

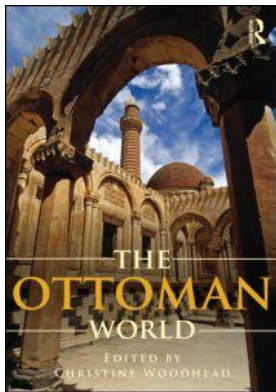
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 11 Dec 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Ottoman World

Christine Woodhead

Imarets

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203142851.ch5>

Amy Singer

Published online on: 14 Dec 2011

How to cite :- Amy Singer. 14 Dec 2011, *Imarets from: The Ottoman World* Routledge

Accessed on: 11 Dec 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203142851.ch5>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

CHAPTER FIVE

*IMARETS**

Amy Singer

A verse from the Koran, inscribed over the gates of more than one Ottoman *imaret* (public kitchen), reads:

And they give food in spite of their love for it, to the needy, the orphan, and the captive [saying]: We feed you only for the Face of God; we desire no recompense from you, no thankfulness.¹

With this message displayed so prominently, it is no surprise that *imarets* were long considered comparable to modern soup kitchens, feeding modest free meals to the poor, including widows, orphans, the aged, the sick and the infirm, as well as students and ascetic mystics. However, the range of clients eating daily, free of charge, at Ottoman *imarets* was much broader economically and socially than this list suggests, as were the menus, service and settings.² The following discussion explores Ottoman *imarets* in the context of Ottoman charitable practice, material culture, consumption habits and architecture. It considers *imarets* through the prism of their buildings and locations, their clients and the food they served.

Ottoman charity was framed by the principles and practices of Muslim charity. Annual *zakat* (alms) payments are one of the five cardinal obligations of all Muslims. In addition, the Koran and the *hadith* (sayings about the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad) frequently recommend giving *sadaka* (voluntary charity). *Sadaka* donations can be as small as a blessing or as large as an endowed complex of buildings offering social and welfare services to thousands in the form of a mosque, school, hospital, hospice, caravansaray, bath house, public kitchen or public fountain. *Imarets* are therefore physical evidence for the charitable donations of individual Ottomans.³

All *imarets* were established as *vakıfs*, charitable endowments sometimes known as *sadaka cariye* (ongoing/enduring charity). *Vakıfs* were the usual means by which social and welfare services were established and maintained throughout the Muslim world, beginning perhaps from the earliest days of Islam. Many of these services were those provided today by government welfare offices (education, health, poor relief), but they



Figure 5.1 Inscription above the entrance to the *imaret* of Mihrişah Sultan (d. 1805), mother of Selim III, at Eyüp, Istanbul. Koran 76: 8–9: ‘We feed you only for the sake of God; we desire no recompense from you, no thankfulness’. Author’s photo.

also included ritual facilities (mosques, ablutions pools, cemeteries) and infrastructure projects (water supply, roads, bridges). Provisions for building maintenance are included in *vakfiyes* (endowment deeds), signalling that the complexes were imagined as enduring through time, a permanent feature in the socio-economic life and built fabric of cities.⁴

Beneficent food distributions existed in the Muslim world before the Ottomans. Among the oldest is the *simat al-Khalil*, the Table of Abraham, in Hebron. Ascribed to Abraham and attested by the eleventh-century Persian traveller Nasir-i Khusraw, it provided daily to anyone coming to Hebron a loaf of bread, a bowl of lentils cooked in olive oil, and raisins.⁵ Under the Fatimids and Mamluks in Egypt, the sultans distributed food on special occasions such as Ramadan; in times of hardship they also engaged members of the elite to contribute donations of food aid. Purpose-built kitchens contemporary with the earliest Ottoman principality existed elsewhere. In Tabriz, the foundation of Rashid al-Din (1300) included separate kitchens and menus for travellers and for orphans, students and sufis.⁶ However, it was under the Ottomans that *imarets* became a widespread feature of multi-purpose endowments, serving meals daily to defined groups of beneficiaries.

Imarets were founded across the Ottoman empire, throughout its history. The first was built in the 1330s, the last perhaps in 1890, and at least one, at Eyüp in Istanbul, is said to have operated continuously since the late eighteenth century. They were located mostly in the towns and cities of Anatolia and the Balkans, more rarely in rural areas or villages, and were less prevalent, too, in the Arabic-speaking provinces of the Middle East and North Africa. The kitchens numbered in the hundreds, but they were not all founded at the same time and did not all remain open without interruption. More were founded in the first three centuries of Ottoman history than in later periods. They ranged in size from neighbourhood or small provincial facilities offering meals to one or two dozen people, once daily, to the large imperial kitchens that could feed many hundreds twice a day. The largest clusters of *imarets* were in Istanbul, perhaps as many as fifty, and in the former Ottoman capitals of Bursa and Edirne, which had eight and eleven, respectively. Other large or important towns also had several *imarets* – Amasya (eight), Iznik (ten), Manisa (seven), Salonica (seven) – and it was not uncommon for a sizeable town to have at least two or three (Afyon, Aksaray, Belgrade, Damascus, Dimetoka, Kastamonu, Mecca, Skopje, Trabzon).

There is no official list of all the Ottoman *imarets*, and one is difficult to compile. The word '*imaret*' itself can be misleading. The original Arabic word '*imāra*' means 'habitation and cultivation' or 'the act of building, making habitable'. In Ottoman Turkish, the word became '*imaret*', and was used with two additional meanings. It signified a construction project of one or more buildings, a meaning derived from the use of the complexes to found and develop new neighbourhoods. Complexes also contributed to the creation of new settlements or fortified outposts by providing the core of basic physical infrastructure and services needed for a new Muslim community or a stopping place. More narrowly, '*imaret*' was the public kitchen, one of many elements in a complex, sometimes specified as *imaret-i darü'z-ziyafet*, 'the building for feasts', or *imaret-i darü'l-it'am*, 'the feeding building'.⁷ This chapter uses the word '*imaret*' only to refer to the public kitchens and their subordinate facilities: storerooms, cellars, refectories and baking ovens.

