



EXPLORING TURKEY'S CULINARY HERITAGE

A LOOK THROUGH THE HISTORY, TRADITIONS AND
INGREDIENTS

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF TURKISH CUISINE

Turkish cuisine is considered in the top five cuisines in the world.

The vast geography that the Turks have lived in the past, the various climates, the soil and living conditions have enabled Turks to develop a very rich culinary culture.



TURKS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Before 11th Century



The diet of nomadic Turks consisted mainly on animal products sustained in their immediate environment. They also led an agrarian way of life, depended on agricultural products as well as the animals they bred, and their products.

In Central Asia, there were no definite borders at the time, therefore there was a lot of interaction between different kinds of communities.

Turks that lived in Central Asia, encountered different culinary traditions and ingredients that they assimilated into their own cuisine.

TURKS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Before 11th Century

Meat Consumed

- Horse meat

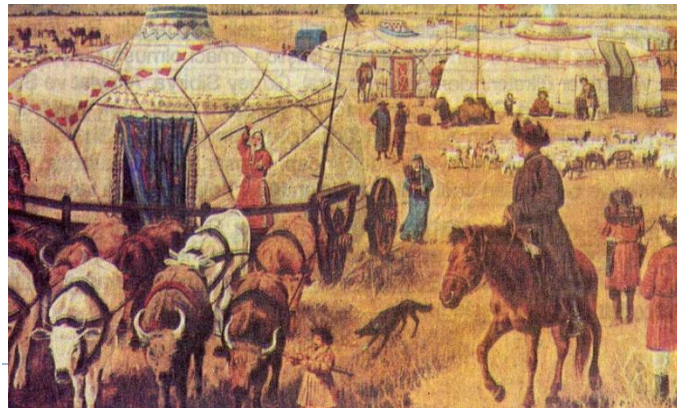
(Horse meat is high in calories therefore gives energy, especially used for celebratory occasions, and also the beginning of spring.)

- Mutton
- Goat meat
 - Beef

Dairy Consumed

- Butter
- Kumiss
- Yoghurt

(Yoghurt plays a very important role within the Turkish cuisine and is used in many different forms)



TURKS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Before 11th Century

Yoghurt



Yoghurt has a very important place in Turkish cuisine and is considered a very important staple. There are a variety of ways of using yoghurt, as well as consuming it as is. It is regarded as one of the most famous Turkish culinary contributions to the world.



“Tarhana”
flakes



“Tarhana”
granules



Yoghurt based soups
and stews



Ayran



Kurut

TURKS IN CENTRAL ASIA Before 11th Century

Crops

Barley



Rye



Oats



Millet



Rice



Wheat

Main staple, used for making bread,
most commonly known is “yufka.”
(*Yufka is the thin flat bread made
with flour, salt and water and
cooked on flat metal sheets.*)

TURKS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Before 11th Century

Yufka

The thin flat bread, yufka, has been an important staple for the Central Asian Turks. Made with flour, water and salt it is stretched thin and cooked on both sides on a thin metal sheet over a woodfire. Then dried and stored. This bread was easy to make and did not require leavening therefore it was very simple to make.

Turks would carry the light bread along with the metal sheet with them, therefore they were known to carry their ovens on the back of their horses. When eating meat, the cooked meat would be placed inside “yufka” and rolled to make the first examples of a wrap in history. Wrap in Turkish is called “dürüm” which comes from the verb “dürmek” meaning to roll, as the bread is rolled.



THE SELJUKS

Between 11th - 13th Centuries



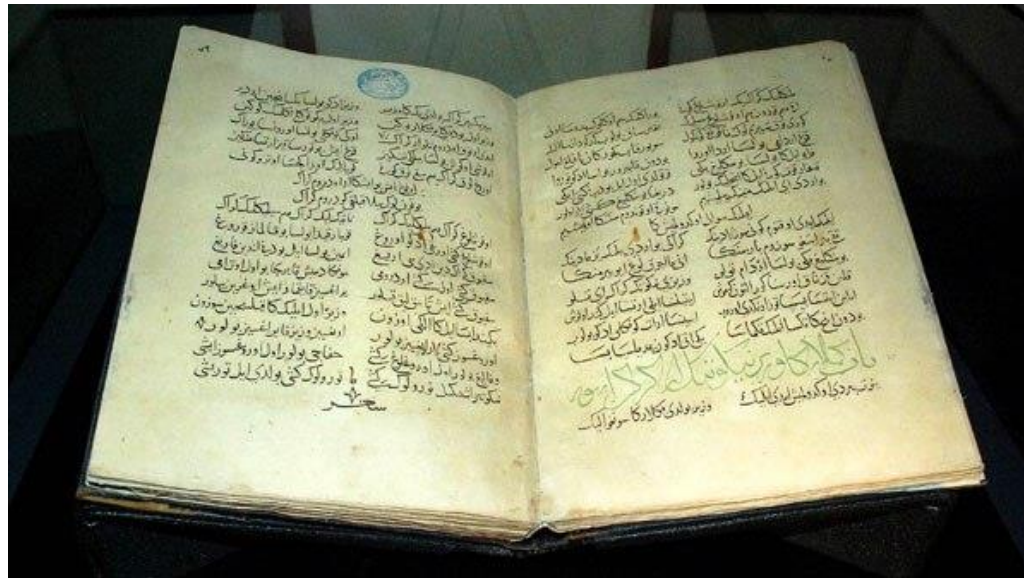
When the living conditions became unstable in Central Asia, the Turks emmigrated and settled in Anatolia. The most significant and the powerful state that was formed in Anatolia was the Anatolian Seljuks. In this new land, Anatolian Seljuks were exposed to many different and new ingredients. Upon encountering these new ingredients, they incorporated them into their own cuisine. The once simple cuisine became more complex with the addition of new ingredients and new cooking methods. There are two important sources that gives us valuable information about the cuisine from the 11th century.

