's student in Religious Studies and Political Ecology at Utrecht University. She has an academic background in environmental humanities from Wageningen University, where she developed a strong interest in the politics of food practices, culminating in a BSc thesis on tradition in Dutch fisheries. Her current research focuses on political ecology and racial capitalism in the context of the French colonization of the Algerian countryside. Outside academia, Imme enjoys practicing commensality by cooking and hosting dinners for those around her.

Hélène Jawhara Piñer teaches in the Department of Medieval History and History of Food at the Universities of Bordeaux and Tours, France. In 2024, she was a SIMS fellow at the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts at the University of Pennsylvania. Her books include *Sephardi: Cooking the History. Recipes of the Jews of Spain and the Diaspora from the 13th Century to Today* (Cherry Orchard Books, 2021); *Jew, Food, and Spain: The Oldest Medieval Spanish Cookbook and the Sephardic Culinary Heritage* (Cherry Orchard Books, 2022); and *Matzah and Flour: Recipes from the History of the Sephardic Jews* (Cherry Orchard Books, 2024). She is currently writing a book based on her research in the Spanish Inquisition manuscripts and their connection to Sephardic food practices.

Florien Kroodsma is a Master's degree student in Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Groningen. With an academic background in Middle Eastern Studies and Social Work, she also has professional experience in intercultural settings. Her interests include migration and cross-cultural dialogue. Her current research explores the re-imagination of Syrian identity within the Syrian diaspora in Groningen following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024.

Anna Maria Beylunioğlu is a political scientist and trained professional cook, specialising in religion-state relations, religious freedom, minorities and food history, with experience in civil society initiatives related to food and migration. She lectures at Koç University (Türkiye). She is co-founder and editor of *Nehna*, an initiative focused on the Orthodox community and the preservation of the memory of Antakya.

Erdal Tüt graduated from the Sculpture Department of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Yüzüncü Yıl University (Türkiye). His work engages with history, culture, nature, and human psychology, using sculpture as a medium for conceptual storytelling. His art aims to guide viewers on both emotional and intellectual journeys.

Frits Heinrich specialises in Ancient History, Agricultural History, and Food History. He is a Professor at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB, Belgium) in the research groups on Interdisciplinary Historical Food Studies (FOST) and Industrial Microbiology and Food Biotechnology (IMDO). His interdisciplinary research unites archaeobotany, history, food chemistry, and biotechnology and focuses on Roman agriculture, diet, and nutrition, particularly in Roman Egypt. Frits co-founded the archaeobotanical laboratory at VUB and is involved in various historical farming and ethnoarchaeobotanical projects in Belgium, the Netherlands, Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, and Ghana.

Annette M. Hansen, ir. MSc (Oxon.) is an agricultural and food historian, archaeologist, and ethnoarchaeobotanist specializing in the Islamic world. She is a researcher at Vrije Universiteit Brussel with the research groups Interdisciplinary Historical Food Studies (FOST) and Industrial Microbiology and Food Biotechnology (IMDO), and senior archaeobotanist on projects in Jordan, Egypt, and Sudan. She co-founded and manages VUB's archaeobotanical laboratory. Annette is completing her PhD at the Groningen Institute of Archaeology, University of Groningen (The Netherlands).

Reem Samed Al Shqour is Research Associate for Islamic Archaeology at Andrews University (USA) and earned her PhD in Archaeology from the University of Ghent. An historian and archaeologist, Al Shqour has worked as a curator of the Madaba Archeological Museum and carried out fieldwork at sites across Jordan and Europe for over 20 years. She has directed three archaeological projects in Jordan and co-directed one project in Belgium. Al Shqour has published several archaeological publications concerning her work, including her monograph *The Aqaba Khans and the Origin of Khans in Jordan: An Archaeological Approach* (Gorgias Press, 2019).

Joanita Vroom is Professor of the Archaeology of Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia in the Faculty of Archaeology at Leiden University in the Netherlands. She specializes in the archaeology of the eastern Mediterranean and Near East (Byzantine, Islamic, Crusader, and Ottoman periods), with a focus on socio-economic and cultural aspects of material culture, including ceramics, cuisine, and eating habits. She is editor of the *Medieval and Post-Medieval Mediterranean Archaeology Series* (MPMAS) at Brepols Publishers.

Lars Baumann is a Master's degree student in Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Groningen. He previously completed a Bachelor's in History at the same university, where he developed an interest in cultural interconnectedness. His thesis focuses on the Abraham Accords and other US-mediated Arab-Israeli peace agreements. Outside of academia, he enjoys sports.

Weston Kennedy is a PhD candidate at Leiden University in the Netherlands. He earned his undergraduate degree from the University of St Andrews in 2022, writing on the political construction of space in late antique Constantinople. He then completed a Master's degree in Mediterranean Archaeology at Sapienza University of Rome, focusing on ceramic and stratigraphic analysis of the AT21 excavation near the Palatine Hill. His doctoral research compares cooking and coarse ware pottery from archaeological sites in Jerusalem and Ta'as.

José Rafael Medeiros Coelho is a PhD candidate in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. His research explores the migration of Ottoman Arab Christians to Latin America in the 19th and 20th centuries, with a focus on identity, heritage, and transnational connections that challenge conventional historical narratives. His last publication is: Duman, L., & Medeiros Coelho, J. R. (2025), 'Antakya at the crossroads of Europe: diaspora, homeland, and networks in post-Ottoman Arab Antiochian family migration narratives,' *The History of the Family*, 1–30.

Patrick Lewis is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Concordia University in Montreal (Canada). His academic interests include linguistic and semiotic anthropology, economic anthropology, and historical linguistics. His current project investigates the historical relationship between coffee and tea as polyvalent media of value in modern Turkey.

Amir Sayadabdi is Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand). His research focuses on the anthropology of food as it intersects with gender studies, migration, race, ethnicity, and nationalism. He is also interested in the cultural history of food and how historical foodways have shaped political and economic institutions. Amir serves on the board of the Association for the Study of Food and Society (ASFS).

Food holds an important place in people's lives and in the social values of individuals and groups, shaping identities along religious, ethnic, linguistic, and national lines and according to gender, class, place (including identification with particular towns or landscapes), and other variables. In the Middle East and among Middle Eastern diasporic communities today, culinary culture remains a source of deep pride, while reflecting ethical values that people place on sharing food with guests or with others in need. Regarding food as part of their cultural heritage, peoples of Middle Eastern origin are aware of illustrious culinary traditions that go back centuries and even millennia to innovations in agriculture that benefitted human societies at large.

This book explores the theme of "commensality," which implies being at the same table while respecting differences among those who share a meal. At the same time, it considers the study of cultural heritage among Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East and in associated diasporas through foodways – customs regarding the preparation and consumption of food. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, this book argues for the centrality and import of the Middle East and its diasporas within the flourishing field of Food Studies while setting agendas for future research.

VMENA

Visions of the Middle East and North Africa is a collaborative initiative between the Middle Eastern Studies programme at the University of Groningen and University of Groningen Press. Volumes published in the series highlight the diversity of the Middle East and North Africa by exploring culture and society through images and text. Individual volume themes are connected to departmental research. The series is inherently interdisciplinary, incorporating fields such as sociology, history, cultural studies, and political science.

9789403431284

9 789403 431284 >

University of Groningen Press