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Infidel Foods: Food and Identity in Early Modern Ottoman Travel Literature

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Kafir yemekler: Erken Modern Osmanlı Gezi Edebiyatı'nda Yemek ve Kimlik

Özet ■ Birçok farklı sahalarda çalışan araştırmacılar, yemeğin kimlik yaratan gücünü göstermişlerdir. Erken modern dönemde yazılmış gezi edebiyatı ürünleri, yemek kültürünün hem tanımlamak, hem de ayırtırmak için kullanılan güçlü bir damga olduğuna işaret eden birçok örnekle doludur. Avrupa gezi edebiyatında yemek ile ilgili giderek büyüyen bir literatür varsa da, Osmanlı çalışmalarında bu konu daha yeterince dikkat çekmemiştir. Bu makale, Osmanlı gezi edebiyatının bazı önemli örneklerine bu gözle yaklaşıp yemeğin, erken modern dönemde kimlik kurgulanmasında ne gibi işlevler gördüğü üzerine bazı farazi sonuçlar önermektedir. Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali ve Evliya Çelebi'nin yazdıkları, Osmanlılar'ın, imparatorluk merkezindeki kültür ile imparatorluğun çevresinde kalan bazı yörelerin arasında sınırlar çizerken yemeği nasıl kullandıklarını göstermektedir. Onlar, yemeği Avrupa gezi anlatılarında da rastlandığı şekilde kullanırken, bazı açılardan da o anlatılardan ayrılmışlardır ki, bu fark da Osmanlı ve Avrupa gezi edebiyatlarının ve onların yemeğe yaklaşımlarının karşılaştırmalı bir incelemesinin verimli bir araştırma sahası olduğuna işaret eder.

Anahtar kelimeler: Yemek, yemek kültürü, gezi edebiyatı, Evliya Çelebi, Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, Kürtler.

One of the central credos of food studies is the aphorism of the French writer Anthelme Brillat-Savarin in his 1825 book, *Physiologie du goût*: “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are.”¹ What Brillat-Savarin sensed intuitively, research has illustrated substantively: anthropologists, literary scholars, and historians have emphasized the power of food to signify, classify, and construct

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1 Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du Gout, ou Méditations de Gastronomie Transcendante* (Paris: Flammarion, 1982), 19.

identity. Like language, symbol or ritual, foodways are a powerful means of both delineating and transmitting culture. Because it breaches the body's internal/external boundary, and because of the biological imperative to eat daily, food inheres in a unique and intimate way in our collective and individual identities, and functions as a potent social, religious, gender, political, and cultural marker.² Foodways form a sort of culinary identity that both defines and differentiates: those who eat similar foods are trustworthy and safe, while those whose foods differ are viewed with suspicion and even revulsion.³

This notion is not new, of course, early modern observers too acknowledged the nexus of food and identity. This is particularly evident in the era's voluminous travel literature: then as now, travelers were often led by their stomachs, and regularly commented on the foods they encountered.⁴ They deployed foodways to produce culinary geographies and to inscribe boundaries between self and other. In the early modern world who you were was defined (at least partly) by what you ate and how you ate it.

While there is a growing body of work on European travel literature and its treatment of foodways,⁵ no attention has been given to this topic in the Ottoman context. This is in large part because there has been a tendency to see "early modern travel and exploration as exclusively Euro-Christian," and something in which Ottomans did not participate.⁶ The absence of travel literature has been held up as

- 2 Peter Scholliers, "Meals, Food Narratives, and Sentiments of Belonging in Past and Present," in *Food, Drink and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe since the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Scholliers (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 7-10; Deborah Lipton, *Food, the Body and the Self* (London: Sage, 1996), 1, 25; E.N. Anderson, *Everyone Eats: Understanding Food and Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), 109.
- 3 Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 16; Maria Dembinska, *Food and Drink in Medieval Poland: Rediscovering a Cuisine of the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 1; Anderson, *Everyone Eats*, 6, 114, 125.
- 4 Food represented the most commonly treated element of sixteenth century literature on the Ottomans. See Gábor Kármán, "An Ally of Limited Acceptability: Johannes Bocatius and the Image of the Turk in Hungary," in *Perspectives on Ottoman Studies: Papers from the 18th Symposium of the International Committee of Pre-Ottoman and Ottoman Studies*, eds. Ekrem Čaučević, Nenad Močanin and Vjerman Kursar (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2010), 974.
- 5 See for example, Anna Suranyi, "Seventeenth-Century English Travel Literature and the Significance of Foreign Foodways," *Food & Foodways* 14 (2006): 123-49; Robert Launay, "Tasting the World: Food in Early European Travel Narratives," *Food & Foodways* 11 (2003): 27-47; Catherine Briand, "The Performance of the Meal in 17th-century French Travel Accounts to New France: From Hospitality to Hybridity," *Food, Culture and Society* 11 (2008): 219-241.
- 6 Nabil Matar, *In the Lands of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), xiii.

evidence of a fundamental lack of interest in Europe and the wider world among Muslims. There is a growing body of scholarship, however, which has fundamentally undercut this assumption and has shown the “copious production of travel literature in non-Western languages” and in non-Western contexts.⁷

For the Mediterranean, Nabil Matar’s work has been central to this reassessment. Focusing on Arab North Africa, he has shown that there was extensive interest in and interaction with Europe. While not as numerous as European travelers to Islamic lands, there were nonetheless Arab diplomats, merchants, ecclesiastics, jurists, spies, and slaves who “ventured across seas and mountains into Spain and France, Holland and Italy, England and Russia – and wrote firsthand descriptions of the peoples and customs, the geography and ethnography of the ‘lands of the Christians.’” Indeed, no one devoted more written attention to the Europeans than the Arabs.⁸ These voices have been ignored in part because of a tendency to look rather narrowly for examples of Ottoman travel literature that fit into the more familiar European genre.⁹ A more ample notion of what constitutes travel literature,¹⁰ reveals the existence of a diverse array of sources that do convey Arab views, including hagiography, history, verse, ballads, prose, jurisprudence, prayers, correspondence, as well as some few travel narratives that parallel European models. These “multi-vocal narrative[s]” illustrate the diversity of views among “the Arabic-speaking peoples of the Mediterranean,” who clearly composed “their own ‘narratives’ about the Euro-Christians and were neither indifferent to nor ignorant about them.”¹¹