THE SELJUKS

Between 11th -13th Centuries

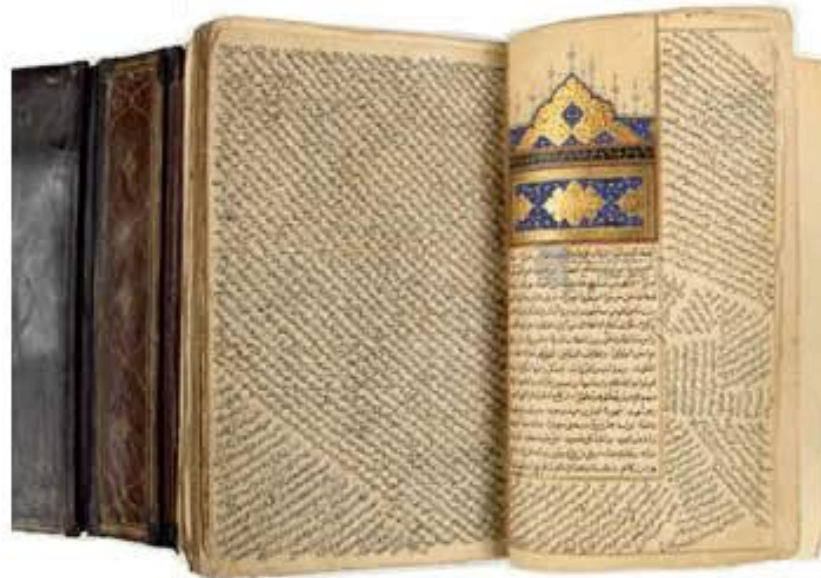
“Divanü Lugat-it Türk” by Mahmoud al Kashgari

The oldest Turkish dictionary written between 1072 – 1074. Mahmoud al Kashgari introduced us to the 11th century cuisine from two aspects, the space and the material culture. He also provided information on names of various dishes and their preparation methods. It is considered a very valuable resource.



THE SELJUKS

Between 11th - 13th Centuries



“Kutatgubilig” (*Wisdom which brings good fortune*)

by Yusuf Has Hacib

A manuscript written after Turks accepted Islam as their religion. This book is about his society’s beliefs and practices with regards to topics that reflect various aspects of life. The book gives information on how to set the table, feast preparations, and Turkish table etiquette.

THE SELJUKS

Between 11th - 13th Centuries

The Mevlevi sect that was established after the death of Mevlana Cemaleddin Rumi, a 13th Century Muslim saint and founder of Sufism, was known to give a lot of importance to the kitchen, therefore they have established rules about table manners, kitchen discipline and hierarchy in the kitchen.

Anyone who wished to enter the dervish lodge would pledge his allegiance to the Chief of Kitchen (Aşçı Dede). First task was to sit on a platform located at the entrance of the kitchen. If the keeper of the cauldron approved, the novice would be sent to run errands for 18 days wearing the same clothes that he arrived in. If this task was completed with success, then he would receive his wide skirted special garment and start his 1001 days of ordeal, which also took place in the kitchen. During this time period the novice was given the same tasks over and over again to measure his obedience, endurance and patience. If the novice was not good enough or was not patient enough to complete any of these tasks, his shoes would be placed in front of the door, with the tip of the shoes pointing outwards, signifying that he should leave. If the novice was engaged in a misconduct, then he was forced to leave through the door of insolence.



