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Author(s): ERIC R. DURSTELER

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Bad Bread and the “Outrageous Drunkenness of the Turks”: Food and Identity in the Accounts of Early Modern European Travelers to the Ottoman Empire

ERIC R. DURSTELER
Brigham Young University

ONE of the overarching themes that unite this special volume is the important role of travel and travelers in expanding European encounters with and comprehension of global Islam. The initial point of contact in this growing connection, with intensive interactions dating to the Middle Ages and classical antiquity, was the Mediterranean Sea, particularly the lands bordering its eastern climes, which over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries came to be dominated by the Ottoman Empire. While the Mediterranean had been plied with some regularity during the Middle Ages, the early modern period saw a steadily expanding number of travelers from throughout western and Christian Europe to the region. This increase was accompanied by a parallel growth in travel narratives, particularly those dedicated to the Ottoman Empire.¹ Indeed, until well into the seventeenth century eas-

¹ On this extensive body of travel narratives, see Stéphane Yerasimos, *Les voyageurs dans l'Empire ottoman (XIVe–XVIe siècles)* (Ankara: Imprimerie de la société turque d'histoire, 1991); Elisabetta Borromeo, *Voyageurs occidentaux dans l'Empire ottoman, 1600–1644*, 2 vols. (Paris: Maisonneuve and Larose, 2007). Also, C. Göllner, *Turcica: Die europäischen türkendrucke des XVI jahrhunderts*, 2 vols. (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1961, 1968). For a breakdown of general numbers of travel narratives 1500–1800, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 358.

ily four times more books were published on the Ottoman Empire and Asia than were published about the Americas, such was the fascination with the sultans' realms.² Within this burgeoning body of travel literature, food was among the the most commonly observed and commented upon aspects of Ottoman culture.³ Then as now travelers were led by their stomachs.⁴ Observations on foodways were a fixture in travelers' accounts and served as a useful taxonomy in ordering and parsing travel experiences. Indeed, a budding contemporary advice literature, heavily influenced by Italian humanism and the model of the Venetian ambassadorial report,⁵ provided travelers with instructions on how and what to observe in their travels, with agriculture and diet occupying a prominent position on these lists.⁶

² J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 8–11, 13–16; A. Caracciolo Aricò, "Il nuovo mondo e l'umanesimo: immagini e miti dell'editoria veneziana," in *L'impatto della scoperta dell'America nella cultura veneziana, Atti del I Convegno Colombiano*, ed. Angela Caracciolo Aricò (Rome: Bulzoni editore, 1990), p. 25; Almut Höfert, "'Europe' and 'Religion' in the Framework of Sixteenth-Century Relations between Christian Powers and the Ottoman Empire," in *Reflections on Europe: Defining a Political Order in Time and Space*, eds. Hans-Åke Persson and Bo Stråth (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 223. Also, H. R. Trevor-Roper, "A Case of Coexistence: Christendom and the Turks," in *Historical Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), p. 173; Kenneth M. Setton, *Western Hostility to Islam and Prophecies of Turkish Doom* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1992), p. 46.

³ 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 Čaušević, Nenad Moačanin, and Vjeran Kursar (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2010), p. 974; Almut Höfert, *Den Feind beschreiben: "Türkengefahr" und europäisches Wissen über das Osmanische Reich 1450–1600* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag, 2003), pp. 238–239.

⁴ Though not the focus of this essay, there is ample evidence of Ottoman travelers and observers also using foodways in a similar fashion. On this, see Eric R. Dursteler, "Infidel Foods: Food and Identity in Early Modern Ottoman Travel Literature," *Journal of Ottoman Studies* 39 (2012): 143–160.

⁵ Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Instructions for Travellers: Teaching the Eye to See," *History and Anthropology* 9 (1996): 140–151.

⁶ Anna Suranyi, "Seventeenth-Century English Travel Literature and the Significance of Foreign Foodways," *Food and Foodways* 14 (2006): 127. For examples of this literature, see *Certainne briefe, and speciall instructions for gentlemen, merchants, students, souldiers, mariners, &c. employed in seruices abrode, or anie way occasioned to conuerse in the kingdomes, and gouernementes of forren princes* (London: John Wolfe, 1589), pp. 8–11, 14; Thomas Palmer, *An essay of the meanes how to make our trauailes, into forraine countries, the more profitable and honourable* (London: H L for Mathew Lownes, 1606), p. 91; Robert Devereux, *Profitable instructions; describing what speciall obseruations are to be taken by trauellers in all nations, states and countries; pleasant and profitable* (London: Benjamin Fisher, 1633), pp. 1–4. Also, Baudelot de Dairval, *De l'Utilité des Voyages et de l'Avantage que la recherche des Antiquitez procure aux Sçavans*, 2 vols. (Paris: Pierre Aubouin and Pierre Emery, 1686); Bernardo Bizoni, *Diario di viaggio di Vincenzo Giustiniani*, ed. Barbara Agosti (Bologna: Quaderni del battello Ebbro, 1995), p. 173.

Food functioned in these narratives in a number of ways. At its most basic level, travelers used food and drink to create a “consuming geography” of the Mediterranean.⁷ Much ink was spilled describing the flora and fauna, the agriculture and cuisine, of every corner of the sea. Beyond this, however, travelers employed food as a means to inscribe difference between themselves and the Ottomans, a practice memorably articulated in Anthelme Brillat-Savarin’s famous aphorism “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are.”⁸ More recent scholars have emphasized how food’s “everydayness”⁹ infuses it with a uniquely intimate potency as a social, religious, gender, political, and cultural marker.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ The use of food to demarcate difference has been central to studies of early modern food; however, we must be cautious not to embrace deceptively simple or culturally reductionist assumptions. Travelers did not engage Ottoman culture in a monochromatic or overly simple fashion; rather, they displayed a nuanced range of responses to the foodways they encountered, and this in turn suggests the need for a more complex and connected reading of the early modern Mediterranean world and its foodways.

The ways in which certain travelers who ventured from Western Europe into Ottoman lands used foodways to delineate boundaries of alterity is evident in the writings of Nicholas de Nicolay, the royal geographer to Henri II and self-styled “citoyen du monde” who accompanied the French ambassador Gabriel d’Aramon to the Porte in 1551, and subsequently authored one of the most influential travel narratives

⁷ David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds., *Consuming Geographies: We Are What We Eat* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁸ Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du Gout, ou Meditations de Gastronomie Transcendante* (Paris: Flammarion, 1982), p. 19. All translations from non-English language sources are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

⁹ Kyla Wazana Tompkin, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), p. 185.

¹⁰ 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), pp. 7–10; Deborah Lipton, *Food, the Body and the Self* (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 1, 25; E. N. Anderson, *Everyone Eats: Understanding Food and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p. 109.

¹¹ Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 16; Maria Dembinska, *Food and Drink in Medieval Poland: Rediscovering a Cuisine of the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 1; Anderson, *Everyone Eats*, pp. 6, 114, 125.

on the Ottoman Empire, published in France in 1568, and translated into English, Dutch, German, and Italian over the next two decades.¹² During his sojourn in Istanbul, Nicolay was decidedly unimpressed by its culinary offerings:

the ordinary maner of eating of the Turks . . . farre differeth from ours, [which is] so superfluous, curious, and delicate . . . whereas to the contrary theirs is scant, bare, and grosse, without anye diversities of lardings, dressings, sawces, ioyces, and confections: their Cookes being very simple dressers of meat, as being neither dainty or delicate in ye dressing thereof. For the Turks do content themselves with slight meates & easily dressed . . . Bucks flesh, Goates fleshe, Mutton, Lambe, and Kidde, and certayne Hennes.

Meat was prepared in a large iron pot with a grill set over hot coals in the bottom “upon the which they doe roast their flesh through the vapour and heate of the coales, which can neither be wholesome nor daintie. Ande to be short their kitchins & Cookes are nothyng lyke unto ours.” As for drink, Nicolay reports, “their most usuall and common beverage is that which is natural unto al beastes in the worlde, too witte, fayre and cleare water.”¹³

In Nicolay’s “grammar” of Ottoman cuisine,¹⁴ he sets up a dichotomy not only between good and bad food, but also between civilization and barbarity. While meat was widely consumed in what Fernand Braudel described as “carnivorous Europe” in this period, its preparation, not its quantity, was what distinguished Ottoman foodways.¹⁵ “Our” food, by which Nicolay means narrowly French cuisine, but more broadly foods with which he was familiar from his extensive travels in Europe, are familiar foods that are delicate and prepared in complex ways—that is, they are transformed from their natural state into finely processed products that are “superfluous, curious, delicate, . . . [and] daintie.” Ottoman foods in contrast are crude, with little variation from their organic state. They are simple and lacking in any type of elaboration—

¹² Amanda Wunder, “Western Travelers, Eastern Antiquities, and the Image of the Turk in Early Modern Europe,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 7 (2003): 115–119; Yerasimos, *Les voyageurs dans l’Empire ottoman*, pp. 224–225.