Scholars working on other parts of the Ottoman and Islamic world are finding similar examples. Giancarlo Casale has pointed to a diverse body of what he terms

7 Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2-3. Also, Nicolas Vatin, “Pourquoi un Turc-ottoman racontait-il son voyage? Note sur les relations de voyage chez les ottomans des Vakaâta Sultân Cem au Seyahatnâme d’Evliyâ Çelebi,” *Études Turques et Ottomanes: Documents de Travail* 4 (1995): 5-15.

8 Matar, *In the Lands of the Christians*, xxxviii.

9 Frédéric Hitzel, trans. and ed., *Prisonnier des Infidèles: Un soldat ottoman dans l’Empire des Habsbourg* (Arles: Sinbad, 1998), 19-20.

10 Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Travel Writing as a Genre: Facts, Fictions and the Invention of a Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Europe,” *Journeys* 1 (2000): 6; Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 25; Luigi Monga, “Travel and Travel Literature,” in *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance*, ed. Paul F. Grendler, 6 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1999), 6: 167.

11 Nabil Matar, *Europe through Arab Eyes 1578-1727* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 18-19.

“Ottoman discovery literature” that began to appear in the mid-sixteenth century. These “underutilized” sources include “cosmographies, geographies, maps, travel narratives.” This body of literature included many “untranslated Western published works” that reached the Ottoman market “surprisingly quickly after first appearing in Europe.” The final decades of the century saw an “exponential increase” in both the number and variety of texts in response to “a growing popular appetite for geography and cartography among the Ottoman literate classes.”¹²

While scholars have debunked the myth of a Muslim deficiency of curiosity, and are identifying an expanding body of sources to support their contentions, to this point there has been no attempt to survey or analyze this literature through the prism of foodways. Indeed, as recently as a decade ago, an Ottoman scholar could state that “the history of Ottoman eating and drinking” has generally been “neglected.”¹³ While this is no longer true as evidenced by a small, but growing body of literature on Ottoman food history,¹⁴ there is nothing that addresses the topic through the prism of Ottoman travel narratives. This paper will examine some notable examples of this literature in order to make some tentative conclusions about the ways that treatments of food in Ottoman travel literature functioned in constructing identities and inscribing boundaries in the early modern era.

There is of course a long and rich tradition of writing about foodways in medieval Muslim literature.¹⁵ The great fourteenth-century Tunisian scholar, Ibn

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- 12 Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), xviii, 185-86, 195; Giancarlo Casale, “The Ottoman ‘Discovery’ of the Indian Ocean in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges*, eds. Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, Kären Wigen (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 98.
- 13 Tulay Artan, “Aspects of the Ottoman Elite’s Food Consumption: Looking for ‘Staples,’ ‘Luxuries,’ and ‘Delicacies’ in a Changing Century,” in *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550-1922: An Introduction*, ed. Donald Quataert (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 114.
- 14 See Suraiya Faroqhi and Christoph Neumann, eds., *The Illuminated Table, the Prosperous House* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2003); Amy Singer, ed., *Starting with Food: Culinary Approaches to Ottoman History* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2011); Gerry Oberling and Grace Martin Smith, *The Food Culture of the Ottoman Palace* (Istanbul: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture, 2001); Stéphane Yerasimos, *A la table du Grand Turc* (Arles: Sinbad, 2001); Amy Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence: an Imperial Soup Kitchen in Jerusalem* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002). Arif Bilgin and Özge Samancı, eds., *Turkish Cuisine* (Ankara: Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2008); also, Özge Samancı, “Food Studies in Ottoman-Turkish Historiography,” in *Writing Food History: A Global Perspective*, eds. Kyri W. Claflin and Peter Scholliers (London: Berg, 2012).
- 15 G. J. H. van Gelder, *God’s Banquet: Food in Classical Arabic Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

Khaldun, dedicated a section of his *Muqaddimah* to the relationship of food scarcity to human character and body shape. Where the land is fertile and food plentiful, he wrote, the inhabitants are “stupid in mind and coarse in body,” whereas “those who lead a frugal life ... are superior both intellectually and physically.”¹⁶ Ibn Jubayr, who went on the haj in 1183, left a detailed description of the delicacies of Mecca, including the confectionary, meat, and especially the watermelon, which is “like sugar-candy or purest honey.”¹⁷ The most famous medieval traveler, Ibn Battuta, was a devoted gastronome who provided extensive descriptions of and commentary on the foods he consumed in his peregrinations from Morocco to China, covering more than 70,000 miles from 1325 to 1354.¹⁸ Indeed, scholars have credited him with creating a “gastronomic Baedeker” of the medieval world.¹⁹ He describes eating mangoes, and pickled lemon cooked in milk in Mogadishu; macaroni with Turks; turmeric stuffed skinks in Pakistan; and vermicelli made of yams and cooked in coconut milk in the Maldives, which he declared “one of the most delicious dishes.”²⁰

In the early modern period, these classical Arabic works served as models for Ottoman travelers and writers. The manuscripts were widely copied and by the middle of the sixteenth century, a growing number of Turkish translations of “major Arabic geographical texts began to appear.” These texts, along with others both by Ottoman and Western contemporaries in their original languages, circulated widely among Ottoman scholars, and they clearly impacted Ottoman writers.²¹

This influence is evident in a diverse range of Ottoman works. For instance, the famed cartographer Piri Reis comments extensively on food in his *Kitab-ı*

16 Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal and ed. N.J. Dawood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 66.