THE SELJUKS

Between 11th - 13th Centuries



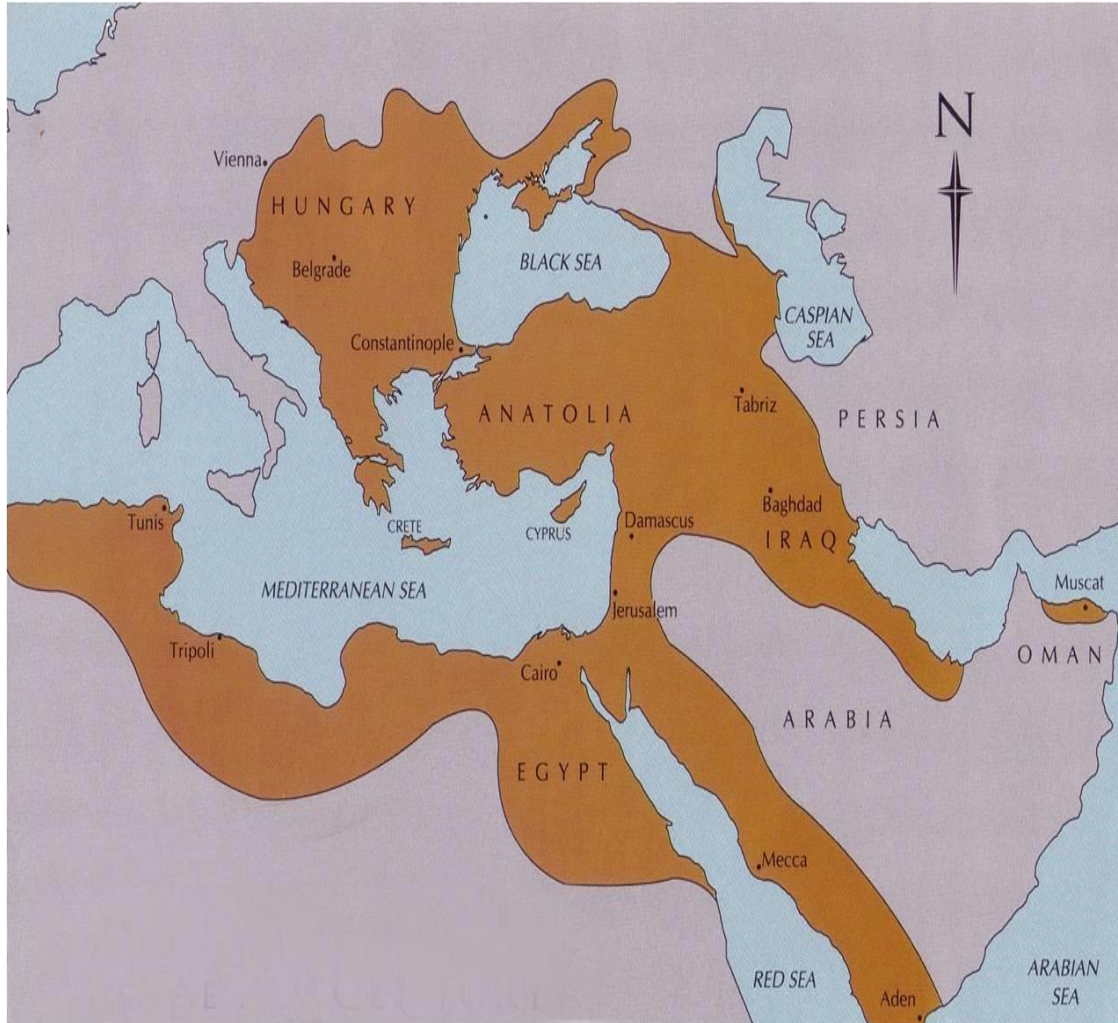
Yusuf Şemseddin, who is more commonly known by his nickname Ateşbaz-ı Veli, which means the one who plays with fire, was the cook of Rumi. He got that name, when one day he was complaining to Rumi about the finished firewood. Rumi told him to put his feet under the cauldron to light the fire. When he did as he was told, his toes lit up making fire.

He is the first chef to have a tomb as a grave, to his name and it is located in Konya. Visiting his tomb is considered as a pilgrimage for all chefs and cooks. The salt that is offered there is known to bring prosperity and wealth to your household once mixed with the salt at home.



OTTOMAN PERIOD

14th - 19th Centuries



Fall of the Anatolian Seljuks marked the beginning of Ottoman Empire. Anatolia was divided into many principalities, among which the most powerful one, the Ottomans, took over the rest and became the most powerful Empire between 14th and 18th centuries. The map on the left shows the borders of Ottoman Empire at its height.

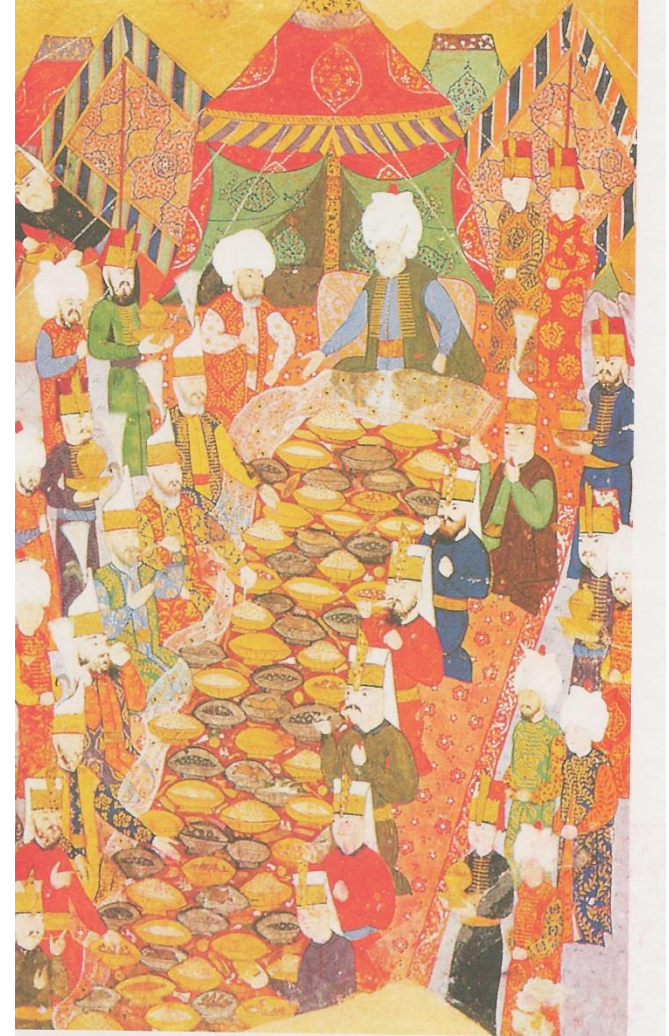
OTTOMAN PERIOD

14th - 19th Centuries

The cuisine became more important after 15th century when Sultan Mehmet, the Conquerer conquered Istanbul in 1453.

The foundations of today's Turkish cuisine is based on Ottoman cuisine which is the palace cuisine. It is made with the finest of the ingredients combined with smart cooking techniques. In the beginning, the cuisine was refined and modest. As the kitchen involvement continued throughout the years, the cuisine became more elaborate and complex.