¹³ The first French edition was published as *Les quatre premiers livres des navigations et peregrinations orientales* (Lyon: Guillaume Rouille, 1567–1568). Quotations come from the 1585 London edition *The Navigations into Turkie* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1585; repr. Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, Ltd., 1968), 90v.

¹⁴ Massimo Montanari, *Il cibo come cultura* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2006), pp. 137–142.

¹⁵ Massimo Montanari, *The Culture of Food* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 73–74.

sauces, dressings, and so on—that might transform them into foods that were recognizable or tasteful to Nicolay. To drive home his point, Nicolay describes the Ottomans’ most common beverage as “fayre and cleare water.”¹⁶ Though water was of course widely consumed in early modern Europe, despite concerns about its purity and suitability for drinking, Nicolay is clear: The Ottomans’ imbibing of water, regardless of how pristine, placed them in the same category as animals.¹⁷

In using food to draw a stark line between Ottoman East and European West, the humanist-educated Nicolay and numerous other travelers who made similar observations¹⁸ were building on long-standing Greco-Roman precedents, which informed the cultural world of early modern Europe, and with which he was undoubtedly familiar. From at least the age of Homer, what one ate, how it was prepared, and how it was eaten were all significant markers of the boundary between “civilised, sedentary farmers . . . and uncivilised, pastoral nomads.” For Herodotus these non-Greek peoples were “eaters of meat and drinkers of milk.”¹⁹ Strabo described them as “savages, dwellers in caves, nomads, brigands and warriors” unable to achieve even “the basic civilised state of agriculture.” The diet of one such tribe, the Gauls, was composed primarily of “milk and flesh of all sorts, but especially the flesh of hogs, both fresh and salted.” Another Greek writer, Posidonius, concurred: The Gauls’ food “consists of a few loaves of bread, but of large quantities of meat prepared in water or roasted over coals or on spits.”²⁰ Roman writers employed similar tropes: Ammianus Marcellinus wrote that the Huns had no agriculture at all, rather their food was “wild and uncooked flesh, since [they] do not even have fire to cook their meat or even smoke to cure it. They only consume the roots of

¹⁶ Nicolay, *The Navigations into Turkie*, 90v.

¹⁷ Ken Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 120–122; A. Lynn Martin, “The Baptism of Wine,” *Journal of Food and Culture* 3, no. 4 (2003): 22.

¹⁸ See, for example, William Biddulph, *The trauels of foure English men and a preacher into Africa, Asia, Troy, Bythinia, Thracia, and to the Blacke Sea: and into Syria, Cilicia, Pisidia, Mesopotamia, Damascus, Canaan, Galile, Samaria, Iudea, Palestina, Ierusalem, Iericho, and to the Red Sea: and to sundry other places* (London: Th. Haueland, 1612), pp. 65–66.

¹⁹ Peter Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 65; Andrew Dalby, *Food in the Ancient World from A to Z* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 44; B. D. Shaw, “Eaters of Flesh, Drinkers of Milk,” *Ancient Society* 13/14 (1982–1983): 12–13, 30.

²⁰ Eran Almagor, “Who Is a Barbarian? The Barbarians in the Ethnological and Cultural Taxonomies of Strabo,” in *Strabo’s Cultural Geography: The Making of a Kolossourgia*, eds. Daniela Dueck, Hugh Lindsay, and Sarah Pothecary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 52.

wild plants and the half-raw meat of whatever animal they happen to capture.”²¹

For classical writers, the consumption of meat, domesticated or wild, over bread and wine, was directly connected to a savage, uncivilized state: animal flesh was the food of barbarians. Meat was not of itself inherently barbaric—Greeks and Romans regularly ate it—the issue was the quantities consumed and the ways it was prepared. As Marcelinus suggests, a recurring classical motif was of barbarians who lacked even the rudimentary ability to produce fire, and so ate their foods raw. Claude Lévi-Strauss famously argued that the transformation of food through cooking has represented in many cultures the symbolic dividing line between nature and culture. In their organic, unaltered condition, raw foods are the sustenance of wild animals. In contrast, through human ingenuity and culture, cooking transforms foodstuffs from their natural state, and thus represents a key marker that sets humans apart from animals, and, by extension, civilized peoples from barbarians.²²

This classical binary, which shares suggestive parallels with both Han China and colonial Latin America, where it was believed that civilized food could transform the culture of barbarian peoples,²³ endured into the Middle Ages, and was adapted to its altered political and cultural landscape, particularly following the eruption of Islam onto the postclassical stage.²⁴ Among late medieval thinkers, the bipartite classical division of the world into realms of civilization and barbarity profoundly affected perceptions of their own age. Classical representations of barbarians and medieval attitudes toward Islam were synthesized with the experiences of Greek refugees from the collapsing Byzantine Empire. The result was a shift from depicting Muslims (no longer Moors or Saracens, but now generically characterized as “Turks”) as

²¹ Shaw, “Eaters of Flesh, Drinkers of Milk,” p. 25; Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity*, p. 68.

²² Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1975); Massimo Montanari, “Food Systems and Models of Civilization,” in *Food: A Culinary History*, eds. Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari (New York: Penguin, 1999), pp. 72, 75.

²³ K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean, from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 152; Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 156–186. Also, Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *¡Que Viva Los Tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), pp. 7–44.

²⁴ See, for instance, Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 316; Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo* (New York: Liveright, 1926), p. 91; Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oneworld, 1993), pp. 252–253.

infidel enemies of Christendom to portraying them as the new barbarians, the antithetical enemy of European civilization.²⁵ Indeed, as James Hankins has documented, European humanists devoted much more attention to the "Turkish menace" than they did to more familiar themes such as education or "the dignity of man."²⁶ Ottoman foodways, not surprisingly, played a notable role in these depictions: For instance, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini wrote of the "monstrously unclean" and "hideous diet" of the "Turks," making particular mention of their intemperate consumption of meat of all sorts ranging from horses to vultures. Similar views were articulated by other humanists, including Francesco Filelfo, Jacopo Filippo Foresti, and Niccolò Sagundino.²⁷ These stock views of Ottoman food found their way into the works of many travelers, weaned on humanist educations, who spread throughout Ottoman lands beginning in earnest in the sixteenth century.²⁸

The dichotomy between civility and barbarity situated at the heart of Nicolay's representation of Ottoman foodways is also evident in the writings of another contemporary with a strong classical education, Luigi Bassano. A Venetian subject from Dalmatia, he drew on his eight-year residence in Istanbul as the basis for his influential *Costumi et i modi particolari della vita de' Turchi*, published in 1545. Bassano devotes a chapter to Ottoman cuisine, and includes an extended reflection on bread:

The bread that the Turks ordinarily eat is black and terrible, [and] badly baked, and this is because sometimes they make huge loaves, and place inside cumin seeds, poppy seeds, and thousands of other things, so that on the outside it cooks and inside remains raw, . . . they make another sort of bread that is very slim and long, which even though it is cooked a bit better, is still terrible and burnt. Everything is made

²⁵ Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Christianity and Civilization in Sixteenth Century Ethnological Discourse," in *Shifting Cultures: Interaction and Discourse in the Expansion of Europe*, eds. Henriette Brugge and Joan-Pau Rubiés (Münster: Lit, 1995), p. 42.

²⁶ James Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49 (1995): 112.

²⁷ Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, pp. 69, 75, 81–83, 116; Bisaha, *Creating East and West*, pp. 76–77.