17 Muhammad ibn Ahmad Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, trans. R.J.C. Broadhurst (London: J. Cape, 1952), 117-19.

18 Ross E. Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta, a Muslim Traveler of the Fourteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 3.

19 Noel Q. King, *Christian and Muslim in Africa* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 19; also Charles Beckingham, “In Search of Ibn Battuta,” *Royal Society for Asian Affairs* 8 (1977): 267-68.

20 H.A.R. Gibb, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D. 1325-1354*, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Hakluyt, 1958-2000), 2:376, 2: 474-75; 3:597, 4: 824; and generally Pier Giovanni Donini, *Arab Travelers and Geographers* (London: IMMEL, 1991).

21 Casale, “The Ottoman ‘Discovery’ of the Indian Ocean,” 90-1; Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 186; Suraiya Faruqi, *The Ottoman Empire: A Short History* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2008), 98.

bahriye, or the *Book of the Sea*, presented to Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent in 1526. His approach tends more toward the simple creation of culinary geographies and the recitation of the types of food commodities available in ports throughout the Mediterranean, and less toward discussions of particular, or peculiar, foodways. So for example, he describes Valencia as “surrounded entirely by sugar cane fields,” and Ancona by “orange and lemon groves and orchards of many varieties of fruit.” Other regions of the Mediterranean were mentioned for their dates, fish, grain, melons. The island of Samos was noted for the cured antelope meat its inhabitants prepared and sold on the mainland, and the island of Conejara near Majorca which was overrun by “so many rabbits that their number defies description.”²² If fairly one-dimensional in its discussion of food, Piri Reis was nonetheless influential: by the end of the sixteenth century the work was circulating in over a hundred copies, and it had an important influence on other Ottoman authors.²³

Like his medieval forefather, Ibn Battuta, food plays a much more sophisticated and revealing role in the extensive travels of the greatest Ottoman traveler of his day, Evliya Çelebi. Evliya was born on 25 March 1611 in Istanbul where his father worked as a jeweler. His family’s roots in the city ran deep: his great-grandfather was the standard-bearer of Mehmed II, and he became a large landholder and endowed a *vakf* for the upkeep of a mosque in the neighborhood where Evliya was born, Unkapanı. He received a solid education, but the initial fodder for his travels were tales recounted by his father’s friends and employees. Fired with a seemingly insatiable curiosity, and unhindered by any family obligations, Evliya set out on his first trip outside of Istanbul at age thirty, in 1640. Over the next forty years he traveled the length and breadth of the Ottoman Empire, and ventured well beyond its confines, before his death in 1684 or 1685.²⁴ The result of this lifetime of travels was his monumental *Seyahatnâme*, or the *Book of Travels*. A rich and complex blend of empirical observations from his own travels, informed by the works of numerous geographical sources, and leavened with imagination and invention, this “romanced travelogue” is considered one of the seventeenth century’s “most monumental example[s] of the first person narrative.”²⁵

22 Piri Reis, *Kitab-ı bahriye* (Ankara: Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Turkish Republic, 1988), 393-401, 763, 959, 1135, 1257, 1403-07, 1433, 1523.

23 Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 186.

24 Robert Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality: The World of Evliya Çelebi* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1-2, 26-29; Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi in Diyarbekir: The Relevant Section of the Seyahatname*, eds. and trans. Martin van Bruinessen and Hendrik Boeschoten (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988), 3-4.

25 Suraiya Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 160-61; Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the*

Evliya was “a voracious eater” and “gourmet, and the *Seyahatnâme* in many ways functions as a culinary guide. His descriptions usually began with a discussion of a locale’s environment, its physical space with special attention to its religious monuments, as well as cultural observations on the local language, customs, and often a mention of the charms of its young men and women. This is almost always followed by an account of the foods and drinks that the area offered, recounted not as a “dry list,” but in the language of a “true connoisseur.”²⁶ So rich and detailed are Evliya’s treatments of food, that the *Seyahatnâme* is essential to any understanding of early modern Ottoman food and drink, and contains material sufficient for “a book length study.”²⁷

At the most basic level, Evliya, like other travelers, used food and drink to create a culinary topography of the Mediterranean, what David Bell and Gill Valentine have termed “consuming geographies,” to order and describe the various regions he visited.²⁸ This was a well-established practice in the tradition of pilgrimage accounts, which often “contained a list of stopping places along the road, together with a report on food and water resources” to aid future pilgrims.²⁹

For example, Evliya’s food map of the city of Struga, in Ottoman Macedonia, describes the local populace eating “yoghurt and cheeses and beestings and curds and cream and honey and omelets with honey, drinking buttermilk and whey, savoring the kebabs of roasted lamb and trout, ... and various kinds of honeyed sherbets, snacking on thousands of kinds of herbs and tendrils and sorrel and wild strawberries and sour cherries.”³⁰ He also enthuses over the eels caught in the nearby Lake Ohrid, which had a “delightful fragrance of musk and ambergris,” and were served “wrapped in bay leaves and roasted.” In addition to their savor, the eels allegedly had beneficial health qualities: “anyone with consumption

World Around It (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 23, 203-04; Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries*, 7, 9.

26 Alexander Pallis, *In the Days of the Janissaries: Old Turkish Life as Depicted in the “Travel-Book” of Evliya Çelebi* (London and New York: Hutchinson & Co., 1951), 216; Richard Tapper and Sami Zubaida, “Introduction,” in *A Taste of Thyme: Culinary Cultures of the Middle East* (New York: Tauris, 2000), 5.