Most of the information we receive from those periods came from the accounting books kept in the palace.



OTTOMAN PERIOD

13th - 19th Centuries

Palace Kitchen

Topkapı Palace kitchen consisted of 8 sections and settled on 1.3 acres of land. Aside from kitchens there were pantries, dormitories for the cooks, a fountain and a mosque.

There were different kitchens used for different purposes. The best example of this is “helvahane” which is where all the desserts were cooked. The reason why desserts cooked in a separate kitchen was so that the odors of savoury foods did not mix in with the smell of desserts.



OTTOMAN PERIOD

13th - 19th Centuries



The Kitchens

There were different kitchens used to cook food for different occupants of the palace. Below is an example of some of these kitchens.

Kuşhane Mutfağı – Used for cooking food for The Sultan.

Has Mutfak – Used for cooking food for the viziers of the Imperial council and the residences of the harem.

Valide Sultan Mutfağı – Used for cooking food for the mother of the sultan, high ranking concubines and the wives of the sultan.

Kızlarağası Mutfağı – Used for cooking food for the heads of the Harem (Eunuchs).

OTTOMAN PERIOD 13th - 19th Centuries

Preparation of each dish required a different skill, therefore there was an extensive kitchen brigade . There were total of 60 skilled chefs and about 200 apprentices serving food for 4000 people daily, however this number was doubled or tripled during council meeting days, ceremonial days and holidays.



OTTOMAN PERIOD

13th - 19th Centuries

The Kitchen Brigade

Aşçıbaşı (*The Executive chef*)

Aşçı (*Cooks*)

Ocakbaşı (*The griller*)

Kebapçı (*Kebab maker*)

Tatlıcı (*Pastry chef*)

Hamurcu (*Chef for dough-based foods*)

Pilavcı (*Rice pilaf chef*)

Balıkçı (*Fish chef*)

Kilercibaşı (*Pantry chef*)

Sebzecibaşı (*Vegetable chef*)

Kasap (*The butcher*)

Kahvecibaşı (*The coffeemaker*)

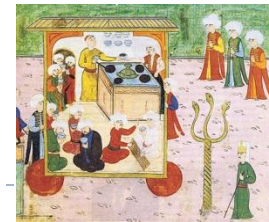


Grand Chef de Cuisine

The kitchen organization in the Ottoman Empire worked as a social corporation. The ranks within the kitchen brigade was very important and respected by everyone. Palace cuisine was very important because it symbolized the wealth of the Sultan and the Empire, therefore it was considered to be very important in relaying this message to their allies and enemies.

OTTOMAN PERIOD

13th - 18th Centuries



Ingredients Consumed

Meat

Lamb, (rarely) chicken, beef, goose, quail, squab

Seafood and Fish (very rarely used)

Seasonal fish, shrimp, calamari, scallops

Fruits & Vegetables & Legumes

All kinds of fruits, vegetables and legumes grown in the Ottoman land.

Spices

Black pepper, saffron, musk, mastic, coriander, cumin, cinnamon, cardamom, cloves

Grains

Wheat, rice

Herbs

Dill, parsley, mint, tarragon, cilantro, basil

Sours

Lemon juice, ver-juce, pomegranate molasses, vinegar, green plum juice

Aromatics

Onion and garlic

Fats

Clarified butter, butter and tallow fat



OTTOMAN PERIOD

18th - 19th Centuries

After 18th century some new ingredients have entered into Ottoman cuisine. Among these ingredients tomatoes had the largest impact taking it's place in almost every dish.

NEW INGREDIENTS

Tomatoes (French apple)

Potatoes

Corn

Red and green peppers

Zucchini

Turkey

Rye

Oats



EATING HABITS DURING THE OTTOMAN PERIOD

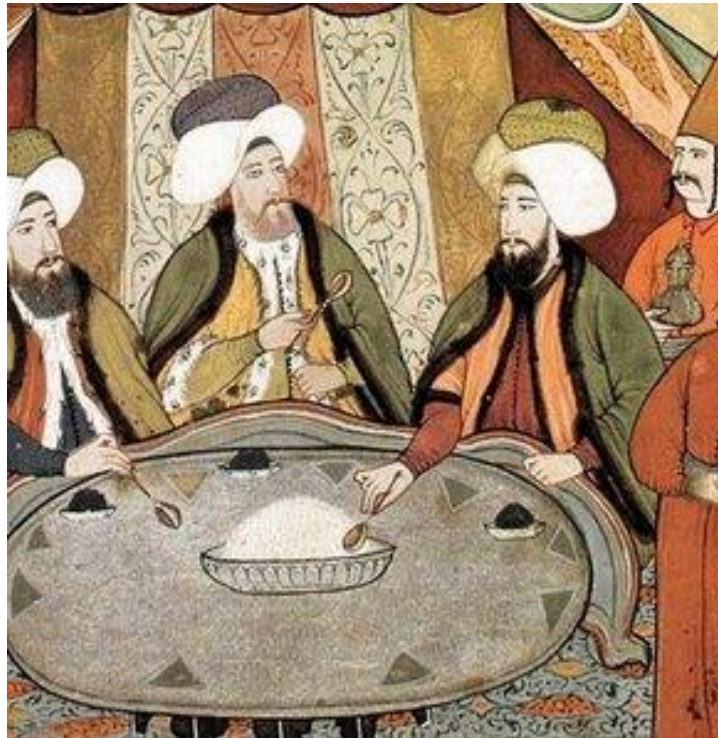


A typical dining scene at the palace

In the Ottoman palace there were no dining rooms. Any room could be turned into a dining room with the help of a “sini.” Food was brought in with the tray and placed on a stool, and everybody sat around it and ate. It was customary to eat from the middle of the table. At the tables of important people or guests, the food would arrive one by one. First course was a meat course, followed by rice and vegetables along with types of bread. Lastly dessert would arrive. The meals were accompanied by sherbets.

