

recommended for those willing to explore the life and legacy of arguably one of the most influential political characters of the medieval Islamic World.

PRISCILLA MARY IŞIN, *Bountiful Empire: A History of Ottoman Cuisine* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018). Pp. 272. \$50.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781780239040

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Food studies is booming in scholarly, pedagogical, and popular arenas. These days, college catalogs list numerous courses on everything from the “Political Economy of Food” and “Food History” to the “Archeology of Food” and “Food Science.” Academic publishers increasingly market their food monographs to students and to broader audiences of food devotees. The fascination with learning about eating and its varied manifestations is related, in no small part, to food’s ubiquity in social media (especially Instagram), television shows, blogs, and glossy cookbooks. Prominent media providers, like Netflix, are also combining stylish food stories with a sense of scholarly curiosity; recently for instance, Musa Dağdeviren, the founder and chef of Istanbul’s celebrated restaurant Çiya, was featured on “A Chef’s Life” where he detailed the ethnographic process of recovering, documenting, and preserving nearly extinct Anatolian dishes in the face of globalization and urbanization.

So how has the growing interest in food studies permeated scholarship about the Middle East? Overall, the output remains limited, certainly relative to counterparts in American, European, and Asian contexts. Extant works have tended to focus on food and religion (much on Judaism, some on Islam, almost nothing on Middle Eastern Christians, Druzes, or Yazidis), food in the Abbasid or Mamluk Empires, and—for the modern period—food and nationalism, and to some extent food and gender. The Ottoman Empire, with its rich archives and complex culinary cultures, is beginning to draw serious scholarly attention by social historians, legal experts, and culinary researchers. Of note, Nicolas Trépanier has looked at food customs in 14th-century Anatolia, on the cusp of Ottoman ascendancy; aspects of Ottoman food consumption have also received attention from Suraiya Faroqhi, Tülay Artan, and Özge Samancı; Amy Singer has explored the relationship between food and charity; and several studies have been produced about Ottoman coffee trade and coffeehouses.

Priscilla Mary Işin’s *Bountiful Empire* is a welcomed addition to this nascent field. The book offers a preliminary introduction to Ottoman food traditions in a plurality of settings. While the term “cuisine” could have been better qualified considering its common association with a particular region or geography and in light of the empire’s vastness and cultural diversity, Işin indirectly suggests that Ottoman cuisine was the food of Istanbul and specifically of the Ottoman palace. Throughout the book, the author frequently highlights how provincial foodstuffs, culinary traditions, ingredients, spices, kitchenware, etc., shaped eating habits in the empire’s capital.

*Bountiful Empire* starts with background information outlining the links between earlier food traditions and the dishes consumed by Ottoman sultans, elites, and—to a lesser extent—commoners. In Chapter 1, Işin catalogues the influence of Persian, Abbasid,

Byzantine, Chinese, Mongol, and nomadic Turkish foods. Of note here are how Central Asian, Mongol, and Chinese thin and layered pastries, like *börek*, *mantı*, and *güllaç*, played a prominent role in Ottoman cooking (p. 16). The legacies of Persian and Abbasid cultures would arise in the Ottomans' appreciation for soups and stews, rice, saffron, and a variety of sweets, while the Byzantine heritage could be detected in their fondness for vegetables, fish, and olive oil (pp. 21–22). Chapter 2 offers an array of observations broadly labeled as “historical developments.” Here, Işın highlights everything from pork consumption among Ottoman Christians (p. 28), the Ottomans' love for stuffed (*dolma*) and uncooked vegetables (p. 30), and the introduction of New World foods (p. 32), to how *salep* (an Ottoman drink made from ground orchid root) became popular in 17th-century France and England (p. 35). The topics and chronology are often unfocused, with quick mention of disparate food customs and their influences within and beyond the empire, alternating back and forth from the earliest Ottoman centuries to the empire's fall in 1922.

The book's core chapters cover a myriad of themes, several that will likely be of great interest to Ottoman and food historians. In fourteen chapters, Işın discusses meals, etiquette, hospitality and charity, food of the Ottoman palace, and the food consumed on military excursions, as well as the consumption of libations like coffee, alcohol, water, and *şerbet*, among other subjects. For a leisurely reader or one simply seeking a reference source, these chapters are sprinkled with fascinating tidbits. Among the most memorable are the introduction of okra (native to West Africa) to Ottoman Istanbul by way of African cooks (p. 95) and how it was selected for royal kitchens by a *bamyacıbaşı* (head okra supplier, p. 73); a discussion about the possible origins of the Turkish term for breakfast (*kahvaltı*, literally “below coffee,” p. 39); scattered references to food rituals among Ottoman Christians, in particular Greeks and Armenians (e.g., p. 110); and a discussion of how the Ottomans tried to control the overconsumption of alcohol among soldiers stationed in distant battlefields (pp. 150–151). Following these lengthy chapters, however, the book provides no conclusion nor an epilogue.