27 Necdet Sakaoglu, “Sources for our Ancient Culinary Culture,” in *The Illuminated Table, the Prosperous House*, 39.

28 David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds., *Consuming Geographies: We Are What We Eat* (London: Routledge, 1997).

29 Suraiya Faroqhi, “Red Sea Trade and Communications as Observed by Evliya Çelebi (1671-72),” *New Perspectives in Turkey* 5-6 (1991): 101.

30 Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi in Albania and Adjacent Regions (Kosovo, Montenegro, Ohrid)*, eds. Robert Dankoff and Robert Elsie (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 219-21.

who puts a salted eel head on his own head will be cured of his ailments,” and a man who ate the eels would be able “to have intercourse with his wife five or six times.”³¹

Evlıya provided a similar description of Ottoman Albania, which he visited three times between 1660 and 1670. He was particularly impressed by the region’s foods, which he described in delicious detail: “Among the best known dishes are: chickpea rolls, chicken börek, types of cheese called jamuk and qumështuar, fried börek and eggs, baklava and fresh cream, and almond samsa. ... white çörek cakes, spiced and sweet breadrolls, and 40 other kinds of food are highly praised.” The region had numerous orchards and gardens, and its produce was justly famous: there were “pomegranates as big as a man’s head,” pears that weighed over a kilogram, apples, quinces, figs, cherries, chestnuts, and olives. Albania was also noted for its diverse beverages, including red wine, “grape juice flavored with mustard, ... sour-cherry juice, honey, mead.” The best known drink was called *reyhania*, “a red grape must ... produced by boiling grapes of various kinds. A glass is enough to make you drunk and will keep your brain perfumed with sweet basil (*reyhan*) and ambergris for an entire week.”³²

While these enticing culinary geographies provide invaluable insights into the diverse foodways of the early modern eastern Mediterranean, the observations of Evliya, and other early modern Ottoman travelers, also functioned in a more complex fashion as a means of both articulating culinary identities and inscribing cultural boundaries. As Sidney Mintz has observed, people’s “food preferences are close to the center of their self-definition: people who eat strikingly different foods or similar foods in different ways are thought to be strikingly different, sometimes even less human.”³³

This boundary and identity function of food is evident in Evliya’s discussion of Kurdish foodways. He traveled to parts of Kurdistan several times between 1640 and 1655, and provided extensive descriptions of the region and its people. The Ottomans had annexed much of the region in 1514 through alliances with numerous Kurdish principalities that were increasingly wary of the Safavids’ growing power and their policy of “Shi’ification.”³⁴ Kurdistan was a broad,

31 Ibid., 197.

32 Ibid., 125, 181. See also Evliya’s description of the foods of Diyarbekir in *Evlıya Çelebi in Diyarbekir*, 171.

33 Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (London: Penguin, 1985), 3.

34 Abbas Vali, *Kurds and the State in Iran: The Making of Kurdish Identity* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011), 8-9.

imprecise category among Ottomans. It could refer to a large geographic area “stretching from Erzerum to Basra, and from Aleppo to Ardalan,” it could refer to areas where Kurds were a majority or a minority.³⁵ Evliya’s criteria for designating who was a Kurd are not entirely clear, nor was his reaction to the numerous Kurds he encountered in diverse contexts uniform.³⁶ In part this was a result of the tremendous cultural and religious diversity of the region. Thus, on the one hand, he greatly admired the Mahmudi Kurds as “fighters of the faith, ... devout and true Moslems,” and commented favorably on the religious life and institutions in Diyarbekir.³⁷ On the other, he variously condemned Kurds he met as “rabble and vermin,” “unclean and faithless ... without religion,” immoral, in short, “a disgusting people.” Foodways were a key component of Evliya’s reaction; he thought “a dish of milk, cereals and butter ... called *pohkin*” that the Mahmudi Kurds prepared “very delicious.” The foodways of the Kurds of Mardin were more troubling: they were “ill-mannered,” and even more revolting, he reported, they were “corpse-eat[ers].”³⁸

Elsewhere in his writing, Evliya ascribes similar cannibalistic practices to other peoples who occupied the interstices of the near east. For instance, in several places, he reports on the cannibalism of “the Kalmyk cannibals in the Kipchak Steppe” in the region of the Caspian Sea, some of whom were at least nominally Muslim. They “eat the corpses of their dead, and they also strangle and eat some of their poor Nogay captives—they do not cut their throats, so as not to lose their blood, but just strangle them, cook them and eat them. The Kalmyks claim that there is nothing tastier than human flesh, snake meat, and pork; and the tastiest part is the pig’s tail and the ‘tail’ or coccyx of the humans.”³⁹ In the same vein, Evliya recounts an experience from his visit to Circassia, between the Caspian and Black Seas, in which he was offered what he called “father soul honey,” which

35 Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi in Diyarbekir*, 253; Baki Tezcan, “The Development of the Use of ‘Kurdistan’ as a Geographical Description and the Incorporation of this Region into the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century,” in *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilisation*, vol. 3, *Philosophy, Science and Institutions*, eds. Kemal Çiçek et al. (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2000), 3: 540-53.

36 Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), 34.

37 Evliya Çelebi, *Travels in Iran and the Caucasus, 1647 & 1654*, trans. Hasan Javadi and Willem Floor (Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers, 2010), 131; Martin van Bruinessen, *Mullas, Sufis and Heretics: The Role of Religion in Kurdish Society* (Istanbul: Isis, 2000), 69-83.

38 Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis*, ed. Robert Dankoff (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 295; Evliya, *Travels in Iran and the Caucasus*, 74, 131.