During the meals it was customary to eat just 2-3 spoonfuls of each meal. If one were to eat more than that, it was considered impolite. It was also impolite to speak or sing at the dinner table. The meals were served in already cut portions and spoon was the only utensil used, other than that Ottomans used their hands to eat with. Bread was always torn by hand.

EATING HABITS DURING THE OTTOMAN PERIOD



A Typical Menu

Soup

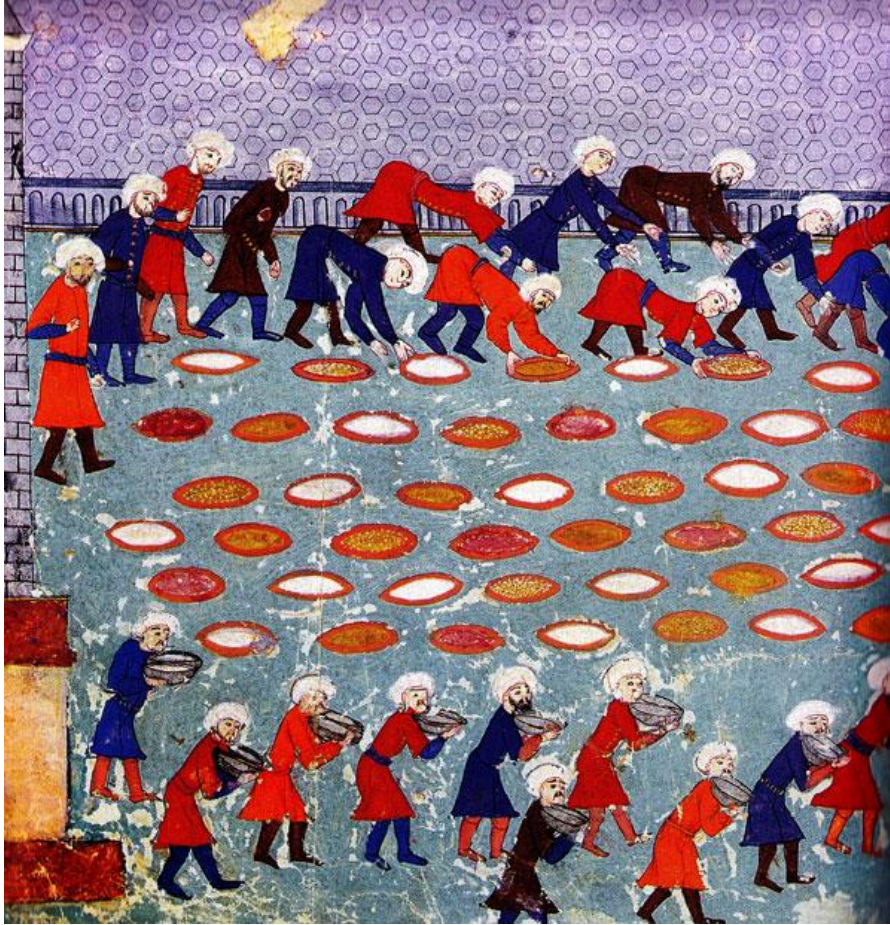
A Meat Dish

Rice pilaf or
börek (*savoury
pies*)

A vegetable dish

Dessert

FEASTS DURING THE OTTOMAN PERIOD



The bowl swag (Çanak Yağması)

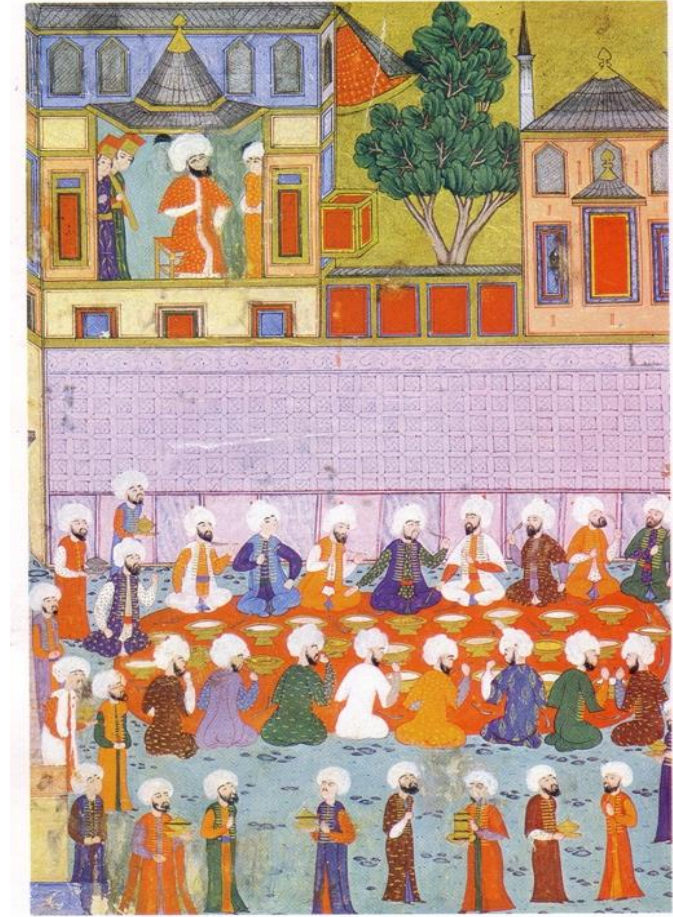
A feast would take place every three months after the Janissary soldiers would receive their salaries. Each of these occasions were celebrated with a feast called a “bowl swag.” The plates of roasted lamb, rice pilafs or saffron pudding were placed on the ground. With the order of the grand vizier the soldiers would grab a plate.