Işın is a well-known food writer whose past publications and transcriptions of Ottoman cookbooks are invaluable for food scholars and historians. Her Ottoman culinary knowledge is superb and her knack for small details is evident throughout the book, particularly in her choice of excellent images to accompany the discussion. Dozens of gorgeous drawings and photographs punctuate the book, although a better organized “photo acknowledgements” section would have allowed readers to more easily determine the source of each image (pp. 267–68). Işın has also consulted numerous primary sources, including the works of Evliya Çelebi, Mustafa Ali, and many European travel accounts, and she incorporates their words, at length, to make inferences and affirm her observations.

Still, the book is not always easy to read and generally lacks a coherent narrative arc. It appears more like a catalogue of historical references to Ottoman food, and the short sequences of anecdotes and quotes make it akin to an encyclopedia rather than a monograph. The choice to rely on (and quote) a large number of primary sources comes at the expense of (under)citing notable scholarly works and of offering a more palpable analysis. For instance, the author is content to accept Evliya's reflection on a particular food custom in the 17th century as self-evident without cross-referencing it to other primary sources or considering its historical meaning and context. Relevant research on some key topics such as the Arab world is missing: these include Paulina Lewicka's writings

on early Ottoman Cairene food, James Grehan's on food consumption habits in Ottoman Damascus, and Najwa al-Qattan's on war, famine, and "the cuisine of desperation" in late Ottoman Syria.

Throughout the discussion, too, Ottoman cuisine can appear timeless. As an example, it might have been helpful to include a dedicated (even if speculative) discussion on how food customs were altered—in terms of cooking techniques, recipes, farming, etc.—by the introduction of New World vegetables like tomatoes, zucchini, peppers, green beans, and corn. Arguably as relevant as tobacco or coffee in transforming Ottoman consumption habits, these ingredients would dramatically shape the empire's culinary landscape in the 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as that of its successor nation-states. How did these foods initially make their way into Ottoman kitchens? What ingredients were Ottoman cooks using before the umami-rich tomato became so omnipresent? Did they devise recipes to incorporate the new vegetables or tweak old ones with the new ingredients? How did corn become such a beloved fixture in Black Sea cooking or spicy peppers in Anatolia's southeast?

Finally, and this point recalls the need for defining "Ottoman cuisine" more deliberately, an integrated discussion of the empire's ethnic, cultural, and religious culinary diversity would have been welcomed. Beyond Istanbul, Işın incorporates several examples from food customs in the Anatolian hinterland, and some from the Balkans and Arab lands; she draws on the food of some religious communities too. But here, the author missed an opportunity to more purposely connect and analyze these food traditions. For instance, her discussion of Anatolian *tarhana* on pages 42 and 43 did not evoke mention of *trahana* (Greek), *keshk* (Persian), or *kashk* or *kishk* (Arabic). Regardless of its origins, variations on this dried yogurt-wheat food have played an important role throughout Ottoman territories (*kishk/kashk* is quite central, for instance, to both Upper Egyptian and Levantine food customs). These culinary overlaps, palpable across multiple regions and communities, are perhaps as much a legacy of "Ottoman cuisine" as the food served in Topkapı's banquets. Finally, there are often imprecise explanations for certain food habits (or lack thereof): at one point, Işın writes that under Ottoman rule, "most Muslims continued to avoid crustaceans and mollusks" (p. 21). But in fact, the prohibition against these sea creatures is specific to some but not all Sunni legal schools; it so happens that the Hanafi school—preferred by the Ottomans and predominant in Anatolia—tends to be the most restrictive with regard to seafood consumption. And even so, as Ståle Knudsen's work has shown, most people living along the Western Anatolian coastline readily consumed mollusks and crustaceans because of established Greek customs.

Overall, though, there is much to appreciate about Işın's book: its ambitious scope, its inclusion of extensive primary materials, its attractive pictures, and its breadth of topics. The work leaves the reader with a tantalizing image of Ottoman food culture which will hopefully inspire future researchers to explore these subjects with greater depth and within a more critical framework.