²⁸ Wunder, "Western Travelers, Eastern Antiquities," pp. 91–92; Jás Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Introduction," in *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p. 46. Also Jonathan Haynes, *The Humanist As Traveler: George Sandy's Relation of a Journey Begun A.D. 1610* (Cranbury, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986).

from flour that comes out rough from the mills . . . no one eats good bread unless they have it made at home. The Grand Turk eats the whitest bread it is possible to find, but it [too] is insipid. I ate it and it seemed to me that I had chalk in my mouth. So . . . in all things they have less delicacy than us.²⁹

Like meat, bread—particularly adulterated Ottoman bread—was a recurring theme in many travel accounts;³⁰ the seventeenth-century English traveler Aaron Hill criticized in similar terms its “course [sic], and ill-grounded flour” that was placed in ashes “till they judge ’em bak’d sufficiently, by which means they are very harsh and grating in the teeth, as if some sand had fallen upon them.”³¹

Like Nicolay, Bassano’s condemnation of Ottoman bread as rough, tasteless, lacking delicacy, and simultaneously both burned and undercooked draws on classical notions. Historically, bread represented the bellwether of civilization, the line of demarcation between sedentary agriculturalists and barbaric nomads. In Homer’s writings, “bread eaters” or “flour eaters” were “synonymous with ‘men.’” Grain was the gift of a benevolent deity: Demeter for the Greeks; Ceres for the Romans. Bread was a quintessential example of artifice, a labor-intensive, human-made product in every stage of its production; indeed, the Greek writer Athenaeus identified fully seventy-two different varieties in his *Deipnosophistae*. Along with wine and oil, bread was an essential symbol of civilized human societies and their ability not simply to hunt or gather, but also to master and transform nature by domesticating plants and animals.³²

Bread enjoyed a similarly elevated status during the medieval and

²⁹ Luigi Bassano, *Costumi et i modi particolari della vita de’ Turchi* (Rome: Antonio Blando Asolano, 1545; repr. Munich: Casa editrice Max Hueber, 1963), p. 80.

³⁰ Anna Suranyi, *The Genius of the English Nation: Travel Writing and National Identity in Early Modern England* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), p. 96; Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe*, p. 173; Kármán, “An Ally of Limited Acceptability,” pp. 974–975.

³¹ Aaron Hill, *A full and just account of the present state of the Ottoman empire in all its branches . . .* (London: John Mayo, 1709), p. 118. Also, Ellis Veryard, *An account of divers choice remarks, . . . taken in a journey through the Low-Countries, France, Italy, and part of Spain; with the isles of Sicily and Malta. As also, a voyage to the Levant . . .* (London: S. Smith and B. Walford, 1701), p. 336; Bernard Randolph, *The Present State of the Islands in the Archipelago* (Oxford: Printed at the Theater, 1687), pp. 46–53; Pietro della Valle, *De’ Viaggi di Pietro della Valle il Pellegrino. Descritti da lui medesimo in Lettere familiari. Parte Prima cioè La Turchia* (Rome: Vitale Mascardi, 1650), 1:149–153.

³² Montanari, “Food Systems and Models of Civilization,” pp. 71–72, 75; Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity*, pp. 62–65, 121–22; Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat, *History of Food* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 128, 137; Giovanni Rebora, *The Culture of the Fork: A Brief History of Food in Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 4.

early modern periods. This was partly due to the symbolic significance that Christians attributed to the wheaten host that transubstantiated into the flesh of a deity.³³ As with meat, classical attitudes to bread informed humanist views: Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini wrote that the “Turks” had “never eaten grain,” and Coluccio Salutati denigrated the Ottomans’ “heavy black bread with many kinds of grains mixed into it.”³⁴ Bassano’s disdain for Ottoman bread was also informed by contemporary views on the centrality of bread in a nutritional diet: It was considered the “glue that kept all the other foods in place.”³⁵ The Bolognese physician Baldassare Pisanelli devoted the opening chapter of his 1589 *Trattato de’ cibi, et del bere* to bread, “the best friend of nature,” because “without it we could not live easily or at length.”³⁶ A century earlier, Michele Savonarola similarly described wheat as “the most noble” grain that “sustains our human nature,” and in a passage that anticipates Bassano, warned of the dangers of under-baked bread: It “is very obstructive, it fills the belly, generates gall stones and side pains, and also produces gout.”³⁷

Beyond bread and meat, the quantities of food and drink consumed were another important marker for early modern travelers as they engaged with Ottoman culture more frequently and directly. For instance, it was common in contemporary descriptions of Ottoman sultans to emphasize their unhealthy and immoderate eating habits as evidence of their despotic nature. The most famous example of culinary incontinence was Selim II, known as the Sot. Venetian ambassadorial reports described him as seemingly more a monster than a man: He was short, “meaty,” “extremely ugly,” illiterate, “greedy, sordid, lustful, incontinent, and finally precipitous in every action.” His revolting physical appearance and utter lack of self-control were mirrored by his gluttony and prodigious drinking. Costantino Garzoni reported that Selim drank “a half a carafe of distilled liquor every morning, and also delights in eating, sometimes spending three continual days and three nights at the table.”³⁸ Popular Italian songs of the day satirized Selim as

³³ Montanari, *The Culture of Food*, p. 17; Ken Albala, *Food in Early Modern Europe* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003), pp. 21–22.

³⁴ Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, pp. 100–103; Bisaha, *Creating East and West*, p. 56.

³⁵ Albala, *Food in Early Modern Europe*, p. 219.

³⁶ Baldassare Pisanelli, *Trattato de’ cibi, et del bere* (Carmagnola: Marc’Antonio Bellone, 1589), pp. 1–3.

³⁷ Michel Savonarola, *Libro della natura et virtu delle cose che nutriscono, & delle cose non naturali* (Venice: Domenico, & Gio. Battista Guerra, 1575), pp. 4–5, 10–13.

³⁸ “Relazione di Marcantonio Barbaro,” in *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al senato*, serie III, ed. E. Albèri (Florence: Società editrice fiorentina, 1840), 1:319–320; “Relazione

the “drunk in crimson cloth.”³⁹ Ottoman commentators depicted the sultan in similar terms: Mustafa Ali wrote he “was by day and night . . . found fuddled and drunk by feverish intoxication of wine.” Indeed, some reports attributed Selim’s premature death in 1574 to a fall in which he struck his head on a tile floor while in a drunken stupor.⁴⁰

Other sultans received similar treatment. The barbarity of Selim’s grandson, Mehmed III, was represented as partly a product of his uncivilized diet. When he came to the throne in 1595, it was reported that “he ate no bread, but lived on solid meats, thick soups, sheep’s marrow, and other aphrodisiacs, [and] lay immersed in lust,” which, combined with excessive drinking, contributed to his early death in 1603.⁴¹ A generation later, the premature demise of Murad IV at age twenty-eight was reported to have followed a days-long drinking binge during Ramadan.⁴²

Immoderation in drink was not limited to royalty. Travelers often commented on their perception of the Ottomans’ widespread, hypocritical abuse of wine, what Henry Blount termed the “outrageous drunkenness of the Turkes.”⁴³ Bassano reports that the empire contained numerous taverns run by Christians “where the Turks go all the day, and they enter in the morning and leave late in the evening, and they do nothing else all day long but eat, drink and sleep. There is never a day in Constantinople that drunken Turks are not seen in the streets, and the same is seen . . . in the rest of Turkey.”⁴⁴ Nicolay similarly asserts that despite Islam’s injunction against it, Ottomans drank “so

di Andrea Badoaro,” in *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al senato*, serie III, 1:360–361; “Relazione di Costantino Garzoni,” in *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al senato*, serie III, 1:401–403.

³⁹ Guido Antonio Quarti, *La Battaglia di Lepanto nei canti popolari dell’epoca* (Milan: Istituto editoriale avio-navale, 1930), p. 111.

⁴⁰ Jan Schmidt, *Mustafa ‘Ali’s Kühü’l-Ahbar and Its Preface According to the Leiden Manuscript* (Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut Te Istanbul, 1987), p. 56; S. A. Skilliter, “The Letters of the Venetian ‘Sultana’ Nur Banu and Her Kira to Venice,” in *Studia turcologica memoriae Alexii Bombacii dicta*, eds. Aldo Gallotta and Ugo Marazzi (Naples: Istituto universitario orientale, 1982), pp. 519–520.

⁴¹ James C. Davis, ed., *Pursuit of Power: Venetian Ambassadors’ Reports on Turkey, France, and Spain in the Age of Philip II, 1560–1600* (New York: Harper, 1970), pp. 168–171.

