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ÜRETİM

Artuklu Tourism Studies

Osmanlı Saray Mutfağı Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme

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Geliş Tarihi/Submission 18 Ekim 2025
Kabul Tarihi/Acceptance 17 Kasım 2025
Yayın Tarihi/Publication 30 Kasım 2025

Atıf Bilgisi

Demir, Ö. (2025). An evaluation of the ottoman palace cuisine. *Artuklu Tourism Studies*, 3, 56-64.

Özet

Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun geniş sınırları içindeki kültürel çeşitlilik, Osmanlı saray mutfağına da yansımış, zengin ve dikkat çekici bir mutfak kültürü ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu çalışma, Osmanlı mutfağına ilişkin mevcut literatürü, özellikle Osmanlı saray mutfağına odaklanarak incelemektedir. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun coğrafyası, tarihi ve kültürüne kısaca değinerek, bu faktörlerin mutfak kültürü üzerindeki etkisi incelenmektedir. Araştırma kapsamında incelenen mevcut literatürden elde edilen bulgular, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun sınırlarının genişlemesi, bu sınırlar içindeki farklı inanç ve etnik grupların bir arada yaşamalarının Osmanlı saray mutfağı üzerinde olumlu bir etkisi olduğunu göstermektedir. Ancak Osmanlı Saray Mutfağı ve padişah sofraları ile ilgili kaynakların kısıtlı olduğunu belirten araştırmalarda ayrıca döneme ait tarif kitaplarının yetersiz olduğu da belirtilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı Mutfağı, Saray Mutfağı, Osmanlı Saray Mutfağı, Topkapı Sarayı Mutfağı, Matbah-ı Amire.

An Evaluation of the Ottoman Palace Cuisine

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Date of Submission 18 October 2025
Date of Acceptance 17 November 2025
Date of Publication 30 November 2025

Citation

Demir, Ö. (2025). An evaluation of the ottoman palace cuisine. *Artuklu Tourism Studies*, 3, 56-64.

Abstract

The cultural diversity within the vast borders of the Ottoman Empire was reflected in the Ottoman Palace kitchen, resulting in a rich and remarkable culinary culture. This study reviews the existing literature on Ottoman cuisine, with particular focus on Ottoman palace cuisine. It briefly addresses the geography, history, and culture of the Ottoman Empire to examine the influence of these factors on culinary culture. Findings from the existing literature reviewed within the scope of the research suggest that the expansion of the Ottoman Empire's borders and the coexistence of diverse faiths and ethnic groups within these borders had a positive impact on the Ottoman palace cuisine. However, studies indicating that recipe books from the period are insufficient also note the limited availability of sources on Ottoman palace cuisine and the sultans' tables.

Keywords: Ottoman Cuisine, Palace Cuisine, Ottoman Palace Cuisine, Topkapı Palace Cuisine, Matbah-ı Amire.

Introduction

The Ottoman Empire, which ruled over vast territories across three continents for approximately six centuries, encompassed a multitude of nations spread over diverse climates (Sandıkçıoğlu, 2018: 11). While the Ottoman Empire achieved a magnificent wealth of its own, its culinary culture also reflected the same magnificence and richness (Yalçın and Mankan, 2024: 36).

The conquest of Istanbul marked the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the New Age, and it was also significant for the development of Ottoman cuisine (Tariñç, Yıldırım, and Kılınc, 2019: 3047). Parallel to the Ottoman Empire's expansion, diversity and innovation flourished in its cuisine, while also preserving its traditional structure (Solmaz, 2018: 75-76). Cuisine was highly valuable to Ottoman palace life; for the sultan and the high nobility, gathering around a table was a means of socialization. Consequently, the palace became a setting where rich and refined dishes were developed, embracing innovation (Solmaz and Dülger Altın, 2018: 114).

While the kitchen structures of Topkapı Palace have survived to the present day, those of Edirne, Çırağan, and Beylerbeyi Palaces have unfortunately been lost to history (Gürsoy, 2013: 93). Therefore, despite this limitation concerning the palace kitchens of former capitals, numerous documents providing information about the kitchens of the New Palace built in Istanbul have survived to the present day (Bilgin, 2021: 92). As palace kitchens served the large population of the palace, they inevitably exhibited a far greater variety, quality, extravagance, and order than an ordinary kitchen, and therefore more rules, organizational structure, and hierarchy (Özer and Atay, 2022: 469). Ottoman palace cuisine experienced its most rapid development during the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror (Baysal, 1993: 38), when the sultan commissioned new kitchens for Topkapı Palace in the second half of the 15th century (Hatipoğlu, 2014: 65). During this period, each kitchen was overseen by a different chef, and the competition among them encouraged the development of increasingly refined and flavorful dishes (Oktay, 2018: 95).