The same procedure was also followed during weddings and circumcision ceremonies that took place in the palace. These events would be open to the public.

FEASTS DURING THE OTTOMAN PERIOD

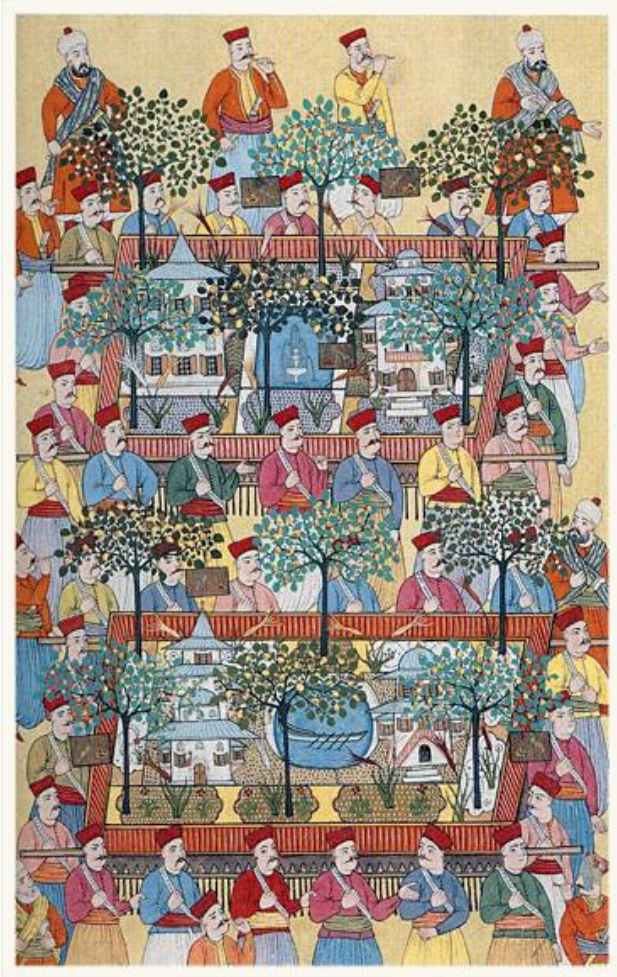
On the days the Imperial council met, there would also be a feast given out to the council members after the meeting.

The Sultan always ate by himself. He was never accompanied by council members, his wives and even his children.



Feast given after the council meeting

FEASTS DURING THE OTTOMAN PERIOD



Candy Gardens

Circumcision and wedding ceremonies were important celebrations that lasted for days. Candy gardens were made to use as decorations. These gardens would have various animal figures and fruits all made from traditional hard candy called “akide şekeri.” The public was also invited for such occasions and were given food as part of the celebrations.



THE LATE OTTOMAN PERIOD 19th – 20th Century (Until 1923)



Towards the end of 19th century, Ottoman Empire started to loose power and decline. They were nicknamed as the “sick man of Europe” by most European nations. In order to establish good relationships with European allies, Ottomans seeked close interactions with them. They also started adopting more modern ways in their lifestyles. These changes also affected their eating habits. The royalty moved from Topkapı Palace to Dolmabahçe Palace which was decorated with Baroque, Rococo and neoclassical designs combined with classical Ottoman touches. Meals were eaten at dining tables with appropriate silverware.



EATING HABITS DURING THE OTTOMAN PERIOD 19th – 20th Century (Until 1923)

The menus served became more elaborate and reflected French cuisine combined with Ottoman cuisine.

A Sample Feast Menu

Potage Creme Royale (*Soup*)

Beurek (*Börek – savoury pastry with a filling*)

Darnes de Saumon Sauce Verte (*Salmon with green sauce*)

Selle de Veau Richelieu (*Leg of veal*)

Supreme de Bécasse Clamart (*Filet of woodcock with peas*)

Neige de Mandarin (*Mandarin Punch*)

Croûtes de Strasbourg (*Foi gras*)

Poularde de Mans Truffée (*Chicken with truffles*)

Salade (*Salad*)

Asperges en branches (*Asparagus*)

Pilaw Ali Pacha (*Ali Pasha Rice Pilaf*)

Glace Succès (*Ice cream*)

Friandises (*Confectionaries*)

Chester Cake



REPUBLIC PERIOD

20th Century until today

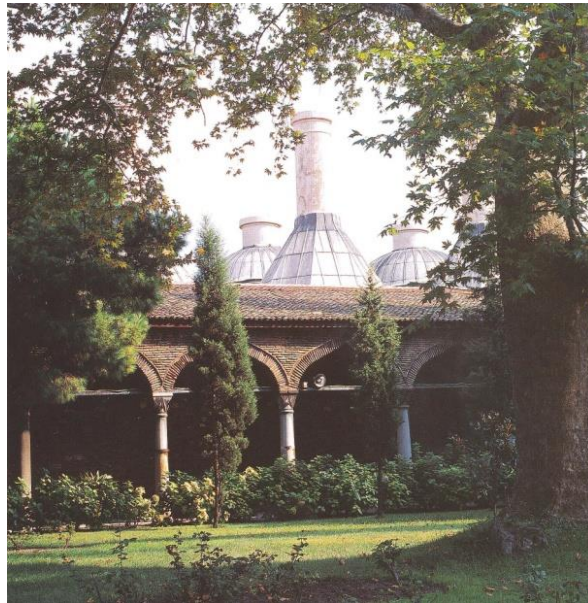
With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Republic of Turkey
was born on October 28th, 1923



THE GENERAL STRUCTURE TURKISH CUISINE

Turkish cuisine can be viewed in two categories. Classical Turkish Cuisine and Regional (Folk) Cuisine.