⁴² Giovanni Sagredo, *Memorie Istoriche de Monarchi Ottomani* (Bologna: Gio Ricaldini, 1674), p. 613; “Relazione di Pietro Foscarini,” in *Le Relazioni degli stati europei lette al senato dagli ambasciatori veneziani nel secolo decimosettimo. Turchia*, eds. Niccolò Barozzi and Guglielmo Berchet (Venice: P. Naratovich, 1872), 2:96; Ismail Hami Danismend, *Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi* (Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1961), 3:384–385.

⁴³ Henry Blount, *A Voyage into the Levant . . . with particular observations concerning the moderne condition of the Turks, and other people under that empire*, 2nd ed. (London: Andrew Crooke, 1636; repr., Amsterdam: Norwood Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1977), p. 93.

⁴⁴ Bassano, *Costumi et i modi particolari della vita de’ Turchi*, p. 78.

much [wine] . . . that scarce they are able to beare it.” Overindulgence was “their natural inclynation,” and they drank to such excess that “in going home to their houses the largest & broadest streets in the city are too narrow for them. And are [so] farre from shame and honest civility, that they doe not thinke they have made good cheere, nor attribute any honour unto those that have feasted them, except they bee made beastly drunk. Notwithstanding that by theyr law . . . they are specially forbidden to drinke wine or to bee drunken, wherat they make no great scruple.”⁴⁵

In commenting on what they considered to be widespread alcohol abuse among Muslims, as with bread and meat, European travelers delineated “honest civility” from barbarism by channeling historical notions of civilized consumption. For ancient writers, wine was a product of value-added agriculture, and its use was governed by highly developed cultural norms. There was an etiquette of consumption, with guidelines on the proportion of water to wine depending on the social setting, as well as standards regarding self-restraint and intoxication. Through self-administered moderation, civilized drinkers demonstrated that they were the “master over wine,” and not the reverse. Barbarians, in contrast, were marked by their inability to control their consumption. For Herodotus wine was a civilized drink, and to quaff it “in a Scythian fashion,” meant to drink to excess.⁴⁶ Tacitus noted, “if you indulge [the Germans’] love of drinking by supplying them with as much [wine] as they desire, they will be overcome by their own vices as easily as by the arms of an enemy.”⁴⁷ Homer’s *Odyssey* makes clear the alluring peril of wine for the uncivilized: When the “milk-, cheese- and raw meat-eating cyclops” is exposed for the first time to undiluted wine, he falls into the drunken stupor that results in his blinding.⁴⁸

Drawing on Cicero and Aristotle, Renaissance humanists, including Matteo Palmieri, Cristoforo Landino, and Platina, emphasized the importance of temperance and moderation. In the latter half of the

⁴⁵ Nicolay, *The Navigations into Turkie*, 90v–91r. For other examples, see Jules Ludger Dominique Ghislain, *Missions diplomatiques de Corneille Duplicius de Schepper, dit Scepperus* (Bruxelles: M. Hayez, 1856), p. 180; Ogier de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters* (London: Sickle Moon Books, 2001), p. 6; “Relazione di Angelo Alessandri,” in *Relazioni di ambasciatori veneti al senato*. Vol. XIV. *Costantinopoli. Relazioni Inedite (1512–1789)*, ed. Maria Pia Pedani (Padua: Bottega d’Erasmus, 1996), p. 675; “Relazione di Costantino Garzoni,” in *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al senato*, serie III, 1:398–399.

⁴⁶ Montanari, “Food Systems and Models of Civilization,” p. 71; Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity*, pp. 66–67.

⁴⁷ Tacitus, *Complete Works of Tacitus*, ed. Moses Hadas (New York: Modern Library, 1942), p. 720.

⁴⁸ Dalby, *Food in the Ancient World from A to Z*, p. 44.

sixteenth century, the perils of immoderation were noted in Giovanni della Casa's influential treatise on manners, *Il Galateo*,⁴⁹ and made explicit in the Venetian centenarian Luigi Cornaro's *Discorsi della vita sobria*, "the most widely circulated" early modern treatment of "dietary temperance."⁵⁰ While alcohol in the forms of ale, beer, and wine was widely consumed throughout early modern Europe, in the wine-drinking regions of southern Europe, the classical notion that civil people drank their wine watered down endured. Diluting wine, it was believed, served "to promote temperance" and good health, and to reduce drunkenness.⁵¹ Unsurprisingly, observers noted that Ottomans did not "baptize" their wine like civilized drinkers: The Venetian diplomat Angelo Alessandri reported in 1637 that Murad IV was increasingly dependent on "the vaporous virtue of wine, which he drinks in great quantities without water, as is the practice among the Turks."⁵²

There was a vibrant early modern debate about wine. On the one hand, it was believed to "nourish the body" and to have numerous medicinal and psychological virtues. On the other, wine was considered dangerous because of its capacity to induce irrationality.⁵³ The physician Pisanelli inventoried wine's deleterious effects:

[Wine] greatly wounds the brain, and all the nerves; and thus gives birth to apoplexy, paralysis, lethargy, epilepsy, spasms, and tremors. As for its impact on the soul: wine makes men loquacious, offensive, imprudent, stupid, homicidal, lustful, it corrupts the mind, reduces the spirit, and destroys one's natural, energetic potency: . . . As a result, beyond extinguishing the light of the rational soul, many times it is the cause of unexpected death; . . . when a man is drunk, he is like a ship which is in the middle of the sea with no one at the helm.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Giovanni Della Casa, *Galateo: A Renaissance Treatise on Manners*, trans. Konrad Eisenbichler and Kenneth R. Bartlett (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1994), pp. 89, 93, 95.

⁵⁰ Steven Shapin, "The Philosopher and the Chicken: On the Dietetics of Disembodied Knowledge," in *Science Incarnate: Historical Embodiments of Natural Knowledge*, eds. Christopher Lawrence and Steven Shapin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 33–37; John Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning: The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 52–55.

⁵¹ Martin, "The Baptism of Wine," p. 21; Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance*, p. 121.

⁵² "Relazione di Angelo Alessandri," in Pedani, *Relazioni di ambasciatori veneti al senato*, p. 639.

⁵³ Ken Albala, "To Your Health: Wine as Food and Medicine in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Italy," in *Alcohol: A Social and Cultural History*, ed. Mack P. Holt (Oxford: Berg, 2006), pp. 11–12; Savonarola, *Libro della natura et virtu delle cose che nutriscono*, p. 167; Pisanelli, *Trattato de' cibi, et del bere*, p. 201.

⁵⁴ Pisanelli, *Trattato de' cibi, et del bere*, pp. 221–222.

Similar warnings were sounded by Giovanni Battista Scarlino and Michele Savonarola, who cautioned that “wine drunk in an ill-bred fashion and without measure, makes a man become a beast without reason, and makes him go groping about, now here, now there.” Anticipating Selim the Sot’s demise, Savonarola also warned that drunkards were “in danger of falling like a reckless fellow from some precipitous place.”⁵⁵ Wine was also dangerous because it inflamed desire, or as Robert Greene wrote, “drunkenness desires lust.”⁵⁶ Gulielmo Grataroli, in his 1565 *De vini natura*, warned that wine turns men and women “into irrational beasts” and leads them to “more easily commit debauchery or adultery.”⁵⁷ This linkage led to something of an early modern temperance movement throughout Europe, which shared interesting parallels with efforts by Ottoman⁵⁸ and Safavid⁵⁹ rulers to control the consumption of alcohol, coffee, and tobacco.⁶⁰ In one of the first of many treatises on the matter, in his popular 1528 work, *Concerning the Horrible Vice of Drunkenness*, the radical Protestant Sebastian Franck argued that all consumers of alcohol were “heathens and not Christian.” Most commentators took a more balanced view, calling only for moderation; as a Catalan treatise on wine stated, “if wine is taken in right measures it suits every age, every time, and every region. It truly is most friendly to human nature.”⁶¹

Ottoman immoderation was also evident in the abuse of other intox-

⁵⁵ Savonarola, *Libro della natura et virtu delle cose che nutriscono*, p. 170; Albala, “To Your Health,” p. 19.

⁵⁶ A. Lynn Martin, *Alcohol, Sex, and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 1; Martin, “The Baptism of Wine,” p. 22.

⁵⁷ Albala, “To Your Health,” pp. 16–17.