This research, focusing on Ottoman Palace Cuisine, was designed as a compilation study. The research briefly addresses the geography, history, and culture of the Ottoman Empire, exploring the influence of these factors on culinary culture. The research also includes a conclusion and evaluation section based on research conducted on Ottoman Cuisine/Ottoman Palace Cuisine.

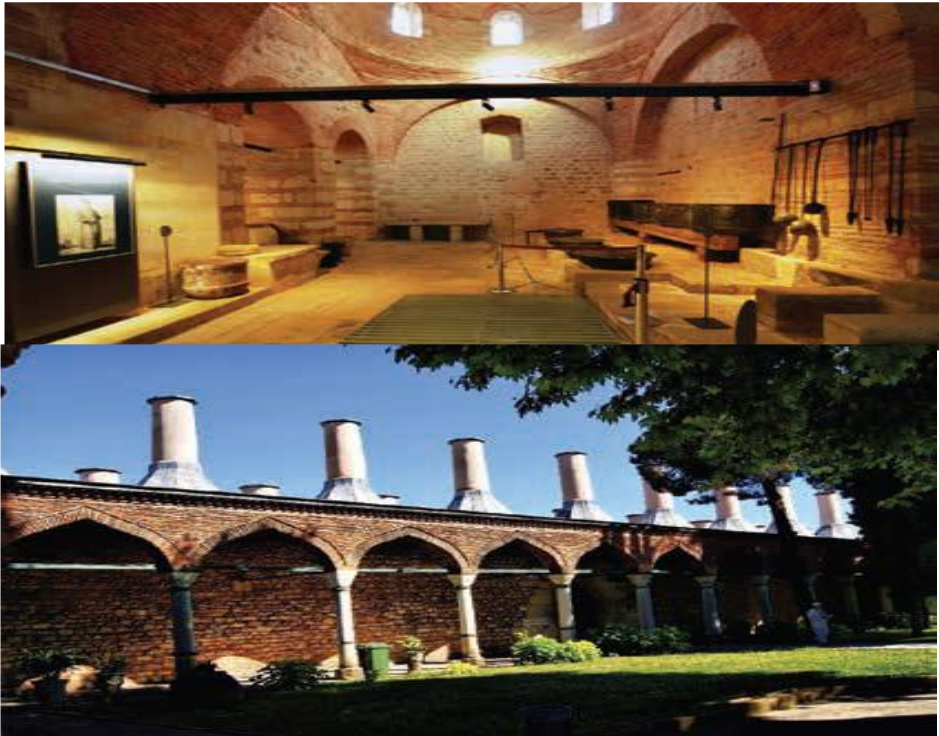
Literature

The palace, the residence of the sultan and the center from which the state was governed in the Ottoman Empire, also functioned as a social, cultural, and administrative center (Apalı and Erturan, 2025: 26). The kitchen was an important part of palace life, and the sultan and his guests dining at the same table was considered a significant social activity. This environment fostered competition among the chefs, who continuously sought new flavors while preparing dishes for the court (Demirer and Özdemir, 2023: 114). Ottoman Palace Cuisine is a rich and diverse culinary tradition, incorporating the cuisines of the Balkans, Aegean, Caucasus, Syria, Lebanon, and Anatolia (Hatipoğlu and Batman, 2014: 63; Armutoğlu and Gülден, 2024: 2740). Although the Ottoman Empire was governed historically from the Bursa, Edirne, Topkapı, and Yıldız Palaces, the classic period of Ottoman cuisine is associated with the cuisine of the Topkapı Palace (Solmaz, 2018: 74). Topkapı Palace served as the official residence of the Ottoman rulers from 1478, with the completion of its first structure, to 1856 (Gürsoy, 2018: 117). Therefore, documents from Topkapı palace are often used as primary sources in research on Ottoman cuisine (Parmaksızoğlu, 2022: 17). Detailed information is particularly available for the palace cuisine of the Fatih period at Topkapı Palace, owing to the abundance and richness of

surviving sources (Haydaroğlu, 2003: 3; Yiğit and Ay, 2016: 17). Unfortunately, culinary records from the periods when the palaces in Bursa and Edirne, the first two capitals of the Ottoman Empire, served as royal residences have not survived to the present day (Bilgin, 2021: 92). Despite this, it can be inferred that the cultural diversity that emerged over the centuries in the Ottoman Empire, resulting from the blending of different religions, sects, and ethnicities, also influenced its culinary culture (Armutoğlu and Güldemir, 2024: 2739).