39 Robert Dankoff and Sooyong Kim, trans. and eds., *An Ottoman Traveller: Selections from the Book of Travels of Evliya Çelebi* (London: Eland Publishing, 2010), 254-55, 385; also, Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality*, 59-60.

was “full of strange hairs that we kept pulling out of our mouths.” Upon further investigation, Evliya discovered that the honey had been gathered by a grieving son from bees that had colonized the groin of his father’s corpse, which was in a box suspended from a tree. Evliya’s response to the food of “this pimp of an infidel,” not surprisingly, was one of revulsion: he described his “gorge rising and ... liver fairly bursting.”⁴⁰

Cannibalism, of course, represents the ultimate culinary act of savagery. It was an extremely common trope throughout the early modern world, indeed tales of cannibalism proliferated.⁴¹ There was a long history of such claims, from the anthropophagi of Homer and Herodotus,⁴² through the Dragoian kingdom of Java (Sumatra) described by Marco Polo, where sick relatives and foreigners were eaten.⁴³ Particularly in the new world context, cannibal “became one of the most powerful terms in the written language of conquest,”⁴⁴ and early modern Europe was “convulsed” by the debate over its practice.⁴⁵ Some Christians feared that “monstrous, ravenous” Muslim corsairs might eat their prey.⁴⁶ Recent scholarship has called into question the veracity of these tales, with the most extreme counter-narratives going so far as to suggest cannibalism was “merely a product of the European imagination, it was never practised anywhere, it was a calumny imposed by European colonisers to justify their outrages, it had its origins in the disturbed European psyche, it is a tool of Empire.”⁴⁷ The debate is ongoing, but even if invented, such stories served a clear purpose of starkly setting apart people who considered themselves civilized from groups they held to be at best inferior, at worst barely human.

40 Dankoff and Kim, *An Ottoman Traveller*, 253-54; Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality*, 60-1.

41 Piero Camporesi, *Bread of Dreams: Food and Fantasy in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 10.

42 Ted Motohashi, “The Discourse of Cannibalism in Early Modern Travel Writing,” in *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*, ed. Steve Clark (London: Zed, 1999), 87; Daniel Baraz, *Medieval Cruelty: Changing Perceptions, Late Antiquity to the Early Modern* (Cornell University Press, 2003), 32.

43 Rubies, *Travel and Ethnology*, 39-40.

44 Motohashi, “The Discourse of Cannibalism in Early Modern Travel Writing,” 85. Also Peter Hulme, “Introduction: The cannibal Scene,” in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

45 Tom Betteridge, “Introduction: Borders, Travel and Writing,” in *Borders and Travellers in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Thomas Betteridge (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 1.

46 Daniel J. Vitkus, *Piracy, Slavery and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 225; Marin Sanudo, *I diarii (1496-1533): pagine scelte* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 1997), 338.

47 Hulme, “Introduction: The cannibal Scene,” 3; Anderson, *Everyone Eats*, 132.

While the focus of much scholarship has been on cannibalism within the European imperial context, such accounts have been common since antiquity in many, perhaps most, cultures. There were certainly Muslim precedents for Evliya's fascination with cannibals: The Koran makes brief reference to cannibalism in the context of discouraging backbiting; both activities are depicted as being repellent.⁴⁸ Ibn Battuta told of a group of "Blacks who eat the sons of Adam," and whom Sultan Mansa Süleyman honored "and gave them in hospitality a slave woman, whom they killed and ate. They smeared their faces and hands with her blood and came to the Sultan to thank him. ... It was reported of them that they used to say that the best parts of the flesh of human females were the palm of the hand and the breast."⁴⁹ Centuries later in 1642, Ahmad ibn Qasim in his *Description of the World* claimed that before the Javanese converted to Islam, "they used to eat human flesh."⁵⁰ Charges of cannibalism overall, however, seem to have been much more prevalent in Christian accounts, than Muslim. For example, in comparison to Christian reports, cannibalism is a minor issue in medieval Muslim discussions of the Mongols, despite the attempt of both to barbarize this threatening new people who appeared on the eastern horizon.⁵¹

While the most sensational charge Evliya leveled against certain of the Kurds was cannibalism, he also denounced them as "faithless" and "without religion," and knowing "nothing of fasting, prayer, hajj and *zakat*, and they know nothing about what God has decreed upon them."⁵² This is a somewhat curious charge, as the Kurds had been introduced to Islam in the first century of the Islamic expansion, though the process of Islamization took many more centuries, and as we have seen, Kurdistan was an extremely diverse area religiously. Though Sunni, most Kurds adhered to a different school of jurisprudence than the Turks, and pre-Islamic practices persisted, as did an attraction among some to the region's many heterodox religious sects, into the early modern era. Thus the Kurds were repeatedly accused by many Ottoman observers of an "imperfect or nominal conversion" to Islam, indeed this is suggested in the Kurdish saying, "compared to the unbeliever, the Kurd is a Muslim."⁵³ Evliya railed against members of the

48 Oliver Leaman, ed., *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 106-07.

49 Gibb, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, 4:968.

50 Matar, *Europe through Arab Eyes*, 204.

51 Baraz, *Medieval Cruelty*, 109.

52 Evliya, *Travels in Iran and the Caucasus*, 74.

53 Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 18-19; van Bruinessen, *Mullas, Sufis and Heretics*, 16 and passim; Michael M. Gunter, *Historical Dictionary of the Kurds* (Plymouth, UK: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 142-43.

syncretic Yezidi sect as “dog worshippers, worse than infidels, a band of rebels and brigands and perverts, resembling ghouls of the desert, hairy heretic[s].”⁵⁴ Similarly, the Ottoman official, poet, historian and writer of the late sixteenth century, Mustafa Ali, placed “the perfidious Kurds whose character is nothing but obstinacy and stubbornness” at the top of his rankings of “nations among the various races that are definitely not suitable” for high position in the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁵ An official view of Kurds, among other provincial Ottoman peoples, as “outsiders,” “rubes,” and “savages” persisted into at least the late nineteenth century.⁵⁶