⁵⁸ On this see Katib Chelebi, *The Balance of Truth* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), pp. 53–58; Robert Dankoff and Sooyong Kim, trans. and eds., *An Ottoman Traveller: Selections from the Book of Travels of Evliya Çelebi* (London: Eland Publishing, 2010), p. 25. Also Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), pp. 29–60; James Grehan, “Smoking and ‘Early Modern’ Sociability: The Great Tobacco Debate in the Ottoman Middle East (Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries),” *American Historical Review* 111 (2006): 1352–1377; Madeline C. Zilfi, “The Kadizadelis: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45 (1986): 254.

⁵⁹ Rudi Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500–1900* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 1–174.

⁶⁰ On anti-tobacco campaigns in Europe and Russia, see Nikolaos A. Chrissidis, “Sex, Drink, and Drugs: Tobacco in Seventeenth-Century Russia,” in *Tobacco in Russian History and Culture: The Seventeenth Century to the Present*, eds. Matthew Romaniello and Tricia Starks (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 26–43.

⁶¹ Mack P. Holt, “Europe Divided: Wine, Beer, and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Europe,” in *Alcohol: A Social and Cultural History*, ed. Mack P. Holt (Oxford: Berg, 2006), pp. 30–32; Martin, “The Baptism of Wine,” p. 25.

icants: In 1579 Carlier de Pinon noted Ottomans “drunk” on hashish,⁶² while others described them as “incredible takers of Opium” and “giddy headed and turbulent dreamers,” who became “so out of square, that they loose both their wits and understanding, for they go reeling about the streets, holding one of another, as the other Drunkardes doe, foming out of the mouth like unto chafed boares, making fierce and terrible cries and howlings like unto doggs.”⁶³ Burgeoning Ottoman coffee and tobacco consumption—mirrored in most of Europe, it should be noted—also attracted increasingly censorious comment.⁶⁴

For early modern travelers to Ottoman lands, not only the foods but also the way they were eaten evoked comment. In his *Libri tre delle cose dei Turchi* (1539), Benedetto Ramberti described the dining habits of the “Turk” as “dirty and very disorderly.” He eats “on the ground . . . and does not have a designated time for this, rather he eats at night, during the day, and always without rules, without style, with no delicacy whatsoever, but rather like animals do.”⁶⁵ The same view was reiterated 160 years later by Ellis Veryard, who complained of having to sit “cross-legg’d like Taylors.”⁶⁶ Philippe du Fresne-Canaye, writing in the mid sixteenth century, reported on one of these differences in food service. His party was “not served à la chrétienne”; rather than dishes being brought to the table individually, all the food was placed on it once at the start of the meal.⁶⁷

The slowly expanding “culture of the fork” in Europe led some travelers to note the lack of utensils and other tableware.⁶⁸ John Covel, chaplain to the English embassy in Istanbul from 1669 to 1677, described

⁶² E. Blochet, “Relation du voyage en Orient de Carlier de Pinon (1579),” *Revue de l’Orient latin* 12 (1909–1911): 329–330.

⁶³ George Sandys, *A relation of a journey begun an: Dom: 1610: Foure bookes. Containing a description of the Turkish Empire, of Ægypt, of the Holy Land, of the remote parts of Italy, and ilands adioyning*, 3rd ed. (London: Ro Allot, 1627), pp. 65–66; Pedro Teixeira, *The Travels of Pedro Teixeira*, trans. William F. Sinclair (London: Hakluyt, 1902), pp. 200–201; Hill, *A full and just account of the present state of the Ottoman empire*, pp. 123–124; Nicolay, *The Navigations into Turkie*, p. 91r–v.

⁶⁴ della Valle, *De’ Viaggi*, 1:149–155; Daniel J. Vitkus, *Piracy, Slavery and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 235–237.

⁶⁵ Benedetto Ramberti, *Libri tre delle cose dei Turchi* (Venice: Aldus, 1539), p. 28r–v.

⁶⁶ Veryard, *An account of divers choice remarks*, pp. 343–344.

⁶⁷ Philippe du Fresne-Canaye, *Le Voyage du Levant*, ed. M. H. Hauser (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1897; repr. Ferrières: Editions de Poliphile, 1986), p. 63.

⁶⁸ Rebora, *The Culture of the Fork*, pp. 14–17; Fernand Braudel, *Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), pp. 205–207.

eating a meal at the divan as going to battle with the “wooden artillery of the spoon,” while a Polish diplomat compared an imperial meal without knives to a “scratching party.”⁶⁹ Writing in 1709, Aaron Hill claimed that the Ottomans eat “so thoroughly boil’d or roasted, that they tear with ease what part they chuse, by the assistance of their Fingers, eating last of all the Plates [flat breads] themselves, as did Aeneas and his newly landed Trojans [as] described by Virgil.”⁷⁰

The timing of the meal, the way it was served, the seating and the utensils, all seemed, as Ramberti stated, “rather like animals”—that is, a less civilized manner of eating that was closer to the state of nature than to that of human culture.⁷¹ These descriptions had a classical and humanist genealogy too. Strabo and Posidonius depicted Gauls eating like animals, seated on “beds of straw.” Hill’s description of Ottomans tearing at meat with their fingers paralleled classical accounts of barbarians eating “like lions . . . grasping whole joints with both hands and biting them off the bone,”⁷² and his evocation of Trojan eating habits echoed earlier humanist debates over the Ottomans’ supposed Trojan origins.⁷³ Reflections on Ottoman table manners were also no doubt inspired, in part, by the evolving sense of *civilité* linked to social performance and graces, and table manners that tempered humans’ natural functions and distinguished them from animals.⁷⁴

As this survey has suggested, early modern travelers made extensive use of foodways as a means to organize and understand the culturally rich and diverse Mediterranean world that they encountered. In

⁶⁹ J. Theodore Bent, ed., *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant* (London: Hakluyt, 1893), pp. 260–263; 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*, eds. Suraiya Faroqhi and Christoph Neumann (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2003), pp. 55–57. Also Robert Elsie, *Early Albania* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003), pp. 78–79.

⁷⁰ Hill, *A full and just account of the present state of the Ottoman empire*, p. 118.

⁷¹ Ramberti, *Libri tre delle cose dei Turchi*, p. 28r–v.

⁷² Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity*, p. 67; Shaw, “Eaters of Flesh, Drinkers of Milk,” p. 24.

⁷³ Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, pp. 22–64; Bisaha, *Creating East and West*, pp. 68–93; James G. Harper, “Turks as Trojans; Trojans as Turks: Visual Imagery of the Trojan War and the Politics of Cultural Identity in Fifteenth-Century Europe,” in *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*, eds. Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 151–179.

⁷⁴ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon, 1978), pp. 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), pp. 14–17.

response to Brillat-Savarin's query with which this article began, for some travelers, if what you consumed was crude and simple meat, badly baked bread, and wine to excess while sitting on the ground and eating without a fork, then you were a Turk and the latest in a long line of barbarians from the East.

Brillat-Savarin's aphorism has become an article of faith in food studies, a dogma that is often axiomatically and uncritically embraced. Scholars such as Jean-Louis Flandrin and Stephen Mennell have argued that components of nascent "national" cuisines began to appear in the late Middle Ages, and certainly as the examples catalogued above illustrate, there is no question that foodways functioned as a meaningful boundary and marker of identity in the early modern era.⁷⁵ We must be cautious, however, of projecting modern "food nationalism," with its tendency to employ cuisine to mark national boundaries, onto pre-modern society. The tendency toward caricature and the exoticism of "extreme cultural contrasts" is a very real danger, both in contemporary accounts and in modern scholarly treatments.⁷⁶ As Anna Suranyi has perceptibly noted, however, early modern travelers often depicted unfamiliar foodways as if they "were representative of uniform national practices," and thus broadly characteristic of peoples and cultures they encountered, despite the fact that significant local variations in food cultures existed and the idea of nation was only beginning to evolve toward its modern connotation.⁷⁷ In the remainder of this essay, I will argue that the uncritical or exaggerated emphasis on the ways in which food functions in constructing boundaries and defining identities can obscure and oversimplify the complex and multivalent ways that food functions in transcultural contexts. This is apparent in the early modern Mediterranean, where overemphasis on rhetorical constructions of

⁷⁵ Patricia Clark, "Cookbooks, Cuisine, Nationalisms: A Study of National Cuisine, Nation Building, and Gender Formation through Black Nationalist Discourse," in *Gendering Global Transformations: Gender, Culture, Race, and Identity*, eds. Chima J. Korieh and Philomena Okeke-Ihejirka (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 52; J.-L. Flandrin, "Différence et différenciation des goûts: Réflexion sur quelques exemples européens entre le 14^{ème} et le 18^{ème} siècle," in *National and Regional Styles of Cookery: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, 1981* (London: Prospect Books, 1981), pp. 191–207.