The palace kitchen, known as the "Matbâh-ı Amire," was responsible for preparing a wide variety of sumptuous dishes for the sultan and the court (Demirer and Özdemir, 2023: 114). In fact, Matbah-ı Amire did not refer to a single kitchen, but it was rather the name of an administrative institution that encompassed various kitchens, a helvahane (halvahane), a pantry, bakeries, various cashier offices, a mirî dairy, and a simidhane (Hatipoğlu and Batman, 2014: 65). While the kitchens, helvahane, and tinsmithery were situated within the kitchen complex, the other facilities were located in different sections of the palace or its grounds (Hatipoğlu, 2014: 74-75; Bilgin, 2019: 32). The kitchens, located on the right side of the second courtyard in Topkapı Palace, originally had four domes. As the number of residents increased, they were expanded during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566) with the addition of a six-domed section (Gürsoy, 2013:91; Gürsoy, 2018: 117). Eight of the ten domes were kitchen buildings, named after the classes they served (Has, Divan, Ağalar, etc.), while the remaining two compartments were allocated to the Helvahâne (Başaran and Güldemir 2018: 61). The Matbah-ı Amire (Matbah-ı Amire), which constituted 5,250 m² of Topkapı Palace (Yerasimos, 2010: 28; Durlu Özkaya and Cömert, 2017: 32), accounted for 25 percent of the palace's indoor areas (Gürsoy, 2018: 117).

Figure 1. Interior and Exterior Views of Topkapı Palace Kitchen



Source: Başaran and Güldemir, 2018: 60-61.

The number of personnel working in the kitchens steadily increased in line with the palace population and the number of employees, which was 100 during the reign of Fatih, 250 at the beginning of the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, 500 at the end of the 16th century, 1000 at the end of the 16th century, around 1300 in the mid-17th century, and approximately 1253 at the end of the 17th century, and maintained approximately the same number until the early 18th century (Özer and Atay, 2022: 470). While the kitchen staff sought to meet the culinary needs of both the palace entourage and the guests, meals were prepared for 4-5 thousand people each day, with the number rising to as many as 15,000 on official occasions (Ceyhun Sezgin and Durmaz, 2019: 1502). Chef candidates for each kitchen worked their way through the apprenticeship and journeyman levels, attained the rank of Master (cook), and then became Head Chef (Chef Chef) under the supervision of the Chief Chef (Yiğit and Ay, 2016: 17).

It is important to note that Ottoman palace dietary habits weren't based on one or a few staple foods; rather, they aimed to consume all available ingredients in a balanced manner (Başaran and Güldemir, 2018: 63). While the foundations of palace cuisine were wheat/flour, mutton and lamb, sugar, rice, and clarified butter, it's known that the most commonly cooked dishes were pilaf, soups, and meat dishes (Şimşek, Soylu, and Özkaya, 2020: 498). During this period, other dishes served at the table included compotes, sherbets, and syrups prepared with fresh and dried fruits, along with some pot dishes prepared with meat and vegetables, as well as desserts such as halva, milk puddings, baklava, güllaç, and kadayıf (Solmaz and Dülger Altner, 2018: 115-116). Festivities held for official purposes in Ottoman palaces were made more enjoyable through lavish tables. Festive feasts featured meat dishes, seafood, pastries, and gözleme (a type of flatbread), soups, pilafs, desserts such as aşure (a type of pudding), baklava, and pumpkin dessert, as well as a variety of cold sherbets and compotes (Seçim, 2018: 126). During the Ottoman period, sherbet was served so frequently that a separate sherbet was made for almost every special occasion (Sandıkçioğlu, 2018: 146). Chicken, pigeon, goose, duck, quail are among the meat types used on special occasions and mostly for palace dishes (Samancı, 2019: 74).