For Evliya, peripheral peoples of the steppes, people on the political and religious margins of the eastern reaches of the Ottoman Empire, represented the limits of both civilization and also religion. As in other contexts, accusations of cannibalism functioned as a powerful way to define “other people by locating them in a system of values which is an inversion of one’s own.”⁵⁷ A key component of what made the Kurds other to Evliya was their imprecision in religious practice, and the potential danger that they represented in their critical location on the frontiers between the Ottomans and their great regional rival, the Safavids. The Ottomans held similar views toward other peoples on the Ottoman periphery, including the Arab Bedouins, and the heterodox Druze and Maronite populations of the Levant among whom confessional distinctions were notably fluid.⁵⁸ This was not the case with all frontier subjects: for instance, despite the “popular prejudice” among many Ottomans against Albanians, in part because of their reputation for religious indifference and heterodoxy, Evliya does not make specific mention of questionable Albanian beliefs or practices.⁵⁹ In certain in-

54 Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *American Historical Review* 107 (2002): 768-96, at 773.

55 Andreas Tietze, ed. *Mustafa Ali’s Counsel for Sultans of 1581* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1979), 63.

56 Virginia Aksan, “Locating the Ottomans Among Early Modern Empires,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 3 (1999): 121; Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 43-44.

57 Urs Bitterli, *Cultures in Conflict: Encounters Between European and Non-European Cultures 1492-1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 8-9.

58 Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” 774-75; Bernard Heyberger, “Frontières confessionnelles et conversions chez les chrétiens orientaux (XVII-XVIII siècles),” in *Conversions islamiques: Identités religieuses en Islam méditerranéen*, ed. Mercedes García-Arenal (Paris: Maisonneuve-Larose, 2001), 246-49.

59 I. Metin Kunt, “Ethnic-Regional (Cins) Solidarity in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Establishment,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5 (1974): 238; Noel Malcolm, “Myths of Albanian National Identity: Some Key Elements, as Expressed in the Works of Albanian Writers in America in the Early Twentieth Century,” in *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*,

stances, however, for Evliya and other Ottomans from its capital and heartlands, “the frontiers of the empire were its antithesis: regions where heresy flourished, locales of strange and often comical stories,” and where unusual food practices also could be found.⁶⁰

Charges of suspect religiosity and barbarity, however, were less facetiously leveled against one of the empire’s most important regions, Egypt. Following its conquest in 1517, Egypt was one of the empire’s most populous, wealthy, and significant provinces. For Evliya, Egypt represented the “Mother of the World,” a “goal and haven” where he settled for his final years after his forty years of travel.⁶¹ A century earlier, Mustafa Ali was also drawn to Egypt: he traveled there twice, first in 1568 as secretary to Lala Mustafa Paşa, and again in 1599 for several months while making his way to a new position in Jidda. In the hopes of obtaining the governorship of Egypt, he wrote a treatise describing what he perceived as the tremendous decline the country had experienced in the years between his sojourns. Although he considered it “the best land,” and extolled its “unequaled” and “exquisite beauty,” Ali was broadly critical of Egypt, no doubt in an effort to strengthen his case for the governorship.⁶²

One of the areas Ali focused on in his broad-ranging assessment was Egypt’s foodways and its status as “the breadbasket of the Ottoman Empire,” a view that was held by Muslim and Christian both.⁶³ He writes that during his second stay, he became “thoroughly acquainted with the prosperity of the country, the plentifulness of food-stuff of all kinds.” He observes that the source of the Nile sprang up “from Paradise,” resulting in “an extremely good-tasting water, . . . in its utmost pleasantness more beneficial to digestion, purer and sweeter” than other water. Also remarkable was Egypt’s soil in which “whatever is sown will grow;”

eds. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd J. Fischer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 84-87; Alexander Lopasic, “Islamization of the Balkans with Special Reference to Bosnia,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 5 (1994): 179.

60 Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” 773-74.

61 Robert Dankoff, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman: Melek Ahmed Pasha (1588-1662)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 6; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Egypt’s Adjustment to Ottoman Rule: Institutions, Waqf and Architecture in Cairo (16th and 17th Centuries)* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 140-41.

62 Andreas Tietze, *Mustafa Ali’s Description of Cairo of 1599* (Vienna: Osterreichische Akademie Der Wissenschaften, 1975), 26; Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 181-83.

63 Alan Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). For the view of Egypt’s fertility from a European traveler’s perspective, see Carla Burri, Nadine Sauneron and Paul Bleser, *Voyages en Égypte des années 1589, 1590 & 1591* (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1971), 197.

this produced an “abundance” of cereals and “other foodstuff, geese, chickens, young pigeons, [which] are extremely inexpensive.”⁶⁴

If the natural resources of Egypt were exceptional, Ali was less impressed by the people and their food. Citing as evidence a hadith that told of Satan coming to Egypt where “he copulated and spawned on the bed of wish-fulfillment and even hatched his offspring,” before eventually settling, Ali asserted that “most of the people of Egypt are of a devilish nature and not fit to associate with the human species.” Their subhuman character was evidenced in their foodways. Egyptians, Ali reported, ate “heavy, indigestible food ... like ox heads, ox feet, lungs, and tripe.” They were especially fond of a fried cheese dish, *jubn maqli*, which was eaten “day and night,” even though it was believed to cause “a weakening of vision and leads to blindness.” Another favorite was a melon that was “completely tasteless, its color is indistinguishable from the bilious excrements [that follow] after purging with a physician’s potion. Persons with a sense of cleanliness refuse to eat it when they see the worms inside it.” Even familiar foods that the Egyptians prepared, such as “stewed meat and rice and saffron pudding,” and “sour-dish and caraway soup,” Ali considered to be “tasteless” and “of very low standard.”⁶⁵