⁷⁶ Richard Tapper and Sami Zubaida, "Introduction," in *A Taste of Thyme: Culinary Cultures of the Middle East* (New York: Tauris Parke, 2000), pp. 9, 11; Stephen Mennell, "Divergences and Convergences in the Development of Culinary Cultures," *European Food History: A Research Review* (1992): 280–281; Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 294.

⁷⁷ Suranyi, *The Genius of the English Nation*, p. 86.

a bipartite sea of antagonism can shroud connections and commonalities in the region’s richly nuanced culinary culture.

Post-Orientalist scholars have, in recent years, fundamentally challenged the notion of an early modern Mediterranean severed along stark religious, political, and cultural lines. They have instead shown the depth and complexity of similar patterns, practices, and experiences in the region in areas such as architecture, cartography, science, and military technologies, as well as in social norms, economic vicissitudes, political challenges and responses, and popular cultural attitudes toward gender and religion.⁷⁸ Instead of the seemingly timeless, unwavering antagonism between Christendom and Islam characteristic of an earlier generation of scholarship, recent research has shown the dynamism and rich complexity of relations within the Mediterranean. A foundational figure in this shift, and also a pioneering food historian, Maxime Rodinson, has argued that Muslims and Christians had a much more complicated understanding of each other that is not easily reduced to a single, simple image of a “barbarous monster,” and has likewise insisted that their views and understanding of each other experienced significant change and variation over time.⁷⁹ Recent scholarship has shown that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “multiple, diversified, incoherent and sometimes even paradoxical images” of the Ottomans and of Islam coexisted, sometimes within the same individual, and that these were influenced by both “mythical and perceptible reality.”⁸⁰ In addition, there is a growing body of transnational food scholarship that suggests that overemphasizing “the ideological uses of food” can obscure the much more elaborate ways in which foodways change and adapt.⁸¹ So, for example, the classical

⁷⁸ Eric R. Dursteler, “On Bazaars and Battlefields: Recent Scholarship on Mediterranean Cultural Contacts,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 15 (2011): 413–434.

⁷⁹ Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), p. 8; David R. Blanks, “Western Views of Islam in the Premodern Period: A Brief History of Past Approaches,” in *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other*, eds. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), pp. 40–41; Daniel J. Vitkus, “Early Modern Orientalism: Representations of Islam in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe,” in *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other*, Blanks and Frassetto, eds. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), pp. 219, 225.

⁸⁰ Aslı Çırakman, *From the “Terror of the World” to the “Sick Man of Europe” : European Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), p. 185.

⁸¹ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, “Five Hundred Years of Fusion: Histories of Food in the Iberian World,” in *Writing Food History: A Global Perspective*, ed. Kyri Claflin and W. Peter Scholliers (New York: Berg, 2012), p. 99.

food myths embraced by some of the travelers referenced here created an imagined and exaggerated binary between civilized and barbarian foods, which masked many common practices and even tastes. These distinctions in turn served to fuel imperial and cultural ideologies, rather than accurately describing actual realities.⁸²

This is evident in the ways in which travelers negotiated diverse foodways. While they often responded in familiar, even redundant ways to Ottoman cuisine, we should be cautious in generalizing some sort of pan-European food culture set off in binary opposition to Eastern, Muslim, or Ottoman foodways. The reality is, of course, that there was tremendous variety among travelers hailing from various regions of Europe, both in their own foodways and in their response to the foods they encountered in their peregrinations.⁸³ And in the same vein, Ottoman scholars have emphasized the rich “multicultural and multiethnic” character of Ottoman cuisine.⁸⁴ Some travelers tended toward superficiality in their treatments, relying on ample borrowing from earlier accounts, and there was a distinct tendency toward “ideological constructions” rather than accurate description. Thus, foodways that were common to both a culture that was perceived as admirable or acceptable, and a culture that was detested or feared were often interpreted according to very different matrices that were firmly rooted in cultural preconceptions and prejudices. In other words, judgment was predetermined, and actual observation of foodways was forced to conform to preexisting cultural notions.⁸⁵

It is important to emphasize, too, that travelers’ responses to foodways can be charted along a broad spectrum. While some denounced the proclivity of “Turks” to drunkenness, others noted their abstinence, indeed sometimes the same traveler might comment on both.⁸⁶ Selim II’s insobriety was invariably set off against the abstemiousness of his father, Suleiman the Magnificent, who was noted for being “very sober in his diet, eating little meat [and only] rarely,” and drink-

⁸² Massimo Montanari, “Romans, Barbarians, Christians: The Dawn of European Food Culture,” in Flandrin and Montanari, eds., *Food*, pp. 165–166.

⁸³ Çırakman, *From the “Terror of the World,”* p. 40.

⁸⁴ Özge Samancı, “Food Studies in Ottoman-Turkish Historiography,” in Claflin and Scholliers, eds., *Writing Food History*, pp. 112–113.

⁸⁵ Suranyi, *The Genius of the English Nation*, p. 87.

⁸⁶ J. B. Tavernier, *Les six voyages de Turquie et de Perse*, ed. Stéphane Yerasimos (Paris: François Maspero, 1981), 1:266; Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, pp. 34, 122–123. Also, Suranyi, “Seventeenth-Century English Travel Literature,” pp. 141–142.

ing only "very delicate waters."⁸⁷ Overindulgence was also not solely an Ottoman or Muslim vice; indeed, beginning in the sixteenth century alcohol consumption and inebriation "increased everywhere" in Europe.⁸⁸ This attracted extensive comment, especially among Italian and Spanish observers, whose cultures considered drunkenness uncivilized and bad form.⁸⁹ Thus travelers from these regions condemned the habits of the English and Poles, but especially the Germans, who were variously known among Italian commentators for their "barbarous habit" and "the common vice of all, which is drinking and getting drunk."⁹⁰ The young Venetian traveler Alessandro Magno was stunned by the "three, and four full hours" Germans spent at the table after dinner, drinking themselves into oblivion, which was followed up with more drink first thing in the morning.⁹¹ The author of *Il Galateo* "thank[ed] God that with all the other plagues that have come to us from across the mountains, this most foul one of enjoying the act of getting drunk not only as a sport but also as a glory has not yet reached us."⁹² This familiar trope of the drunken German was widely shared by other European observers,⁹³ and it had ancient roots, as we have seen, but was also common among the Germans themselves; Luther described the Germans as "swill[ing] without stopping."⁹⁴ The Dutch too were roundly criticized for their drunkenness; indeed, the drunk Dutch sailor or coachman was a recurring trope in the literature of the day.⁹⁵

In the same vein, barbarous consumption of meat was not only an

⁸⁷ "Relazione di Bernardo Navagero," in *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al senato*, serie III, 1:72.

⁸⁸ Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life*, pp. 236–237; Montanari, *The Culture of Food*, pp. 122–123.

⁸⁹ Suranyi, *The Genius of the English Nation*, pp. 86, 88; Maczak, *Travel in Early Modern Europe*, p. 58.

⁹⁰ "Relazione di Michele Soriano," in *Relazioni di ambasciatori veneti al senato*, vol. 2, *Germania*, ed. Luigi Firpo (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1970), 2:864. Also, Marin Sanudo, *I Diarii (1496–1533): Pagine Scelte* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 1997), p. 58.

⁹¹ Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., V.a. 259, Alessandro Magno, *Relazione del viaggio di Cipro, di quell'isola, e di altri viaggi fino al ritorno in Venezia di un Patrizio Veneto*, cc. 191v–192r.

⁹² Della Casa, *Galateo*, p. 95.

⁹³ Suranyi, "Seventeenth-Century English Travel Literature," p. 130.

⁹⁴ Montanari, *The Culture of Food*, pp. 10–11.

⁹⁵ Maczak, *Travel in Early Modern Europe*, p. 58. See also Thomas Palmer, *An essay of the meanes how to make our trauales, into forraine countries, the more profitable and honourable* (London: Mathew Lownes, 1606), pp. 63–64, 67.