Classical Turkish cuisine reflects the cuisine of the Ottoman Palace, which is the founding ground for the Turkish cuisine as we know it today.



CLASSICAL TURKISH CUISINE

Classical Turkish cuisine is a combination of palace cuisine and İstanbul cuisine, which is the cuisine of minorities that reside in İstanbul. Since Ottoman periods, the self ruling minorities were able to preserve their traditions and religious beliefs. Their eclectic cuisine also became a part of Istanbul cuisine.

Here are some of the examples of minorities:

Greeks (*Rum*)

Armenians

Circassians

Sephardic Jews

Descendants from Balkans

Tatars



Easter Bread



Boyoz – A typical Jewish pastry

REGIONAL TURKISH CUISINE

Regional Turkish cuisine is the combined food culture of Turkey's different regions. This cuisine is the result of different food related traditions and culture of inhabitants of Anatolia, who came from different backgrounds and ethnic groups, soil structure and climate.

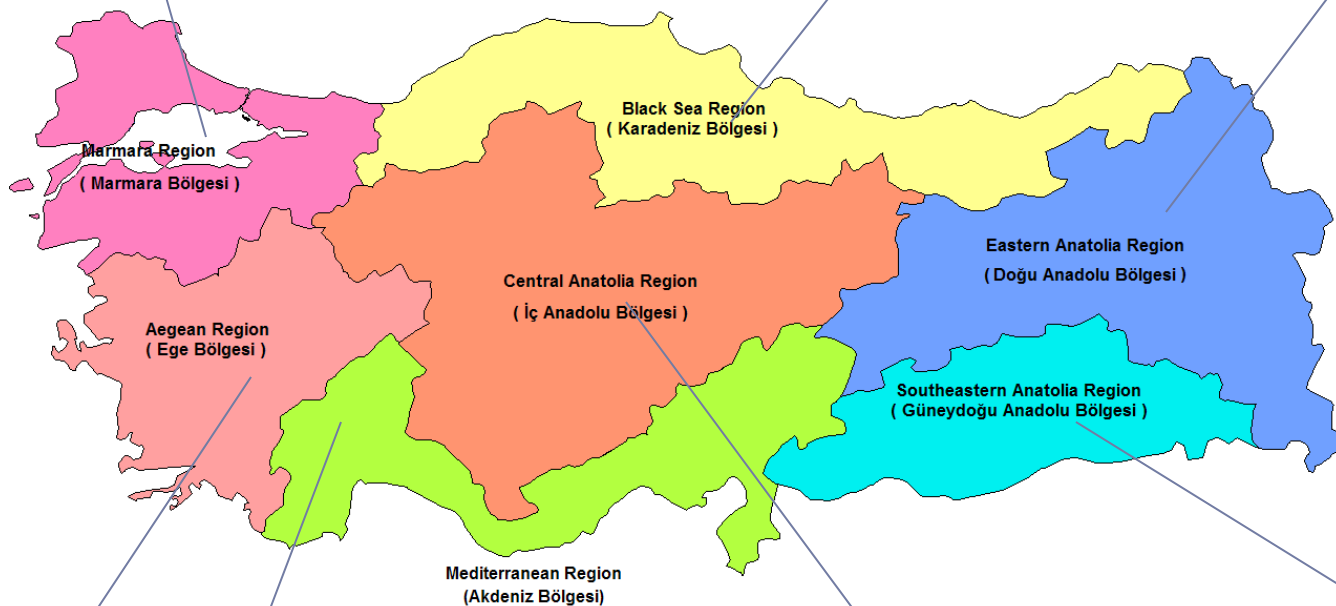


REGIONAL TURKISH CUISINE

A mixed kitchen culture based on the minorities and effects of all the other regions in Turkey.

Corn is the main staple, a lot of fish and wild herbs.

Meat and dairy products based diet



Olive oil, vegetables, fish and seafood.

Wheat based products, meat and bulghur dishes

Legumes, meat and spicy food

TURKISH CUISINE TODAY



COOKING TECHNIQUES AND TYPES OF FOODS



KEBABS (As cooking technique)



- Dry heat- cooking method.
- Meat is marinated in the most common and simple marinade of “onion juice.”
- Marinades usually consist of something acidic that helps tenderize the meat.
- During the cooking process the meat is basted with melted butter.
- In some occasions meat is dusted with flour to give it a crust, that prevents the juices from coming out.
- After the meat is cooked it is placed in a covered pot and placed on a very low fire and rested before serving.

COOKING TECHNIQUES AND TYPES OF FOODS

STEW



Stew and braises use the same types of techniques. The only difference being that stews are juicier than braises.



BRAISES



- Traditionally copper pots were used that conducts and distributes heat evenly through out the cooking process.
- Requires a pot with a lid and cooked in the oven or on the stove.
- Method can be used for meat, vegetables and legumes.
- Yields dishes with lots of juice (Usually enjoyed with fresh bread).
- Aromas are added through spices, fresh herbs and sometimes vinegar. Most important components are usage of onions and garlic.