Beyond their un stomachable foods, Egyptians’ eating habits were equally suspect. Ali describes in rich detail the shocking behavior at a banquet he attended, of Egypt’s grandees, “who do not pay attention to dignity”:

The violent appetite of certain grandees and mallas is indescribable. When they come to a banquet they tuck up their sleeves and enter the battle, accomplishing endless victories in the field of eating and drinking. ... This humble one (i.e. the author) became involved in a meal of this kind. After a while, while I was about to relish the delicacies of a learned conversation, I found that those honorable ones had rolled up their sleeves and were beginning to take off their clothes. While I was still asking myself ‘Are they going to wrestle? Are they eager to perform a wrestling match?’ I saw that one after the other they were tucking up sleeves taking off their mighty turbans, and getting unburdened. Then they rushed to the place of food like wolves, tearing it away from each other! Some scoundrels finished off the table fighting over the morsels like dogs while I was watching aghast. I had

64 Tietze, *Mustafa Ali’s Description of Cairo*, 25, 29, 32. On Egyptian food production and agriculture, see Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt*, 82-123.

65 Tietze, *Mustafa Ali’s Description of Cairo*, 39, 44, 49-50. Interestingly, Istanbuli cuisine today “prides itself on restraint in the use of flavourings,” and views their overuse in the periphery as “a sign of vulgarity and lack of refinement.” Tapper and Zubaida, “Introduction,” 8.

launched the boat of my thoughts into the ocean of amazement, wondering how much gluttons like these parasites could become!⁶⁶

Norbert Elias famously described the evolving sense of *civilité* linked to social performance and table manners as a model of civilized behavior in early modern Europe, and the same was certainly true of high Ottoman society.⁶⁷ Notions of correct table comportment were highly developed in the Ottoman capital among the political, social and cultural elite circles in which Ali circulated before leaving for the provinces. Indeed, Ali's concern for civilized behavior is further evidenced in other writings in which he decries the breakdown of norms of table etiquette at the Porte,⁶⁸ and especially in one of his final works, the *Mevā'idü'n-Nefā'is fi Kavāidi'l-Mecalis* or the *Table of Delicacies Concerning the Rules of Social Gatherings*, composed in 1599-1600, and in part influenced no doubt by his experience in Egypt.⁶⁹ During the early modern period, the Ottoman imperial palace had particularly elaborate rituals and rules of etiquette. Young palace pages were carefully trained not to begin eating before their "superiors had been served," not to gaze "hungrily at the food," or "to eat in haste or with the mouth full." The "Ottoman concern for cleanliness" was evidenced in the use of napkins, "and at the conclusion of the meal a water pitcher, basin, and towel were brought round for hand washing."⁷⁰ Equally elaborate rituals of etiquette characterized dining in the empire's dervish lodges.⁷¹

66 Ibid., 50.

67 Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 84-129; Norbert Elias, *Norbert Elias on Civilization, Power, and Knowledge: Selected Writings*, eds. and intro. Stephen Mennell and Johan Goudsblom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 14-17.

68 Jan Schmidt, "Mustafa 'Alī of Gallipoli, A Moralistic Littérateur on History and the Contemporary Ottoman World," in *The Joys of Philology: Studies in Ottoman Literature, History and Orientalism (1500-1923)*, vol. 1: *Poetry, Historiography, Biography and Autobiography* (Istanbul: Isis, 2002), 136-37; Tietze, *Mustafa Ali's Counsel for Sultans*, 100.

69 Douglas S. Brookes, trans. and ed., *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century: Mustafa Ali's Mevā'idü'n-Nefā'is fi Kavāidi'l-Mecalis 'Tables of Delicacies Concerning the Rules of Social Gatherings'* (Cambridge, MA: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 2003).

70 Oberling and Smith, *The Food Culture of the Ottoman Palace*, 82-5; Özge Samancı, "Pilaf and Bouchées: The Modernization of Official Banquets at the Ottoman Palace in the Nineteenth Century," in *Royal Taste: Food, Power, and Status at the European Courts after 1789*, ed. Daniëlle de Vooght (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011): 112-16.

71 Raymond Lifchez, *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 297-99.

For a cultured, Ottoman observer such as Ali, the unbridled assault of his Egyptian hosts on the dinner table was disturbing on multiple levels. Ali's reconstruction of the episode emphasizes two elements which he finds particularly troubling: first, the deliberate act of stripping down to a state of undress, and second, the animalistic frenzy around the serving table where the Egyptians fought over food like "wolves" and "dogs," the latter of which were considered unclean in Ottoman culture.⁷² In highlighting both nakedness and unrestrained consumption, Ali was clearly setting up a distinction between a cultured Ottoman civility, and Egyptian barbarity and inferiority. Civilized manners and cultural refinement serve to temper the natural functions and urges of humans and to distinguish them from animals. To be sure, this behavior was not on the level of the charges of Kurdish cannibalism, but such unregulated and untempered consumption was emblematic of unrefined and uncivilized behavior. The similarities between Ali's descriptions of Egyptian vulgarian table manners, and the observations of European travelers on Ottoman etiquette are striking, as are the parallels between Ottoman and Western literatures on refinement and courtly behavior.⁷³ These represent yet another example of the shared attitudes and common practices that transcended the boundaries of the early modern Mediterranean, and that undercut "the Orientalist notion" of a Mediterranean of "clear-cut religious and cultural boundaries."⁷⁴

While caution is necessary in generalizing collective Ottoman and Egyptian views, in Ali's account there is clear evidence of certain tensions, which are also present in other works. The Ottoman historian, Ibn Ridwan, described Egyptians as "cruel, miserly, sensualistic, hypocritical and dishonest,"⁷⁵ while other observers considered them as social inferiors.⁷⁶ Evliya believed capital punishment necessary "to maintain control" over both the peasantry and "the preachers ... [who] provide aid and cover to bandits and thieves."⁷⁷ Conversely, some Egyp-

72 Miri Shefer Mossensohn, *Ottoman Medicine: Healing and Medical Institutions, 1500-1700* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 78.