Ottoman trait; the Venetian ambassador to England, Giacomo Soranzo, described the Irish as “in great part savage” because they went barefoot year-round and ate “bloody meat, which they roast on a wooden spit, or boil.”⁹⁶ Not surprisingly, motivated by colonial ideologies, English travelers were especially harsh in their representations of Irish foodways, accusing them of eating nearly raw meat and not having even rudimentary bread, eating instead oat cakes, all of which was consumed while squatting on the ground in filthy conditions.⁹⁷ Giovanni Botero, drawing on the widespread fascination with cannibalism in the early modern world, took this barbarous consumption of meat to the extreme and made the “savage” Irish into cannibals who “esteemed as praiseworthy the eating of their dead parents.”⁹⁸

The views of western European travelers venturing into Ottoman lands should also be understood within the context of what one scholar has described as the “idiosyncrasies of taste”⁹⁹—that is, the seemingly obvious but often ignored reality that not every traveler was possessed of the same tastes. Where some travelers found Ottoman bread insipid, others found it delicate and delicious; the astute observer Ottaviano Bon, who spent five years as Venetian *bailo* in Istanbul in the early seventeenth century, described the bread he ate as “light, and spongy, and easy of digestion.”¹⁰⁰ More experienced and attentive observers, as opposed to oftentimes transitory travelers, often provided significantly more nuanced descriptions of Ottoman foodways. For example, the Croatian Bartholomeus Georgewitz, who spent thirteen years as a slave in the Ottoman Empire, wrote extensively about Ottoman culinary practices. He described Ottoman bread as “not bad” and “like ours.” To be sure, he noted, there were differences, but he attempted to explain and contextualize, rather than condemn: “they sprinkle a certain seed called (Suffam) on top, then they bake it. This gives it a great sweet-

⁹⁶ “Relazione di Giacomo Soranzo,” in *Relazioni di ambasciatori veneti al senato*, vol. 1, *Inghilterra*, ed. Luigi Firpo (Turin: Bottega d’Erasmus, 1965), 1:315.

⁹⁷ Suranyi, *The Genius of the English Nation*, pp. 94–97.

⁹⁸ Piero Camporesi, *Bread of Dreams: Food and Fantasy in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 53; 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), p. 87.

⁹⁹ Suranyi, *The Genius of the English Nation*, p. 88; J.-L. Flandarin, “Distinction through Taste,” in *A History of Private Life*, Vol. 3, *Passions of the Renaissance*, ed. Roger Chartier (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 292–294.

¹⁰⁰ Ottaviano Bon, *The Sultan’s Seraglio: An Intimate Portrait of Life at the Ottoman Court* (London: Saqi Books, 1996), pp. 94, 98–99; Giovanantonio Menavino, *I cinque libri della legge, religione, et vita de’ turchi* (Venice: n.p. 1548), pp. 241–242.

ness to whoever eats it. And this is not done in any place of our people, except in Spain, and then only in certain places, namely the kingdom of Granada, and around Seville."¹⁰¹ He noted the Ottoman consumption of meat, but in contrast to Nicolay, he held that "they use great artifice, and various condiments" in its preparation. Georgewitz also dedicated a lengthy passage to the great variety of delicious Ottoman beverages.¹⁰² In the same vein, after several years' residence in the sultan's seraglio around the turn of the sixteenth century, Giovanantonio Menavino tried to emphasize the similarities over the differences between Ottoman and Italian foodways. After lauding Ottoman teetotaling, he concluded, "since the Turks are mortal like we are, and of the same flesh, and children of God, so they live like us on the same things he created for the sustenance of human bodies, and necessary for their health. Thus the Turks live on bread similar to ours."¹⁰³

In the same way that foodways were used to draw stark differences between generic notions of Ottomans and Europeans, Muslims and Christians, it was also mobilized within these same communities to draw distinctions among themselves.¹⁰⁴ In early modern Europe, in fact, the reformation threw its various food cultures into confusion and saw deepening divides between them.¹⁰⁵ Flandrin has shown how bread preoccupied many travelers within Europe. In his sample, German, Swiss, and Scandinavian travelers made only passing mention of bread, while Italian, English, and especially French travelers provided much more detailed, often critical, commentary on the bread they ate. The addition of spices, salt, garlic, and other supplements, as in Ottoman bread, attracted critical comment. In Italy this was called *pane papaverino* or *pane adulterato*, and it was widely consumed by the poor. For these travelers, "darkness, weight, poor baking and indigestibility were the principal defects of bad bread" and they likewise were a sign of the "poverty and barbarity of a population."¹⁰⁶

This is evident in the reflections on French peasant foodways of

¹⁰¹ Camporesi, *Bread of Dreams*, pp. 17–18, 137–149.

¹⁰² [Bartholomaeus Gyorjevic], *Prophetia de Maometani, et altre cose Turchesche*, trans. Lodovico Domenchi (Florence: 1548).

¹⁰³ Menavino, *I cinque libri della legge, religione, et vita de' turchi*, pp. 83–85.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Launay, "Tasting the World: Food in Early European Travel Narratives," *Food and Foodways* 11 (2003): 42; Martin, "The Baptism of Wine," p. 21.

¹⁰⁵ Montanari, *The Culture of Food*, pp. 113–114.

¹⁰⁶ J.-L. Flandrin, "La diversité des goûts et des pratiques alimentaires en Europe du XVIe au XVIIe siècle," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 30 (1983): 77; Camporesi, *Bread of Dreams*, pp. 17–18, 137–149.

the seventeenth-century English traveler Peter Heylyn, who seems to be channeling Nicolay and Bassano. So impoverished was the the French peasantry that the only meat they ate was “now and then the inwards of Beasts killed for the Gentlemen”; their bread was “of the coursest flowre, and so black, that it cannot admit the name of brown. And as for their drink, they have recourse to the next Fountain.”¹⁰⁷

As Heylyn suggests, in addition to cultural differences, socio-economic factors also factored into the equation. Foodways differed from city to countryside. In urban settings wheat bread was the norm, whereas rural peasants ate bread made of chestnuts, lupins, or whatever was available, which “grew whiter as it rose through the social scale.”¹⁰⁸ The manner of eating often differed according to estate as well: A seventeenth-century French traveler reported dining “with a family of Tyrolean cow-herds” who gave him “the best of their seats, in other words an upturned basin” while they sat on the ground, with “no cloth, napkins, knives, forks, nor spoons.”¹⁰⁹

The use of foodways to demarcate boundaries within Christian Europe is especially evident in the case of Spain, which functioned, according to Barbara Fuchs, as an Orient for much of the rest of Europe. In 1650 James Howell warned the potential traveler that “in Spaine he must be much more carefull of his diet.”¹¹⁰ Antonio di Ferrariis, the Neapolitan humanist known as Il Galateo, held the Spanish responsible for “introducing a whole range of emasculating behaviors to Italy, including excessively refined food, a wan and tearful mode of singing, soft beds, the use of ointments and perfumes, and so forth.”¹¹¹ The seventeenth-century French noblewoman Madame d’Aulnoy noted repeatedly the Spanish practice of women and children eating seated on the floor, something she tried herself with limited success. While she enjoyed some things she ate, she had harsh criticism for much Spanish food, including some bread that was “white enough, and

¹⁰⁷ John Lough, *France Observed in the Seventeenth Century by British Travellers* (Stocksfield, Northumberland: Oriel Press, 1984), p. 36.

¹⁰⁸ Raffaella Sarti, “The Material Conditions of Family Life,” in *Family Life in Early Modern Times 1500–1789: The History of the European Family*, trans. Caroline Beamish, ed. David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 16.

¹⁰⁹ Sarti, “The Material Conditions of Family Life,” pp. 13, 15.

¹¹⁰ James Howell, *Instructions and directions for forren travell* (London: Humphrey Mosley, 1650), p. 31.

¹¹¹ Barbara Fuchs, *Exotic Nation: Maurophilia and the Construction of Early Modern Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 20–21.

sweet, . . . but it is ill wrought, and so little baked, that it is as heavy as Lead in the Stomach.”¹¹²

Beyond how foodways segregated, however, it is worth considering the ways they may have transcended boundaries. Scholarship of Mediterranean connectedness has emphasized certain environmental factors that linked the sea, including a dependence on what Braudel termed the “eternal trinity” of wheat, olives, and vines.¹¹³ This suggestive notion has not been pursued beyond the general level of commodity, however, and our contemporary concept of a rather imprecisely defined Mediterranean diet. The question remains, To what degree we can speak of a cuisine that transcended the region’s many boundaries or, at the least, certain shared commodities, tastes, assumptions, and practices, and what insights may these provide into broader questions of early modern food culture?