At the palace, outside of feasts and banquets, luxury and ostentation were avoided during daily mealtimes, and meals were modest and brief (Durmuş and Türközü, 2024: 33). Banquets held during the Ottoman period also frequently featured sour and salted chicken and pilaf, pigeon, and various types of börek; honey or ground meat, bohça, tatamaç, and soup varieties; and soups called mullet, tarhana, and katta (Parmaksızoğlu, Işık and Şengül, 2024: 330). While the spice variety in Ottoman palace cuisine in the 14th and 15th centuries was limited to around eight spices, with the conquest of Egypt, over two hundred spices were used in the following century (Alparslan, 2021: 35). The most commonly used spices in the Ottoman palace were black pepper, saffron, coriander, cumin, and cinnamon, although ginger, cardamom, and anise were also included in certain recipes (Demir Öztürk, 2024: 389). During the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, a pier was built specifically for the transportation of nuts and spices at the present-day Eminönü pier (Oktay, 2018: 94). Kalaycı (2023), in his study examining the provisions purchased for the Matbah-ı Âmire (Matbah-ı Âmire), found that the spices regularly brought into the Ottoman palace were black pepper, ginger, cinnamon, safflower, saffron, mustard, black cumin, tamarind, sesame, cumin, mastic gum, cardamom, cloves, and tea. Furthermore, the conquest of Cyprus in 1571 ensured that sugar, which had previously been produced in limited quantities within Ottoman territories, was brought to the palace in greater abundance (Başaran and Güldemir 2018: 65).

Sherbets, jams, halvahs, pastes, pickles, medicines, essences, and scented soaps were produced in the helvahane, a separate area from the kitchens. It is reported that medicines and pastes for various ailments were made in the jamhane, a specialized section within the helvahane (Özer and Atay, 2022: 471-472). The helvahane (halvahane) located in the Ottoman Palace also produced various essences, chemical compounds, hand and laundry

soaps, and soaps for treating dandruff and various hair ailments (Bilgin, 2019: 33).

Meals in palaces and mansions were served on tinned, motif-decorated, and circular, yellow or copper trays, known as *sofra* (tables), placed very close to the floor. It is known that meals were also served on silver, gold, and porcelain plates, especially for elite guests (Parmaksızoğlu and Şengül, 2024: 329-330). Topkapı Palace did not have a separate dining hall; meals were served at tables set up in each section of the palace (Halıcı, 2015: 31). Those dining around the tray would either sit cross-legged, with the right knee upright and the left knee bent, or extend their feet under the tray (Yerasimos, 2010: 33-34).

Conclusion and Evaluation

Considering that the Ottoman Empire's vast territory encompassed modern-day Turkey, much of Southeastern Europe including the Balkans, Greece, parts of Ukraine, the Middle East, North Africa up to Algeria, and a large portion of the Arabian Peninsula, it is difficult to draw a comprehensive portrait of the culinary culture across all Ottoman territories (Özaltın and Yılmaz, 2024: 44). With its multinational and multi-religious composition and territorial dominance across three continents, the Ottoman Empire also demonstrated its wealth through its culinary culture, establishing a distinctive cuisine as diverse as the empire itself (Tarıncı, Yıldırım, and Kılınç, 2019: 3047). With Mehmed the Conqueror's conquest of Istanbul in 1453, significant changes occurred in Ottoman palace cuisine, and seafood consumption increased significantly (Güler, 2010: 26). With the conquests, the culinary habits of the conquered territories were discovered and implemented in the palace kitchens. Consequently, as the empire expanded, its culinary culture also became increasingly enriched (Nazıkgül, 2023: 21). Ottoman Palace Cuisine encompassed a wide range of culinary traditions, blending Central Asian, Balkan, Middle Eastern (Islamic world), and, to a lesser extent, Mediterranean and European food cultures (Tarıncı, Yıldırım and Kılınç, 2019: 3047). It is known that in the first centuries of the transition to the Ottoman Empire, Persian and Arab cuisines influenced the tables of Ottoman administrators, and that even the names of many dishes were derived from Arabic and Persian, or from the translation of Arabic names into Turkish (Hatipoğlu, 2014: 67).

Although the Ottoman Empire was historically governed from Bursa, Edirne, Topkapı Palace, and Yıldız Palace, and all of which influenced Ottoman culinary culture, the classical period of Ottoman cuisine is primarily associated with Topkapı Palace (Solmaz, 2018: 74; Demir, 2025: 562). Documents from Topkapı Palace, which has a place in history as an institution that witnessed the development of classical culinary culture, are also considered essential guides in research on Ottoman cuisine (Parmaksızoğlu, 2022: 17).