73 Dariusz Kolodziejczyk, "Polish Embassies in Istanbul or How to Sponge on Your Host Without Losing your Self-Esteem," in *The Illuminated Table, the Prosperous House*, 55-7; Joanita Vroom, "Mr. Turkey Goes to Turkey,' Or: How an Eighteenth-Century Dutch Diplomat Lunched at the Topkapı Palace," in *Starting with Food*, 139-76, at 167.

74 Tijana Krstić, "Illuminated by the Light of Islam and the Glory of the Ottoman Sultanate: Self-Narratives of Conversion to Islam in the Age of Confessionalization," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 (2009): 38-9.

75 Behrens-Abouseif, *Egypt's Adjustment to Ottoman Rule*, 142.

76 Michael Winter, *Egyptian Society Under Ottoman Rule, 1517-1798* (London: Routledge, 1992), 31.

77 Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality*, 84.

tians considered the Ottomans “morally and intellectually inferior,” “ignorant and stubborn,” and “bad Muslims.” In the years following the conquest of 1517, the Ottomans were depicted by one Egyptian chronicler as “drinkers, hashish addicts, and pederasts.”⁷⁸ Over time, however, as Egypt adapted to Ottoman rule, these views changed somewhat as Egyptians’ attitudes became more ambiguous, and “reserved if not hostile.” While concerns about Ottoman religious views and practices endured, many Egyptians came to appreciate the benefits that came with the sultans’ rule and to admire Ottoman religious scholarship.⁷⁹

To conclude, then, there is no question that Ottomans were actively engaged in the broader trends of exploration and travel that characterized the early modern era. Like their European contemporaries, they both built on past traditions of geographical and ethnographic writing,⁸⁰ and responded to the expanding world around them by recording their experiences in a variety of works that fit easily within the broad genre of travel literature. As the writings of two of the most important Ottoman writers of the early modern period, Mustafa Ali and Evliya Çelebi make clear, food was an important element of these narratives, as it was for other contemporary travelers. Both Ali and Evliya used food to overlay geographies of consumption on their food-maps of the Mediterranean. More significantly, both used food as a means to inscribe boundaries and assign difference in the complex world of the Mediterranean that they inhabited. They did so in a fashion that mirrored the approach of many European travel narratives, but also in ways that differed significantly, which suggests the potential insights a comparative consideration of Ottoman and European travel literature and their treatment of food might produce.

Evliya used discussions of the ultimate act of barbarism, cannibalism, among the Kurds and other peoples on the periphery of the empire, as a way to distinguish peoples whose religious status was at best ambiguous from the civilized,

78 Michael Winter, “Attitudes toward the Ottomans in Egyptian Historiography during Ottoman Rule,” in *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt, c. 950-1800*, ed. Hugh N. Kennedy (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 198; Michael Winter, “The Ottoman Occupation,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1: *Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1: 505; Behrens-Abouseif, *Egypt’s Adjustment to Ottoman Rule*, 134-37.

79 Michael Winter, “Cultural Ties between Istanbul and Ottoman Egypt,” in *Frontiers of Ottoman Studies: State, Province, and the West*, eds. Colin Imber and Keiko Kiyotaki, 2 vols. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 1: 193-97; Michael Winter, “Ottoman Egypt 1525-1609,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 2: *Modern Egypt from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. M.W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2: 5-6.

80 Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 9-10; Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, 23, 179.

Ottoman norm. In a similar fashion, Ali's observations about the unappetizing and unpleasant foods of Egypt, and especially their unbridled and uncivilized consumption as a means to set them apart from the more civilized ways of the Ottoman court, and to emphasize the need for the firm hand of an effective Ottoman governor, to right the badly listing ship of Egypt. The reactions of both Ali and Evliya must be understood within the context of the Ottoman imperial system as well. Both men were members of the Ottoman elite who were closely linked to powerful Ottoman officials throughout their adult lives and careers. Both also approached the realms of the empire in which they traveled from a uniquely Ottoman perspective which comprised what Ussama Makdisi has described as "one of the central tenets of the Ottoman imperial system." This worldview assumed a "profound" and "unbridgeable" difference and distance between the Ottoman elite and many of their subject peoples, which was "configured in religious, ethnic, and spatial terms."⁸¹ In the Ottoman Empire, cultural and religious distinctions were essential markers of difference, and foodways were one among a variety of modes by which these differences were articulated and inscribed between the diverse subject peoples of the early modern Ottoman Empire.

Infidel Foods: Food and Identity in Early Modern Ottoman Travel Literature

Abstract ■ Scholars in a range of disciplines have shown the power of food as a marker of identity. Early modern travel literature contains many examples of the ways in which foodways were used as a powerful marker to both define and differentiate. While there is a growing body of literature on food in European travel literature, the topic has not received attention in the Ottoman context. This paper examines several notable examples of Ottoman travel literature in order to make some tentative conclusions about the ways that food functioned in constructing identities in the early modern era. The writings of Mustafa Ali and Evliya Çelebi illustrate the ways that Ottomans used food to inscribe boundaries between the culture of the imperial capital and some of the empire's peripheral areas. They used food in a fashion that mirrored the approach of many European travel narratives, but also in ways that differed significantly, which suggests the potential insights a comparative consideration of Ottoman and European travel literature and their treatment of food might produce.

Keywords: Food, foodways, travel literature, Evliya Çelebi, Mustafa Ali, Kurds.

81 Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 773-74.