So, for example, travelers to the Ottoman Empire disliked some things they ate, but enjoyed others. Nicolay was unimpressed by much of what he was served in Istanbul, but he did enjoy and praise “pies of minced meate, and rice dressed with butter and almonds very savorie and good to the taste”; another traveler criticized the very same pies as “indifferently bak’d,” and filled with so much “garlick, that the strongest appetite of France it self, could scarce digest them.”¹¹⁴ Some English travelers enjoyed Ottoman meat, particularly the mutton, and in the late seventeenth century John Burbury was impressed by the “tender meats” that were “smoked with perfumes.”¹¹⁵ The Jesuit Père Avril undercut distinct culinary boundaries by noting that Venetians and Ottomans “prepare their meats and their pastries” in a similar fashion,¹¹⁶ anticipating the growing body of scholarly literature that attempts to illustrate culinary linkages and influences within the Mediterranean.¹¹⁷ Ottoman kebabs attracted praise, as did the much

¹¹² Madame d’Aulnoy, *The ingenious and diverting letters of the Lady—travels into Spain* (London: Samuel Crouch, 1697), pp. 46–47, 133–134.

¹¹³ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper, 1972), 1:235–236.

¹¹⁴ Nicolay, *The Navigations into Turkie*, pp. 90r–92v; Hill, *A full and just account of the present state of the Ottoman empire*, p. 118.

¹¹⁵ Suranyi, *The Genius of the English Nation*, p. 99.

¹¹⁶ Père Philippe Avril, *Voyage en divers Etats d’Europe, et d’Asie entrepris pour decouvrir un nouveau chemin à la Chine* (Paris: Jean Boudot, 1692), pp. 50–51, 342.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Maxime Rodinson, Arthur John Arberry, and Charles Perry, eds., *Medieval Arab Cookery: Essays and Translations* (Devon: Prospect Books, 2001); and the fascinating but problematic Clifford A. Wright, *A Mediterranean Feast: The Story of the Birth of the Celebrated Cuisines of the Mediterranean, from the Merchants of Venice to the Barbary Corsairs* (New York: William Morrow, 1999).

commented upon beverage called sherbet, which Lithgow described as “exceeding delectable in the taste.”¹¹⁸ Eating seated on the ground did not necessarily equate with uncleanness, and it was viewed by some travelers as benignly exotic and simply different, not a sign of inferiority. The sixteenth-century Frenchman Christophe Richer, for example, remarked on being served a meal on the ground, but emphasized the Ottomans’ “cleanliness . . . in drinking and eating.”¹¹⁹ If they did not use cutlery, many travelers nonetheless noted admiringly the Ottomans’ careful hand washing before meals and their use of elaborate napkins,¹²⁰ something Il Galateo recommended as essential for a civil meal.¹²¹ And indeed, the adoption of the fork was very slow in Western Europe, too; in France “it was uncommon even at court” into the eighteenth century.¹²²

Another aspect of this transcendent food culture is the transmission of specific food preparations, illustrated by the example of recipe exchange in a fascinating manuscript in the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Granville family’s intergenerational cookbook, which includes several recipes written in Spanish by acquaintances from the time one family member spent in Cadiz as the English consul,¹²³ or in Giacomo Castelvetro’s 1614 manuscript, *The Fruit, Herbs and Vegetables of Italy*, which was prepared for the Countess of Bedford.¹²⁴ The transmission of foods and preparations may well have grown out of the common practice of both formal and even more often informal feasting and hosting, which was an important part of diplomatic activity throughout the region.¹²⁵ Indeed, the exaggerated focus on diversity and conflict at the

¹¹⁸ Hill, *A full and just account of the present state of the Ottoman empire*, p. 118; William Lithgow, *The totall discourse, of the rare adventures, and painefull peregrinations of long nineteene yeares trauales from Scotland, to the most famous kingdomes in Europe, Asia, and Affrica . . .* (London: I. Okes, 1640), pp. 151–152.

¹¹⁹ Christophe Richer, *Des Costumes et Manieres de Vivre des Turcs* (Alton: Benoit Rigaud and Jean Saugrain, 1558), p. 8; Menavino, *I cinque libri della legge, religione, et vita de’ turchi*, p. 242.

¹²⁰ Gerry Oberling and Grace Martin Smith, *The Food Culture of the Ottoman Palace* (Istanbul: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture, 2001), pp. 82–87; Palmer, *An essay of the meanes*, p. 63.

¹²¹ Della Casa, *Galateo*, p. 95.

¹²² Sarti, “The Material Conditions of Family Life,” pp. 13, 15.

¹²³ Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., V.a. 430, *Cookery and medicinal recipes of the Granville family, ca. 1640–ca. 1750*, cc. 101–123.

¹²⁴ Giacomo Castelvetro, *The Fruit, Herbs and Vegetables of Italy: An Offering to Lucy, Countess of Bedford*, trans. and intro. Gillian Riley (London: Viking, 1989).

¹²⁵ Maria Pia Pedani, “The Sultan and the Venetian Bailo: Ceremonial Diplomatic Protocol in Istanbul,” *Diplomatisches Zeremoniell in Europa und im Mittleren Osten in der Frühen*

Mediterranean table obscures the many instances of shared, convivial food experiences. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, for instance, describes a meal he attended as a “mélange de nations” comprising “Latin, French, German, English, Dutch, Italian, Portuguese, Persian, Turkish, Arabic, Indian, Syrian, and Malaysian” individuals who gathered around a table, broke bread together, and engaged in pleasant conversation.¹²⁶ The seventeenth-century Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi similarly mentions a “sumptuous feast . . . full of culinary delights, . . . their delicate odors perfuming the brains of those attending” that he enjoyed at the table of a Kurdish khan.¹²⁷ Dining with Ottomans and other members of Istanbul’s international community was an essential part of Venetian diplomacy in the city; indeed, so constant was the flow of individuals that several ambassadors described their embassy as a “continual tavern” in which three or four food services were prepared daily. Other similar shared social experiences shared over were common in the Ottoman capital and throughout the region as well.¹²⁸

The experience of the communal table is essential to a balanced understanding of foodways in the early modern Mediterranean and suggests how these can destabilize the broad cultural borders that are often superimposed onto the Middle Sea, as well as complicating binary notions of encounter with Islam. There is no question that a vibrant, long-lived tradition of “othering” Ottomans and Islam through food persisted throughout this period. Many travelers made much of unfamiliar aspects of the foodways they observed and used these to articulate and preserve binary boundaries between East and West, Islam and Christianity, civility and barbarity. This is not the whole story, however. There was not a single, monochromatic view shared by all European travelers into the Mediterranean or, for that matter, Ottoman travelers. There existed a wide spectrum of reactions to Ottoman foodways rooted in classical and contemporary views, and these were

Neuzeit, ed. Ralph Kauz, Giorgio Rota, and Jan Paul Niederkorn (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), pp. 287–299; 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 Voogh (Farnham, Surrey, U.K.: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 111–115; Oberling and Smith, *The Food Culture of the Ottoman Palace*, *passim*.

¹²⁶ Tavernier, *Les six voyages*, 1:272.

¹²⁷ Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis: The Relevant Section of the Seyahatname*, ed. and trans. Robert Dankoff (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), pp. 117–119.

¹²⁸ Eric R. Dursteler, “‘A Continual Tavern in My House’: Food and Diplomacy in Early Modern Constantinople,” in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Joseph Connors*, ed. Machtelt Israëls and Louis A. Waldman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 2:168.

“differently defined” by both producers and observers.¹²⁹ The very same foodways that were marks of the barbarity of the other were also used to sketch internal differences within cultural, political, and religious communities. There was also a wide range of responses to differing foodways: What was criticized by one observer was often embraced by another. The elasticity of European travelers’ depictions of foodways that they experienced within the Muslim Mediterranean, in short, can be attributed to a number of factors, from personal tastes, to ideological stances, to interested attempts at accurate, ethnographic observations.

¹²⁹ Kyri W. Clafin, “Food among the Historians: Early Modern Europe,” in Clafin and Scholliers, eds., *Writing Food History*, p. 53.