COOKING TECHNIQUES AND TYPES OF FOODS

FRIED DISHES



- This method can be used for meat, vegetables, fish, or offals that are cut into desired portions.
- The ingredient to be fried may be dipped in flour or batter or can be fried as is.
- Depending on the region, the frying fat can be olive oil, sunflower oil, hazelnut oil, or even clarified butter.
- Oil has to be very hot before starting the frying process.
- Fried dishes may be served with appropriate sauce (e.g. Fried calamari with “tarator” sauce and fried eggplants with tomato sauce)

COOKING TECHNIQUES AND TYPES OF FOODS



EGG DISHES



Egg dishes are quite simple in Turkish cuisine, and are eaten during lunch and dinner as well as breakfast.

The most common way they are served are fried eggs with an accompanying meat or vegetable. The most popular ways to serve them is with spinach, caramelized onions, tomato & peppers, mince meat, salt-cured beef (pastırma) or spicy beef sausage (sucuk).

Another way of preparing eggs that is uniquely Turkish is the poached eggs with yoghurt sauce.



COOKING TECHNIQUES AND TYPES OF FOODS



Gözleme – Flat unleavened bread with a filling (Cooked over a thin metal sheet)



Manti – Mince meat filled dumplings that are boiled in water and served with yoghurt sauce and spices.

FLOUR BASED DISHES



Erişte – Hand cut noodles that are boiled and sauteed.



Pide – Flat yeast bread with a filling. Baked in the brick oven.



Çörek – A type of pastry made from a stiff dough with or without a filling



Börek is a savoury pastry made from phyllo dough and has a filling of cheese, potatoes, spinach or mince meat. It is either baked or fried.

COOKING TECHNIQUES AND TYPES OF FOODS

VEGETABLES COOKED IN OLIVE OIL



Vegetables cooked in olive oil are a very unique method in Turkish cuisine where the seasonal vegetables are poached or sauteed in olive oil and eaten cold.

COOKING TECHNIQUES AND TYPES OF FOODS

SALADS & MEZES



Salads and mezes are little appetizer plates that are eaten before the main meal or sometimes they make up a meal all by themselves especially when accompanied by alcohol.

There are a variety of mezes made with seasonal vegetables, grains, seafood, fish and wild herbs. They are usually light, served either hot or cold and typically eaten for dinner.

COOKING TECHNIQUES AND TYPES OF FOODS

DOLMA & SARMA

Wrapped and stuffed foods are considered as a cooking technique as well as a type of dish. These dishes can be made either with a rice and ground beef / lamb filling and served hot or just made with herbed rice filling and served cold.



Herbed rice filling:

- Cooked with olive oil.
- Base of the pot is layered with various vegetables like onions, carrots and parsley stems.
- Served cold.
- Used with eggplant, green bell peppers, tomatoes and dried vegetables.
- Spices used for the rice; allspice, black pepper, salt, mint, currants and pine nuts.



Rice and ground beef /lamb filling:

- Cooked with butter.
- Base of the pot is layered with various vegetables like onions, carrots ,parsley stems and bones.
- Served hot with yoghurt.
- Used with grape leaves, white cabbage, kale, chard, zucchini, green bell peppers and tomatoes.
- Spices used for the filling; black pepper, salt, parsley and dill.

COOKING TECHNIQUES AND TYPES OF FOODS

RICE & BULGHUR PILAF DISHES



Pilaf dishes can be made with a few different kinds of grains, including rice, bulghur wheat, Siyez type bulghur wheat and firik (young wheat). The two most common methods of cooking are sauteeing and boiling method. The pilaf dishes can be just made simply with the grain or can have other flavours such as legumes, vegetables and even meat. The plain ones are usually served as a garnish to accompany meat dishes, whereas the pilafs with other flavors can be consumed as a meal on it's own.

COOKING TECHNIQUES AND TYPES OF FOODS

DESSERTS



Milk- based desserts;

- Baked or cooked on stove top.
- Usually flavored with nuts, fruits or mastic.



Flour-based desserts;

- Either fried or baked
- After the cooking process, gets soaked in syrup and served with a garnish of crushed nuts or a dallop of clotted cream.



Fruit based desserts;

- Baked or cooked on stove top.
- Can be served with a dallop of clotted cream or crushed nuts.
- Compotes can be made with fresh or dried fruits and served plain.

COOKING TECHNIQUES AND TYPES OF FOODS

HELVAS



Flour based helva



Semolina based helva



Tahini helva

Flour and semolina based helvas are an important part of Turkish dessert culture and used for celebratory occasions as well as for after funerals. They are made out of semolina or flour roasted with butter and pine nuts or almonds, combined with a milk and sugar syrup.

Tahini helva is another type of helva variety made with tahini paste, sugar and soaproot (or soapwort).

DRINKS IN TURKISH CUISINE

In Turkish drink culture there are a variety of drinks served hot or cold, alcoholic or non-alcoholic. Below are some of the most popular drinks in Turkish culinary culture.



Sherbets – drinks made from fruits or spices



Rakı – a.k.a. Lion's milk, national alcoholic beverage, made from aniseed and grapes.



Boza –
Fermented millet
drink



Turkish Coffee



Ayran –
Watered
down yoghurt
drink



Sahlep – A popular
winter drink



Şalgam – Fermented turnip
and purple carrot juice

TURKISH TABLES

In conclusion, the dining table is a sacred place for all Turks. Whether at home or at a restaurant, coming together with the family, socializing with friends is a very important activity for all Turks. Good food, good company and good conversations...