Influenced by the empire's multicultural structure, Ottoman Palace Cuisine, which featured dishes from multiple cultures, was initially relatively modest. From the 16th century onward, it took on a diversity that reflected the empire's power and wealth (Hatipoğlu and Batman, 2014: 63). Palace cuisine was the pinnacle of Ottoman cuisine in terms of organization, refinement of taste, diversity, and dietary culture (Kızıldemir, Öztürk, and Sarışık, 2014: 199). Palace cuisine was characterized by the presence of select expert chefs and apprentices, a strong emphasis on food quality, and the careful selection of ingredients and kitchen equipment (Tarıncı, Yıldırım, and Kılınç, 2019: 3047).

Although Ottoman cuisine and the Ottoman Palace cuisine experienced such development and diversity, due to the chefs' secrecy regarding their recipes and cooking techniques, very few recipes from this rich cuisine have survived to the present day (Tarıncı, Yıldırım, and Kılınç, 2019: 3047). Yerasimos (2010: 19) stated that, despite the Ottoman Empire's 500-year culinary heritage, searching for comprehensive, explanatory cookbooks covering several centuries of the period is a futile endeavor. Similarly, Durmuş and Türközü (2024: 32) noted that due to the lack of extensive resources on palace cuisine, information about the sultan's

tables is limited. Parmaksızoğlu (2022) reached similar conclusions in his research, which aimed to determine the sustainability of banquet menus in food and beverage establishments featuring Ottoman palace cuisine and the factors that determine their sustainability. Parmaksızoğlu (2022) stated that businesses that practice Ottoman palace cuisine are effective in transferring cultural sustainability to future generations, but the lack of knowledge about Ottoman cuisine and the lack of standard recipes are shortcomings.

Parmaksızoğlu, Işık, and Şengül (2024) determined that while establishments themed around Ottoman palace cuisine were effective in ensuring cultural sustainability and transmitting it to future generations, they also had some shortcomings. Among the reasons for these shortcomings, the most notable are the limited knowledge of Ottoman cuisine and the scarcity of standardized recipes. Furthermore, in addition to the limited amount of surviving sources, the fact that most of them are based on the culinary habits of wealthy households of the period while sparsely covering the low-income segments of the population, hinders a comprehensive understanding the culinary culture of the period (Armutoğlu and Gülden, 2024: 2739).

Until the mid-15th century, almost nothing is known about dietary habits in Ottoman palaces. This is due to a lack of relevant archival documents from before this period, and existing written sources are limited to records of political events. Despite this, certain interpretations can be made based on these political records (Başaran and Güldemir 2018: 64). Interpreting the dietary habits of the period based on political events prevents us from drawing definitive conclusions. However, as research demonstrates, it can be inferred that as the Ottoman Empire annexed new territories and expanded its borders, palace culinary culture was influenced by this diversity and richness, creating a truly intriguing cuisine. Nevertheless, information on the banquets, dishes, and recipes of the period is limited, and sources are quite scarce.

Article Information

Değerlendirme Evaluation Etik Beyan	İki Dış Hakem / Çift Taraflı Köreleme Two Outside Referees, / Double-Sided Blinding
Ethical Consideration	Bu çalışma Etik Kurul beyanı gerektiren çalışmalar kapsamına girmektedir. Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.
	This study does not fall within the scope of studies requiring an Ethics Committee declaration. It is hereby declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation of this study and that all studies utilized were indicated in the bibliography.
Benzerlik Taraması Similarity Scan Etik Bildirim Ethical Statement	Yapıldı-intihal.net Done-intihal.net artukloutourismstudies@artuklu.edu.tr
Yazar Katkıları Author Contributions Çıkar Çatışması Conflict of Interest Finansman Financing Telif Hakkı & Lisans	Çalışma tek yazarlıdır. The study has a single author. Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir. No conflict of interest declared. Bu araştırmayı desteklemek için dış fon kullanılmamıştır. No external funding was used to support this research. Yazarlar dergide yayımlanan çalışmalarının telif hakkına sahiptirler ve çalışmalarını CC BY-NC 4.0 lisansı altında yayımlanmaktadır.
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