The fact that several institutions distributed food created additional confusion about *imarets*. Especially in the first two centuries of Ottoman rule, it seems that *zaviye-imarets* and *imaret-mosques* overlapped functionally. Moreover, free meals might be had in a sufi lodge (*tekke*, *takiyya*, *hanegah* or *zaviye*), a caravansaray, an imperial palace, or the home of a wealthy person. It is unclear whether these institutions more often competed or co-operated with each other, especially in their urban settings. It is also unclear how individuals chose among one or more institutions, though such strategies may have been an integral part of urban survival for some. The collective impact of these institutions on the populace is not easy to calculate, but it has been estimated that, in the sixteenth century, up to 10 per cent of the population in Edirne and Istanbul received food daily at *imarets*.⁸

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES

The discrete history of *imarets* was mostly neglected until the end of the twentieth century. When mentioned, they were conceived as largely static and unchanging, because they were studied primarily from their prescriptive endowment deeds (*vakfiye*). Also, they were usually portrayed as auxiliary appendages to the mosques and *medreses* that

took centre stage in Ottoman complexes, serving as the showcase elements of Muslim faith and Islamic learning. The first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (published 1908–39) has only a brief paragraph on the term. The second edition (published 1960–2003) has no entry at all, and ‘*imaret*’ is covered there primarily in the general article ‘*matbakh*’ (kitchen). Godfrey Goodwin repeatedly mentions *imarets* in his classic *History of Ottoman architecture* and defines ‘*imaret*’ as a soup kitchen in his glossary, but it is not in the index. However, his Appendix II is an extended discussion of ‘The *vakfiye* and *imaret* system’, where *imarets* are complexes, not kitchens. Both Ömer Lütfi Barkan and Halil İnalçık have asserted the importance of this ‘*vakıf* – *imaret* system’ for the development of the empire.⁹

As for somewhat longer works on *imarets* as kitchens, two on the second Ottoman capital, Edirne, offer an extended catalogue of local *imarets* and an analysis of their collective impact.¹⁰ A more recent publication is this author’s monograph *Constructing Ottoman beneficence: an imperial soup kitchen in Ottoman Jerusalem*, which investigates the foundation process and early operation of the *imaret* of Haseki Hürrem Sultan (d. 1558), wife of Süleyman I.¹¹ The same *imaret* was studied extensively by Peri for the insights it afforded on eighteenth-century *vakıf* foundation and management in Jerusalem.¹² Broader discussions of *imarets* include an entry in a multi-volume collection on Turkish history.¹³ Most recently, the fifteen wide-ranging articles collected in *Feeding people, feeding power* define the *problématiques* of *imaret* research, identify relevant source materials, and delineate directions for future study.¹⁴

There is no shortage of source materials about public kitchens. Thousands of Ottoman endowment deeds survive, for large and small foundations alike. One deed could run to thousands of words, describing in greater or lesser detail the intentions of the founder; the institution to be established; the services provided; the staff, salaries, equipment and furnishings; and the endowed revenue-yielding properties. For *imarets*, the deeds often stipulated the menu, ingredients, kitchen staff, budget for foodstuffs, equipment and salaries. *Vakifyes* provide blueprints of founders’ intentions, expectations and ideology, all of which were culturally shaped and calibrated to the specific size and place of the individual foundation. Other relevant written records include *tapu tabrir defterleri* (Ottoman revenue survey registers) and local *kadı sicilleri* (judicial court records), as well as evidence found in Ottoman chronicles, and the reports of Ottoman and foreign travellers. Many buildings remain as evidence, some in good repair or even in use. Some kitchen equipment (grain storage chests and mills) has been found, and it is possible that more – cauldrons, ladles or bowls – may yet be identified.

Annual or periodic *muhasebe defterleri* (income–expenditure accounts registers) exist for many of the *imarets*. They contain detailed lists of foodstuffs purchased and stored, the names and positions of people employed in or benefiting from the foundation, and the sums and sources of annual endowment revenues. The account books are useful companions to endowment deeds and literary texts for understanding the changing capacity and functioning of *imarets*. More detailed registers listed food and bread recipients, cash payments in lieu of meal allocations, daily storehouse revenues and expenditures, and detailed registers of both people who received cash stipends but no free meals and employees who received salaries.¹⁵ Altogether, the account books are an unparalleled source about foodstuffs and *imarets*, as well as about consumption and nutrition norms.¹⁶

BUILDING *IMARETS*

Together with *zaviyes*, *imarets* were a settlement mechanism of the Ottoman conquests westward across the Balkans and further south and east in Anatolia. Each institution provided food and shelter to wandering dervishes, travellers, students, merchants and the poor. They were one aspect of a general policy that aimed to create a stable Ottoman presence in each town and city of the empire, and represented a significant Ottoman investment in the provinces.¹⁷ No clear architectonic genealogy of Ottoman *imarets* has been established. Scholars point to the Seljuk caravansarays as one likely model for public kitchens, but the earliest *imarets* were small institutions. The caravansarays, even more modest ones, included sleeping, stabling and storage spaces together with a kitchen, mosque and bath, enclosed by an external wall; they provided free, secure lodging and food at regular intervals between the towns of Anatolia.

The T-shaped mosques that housed *zaviye-imarets* and *imaret*-mosques in the first two Ottoman centuries were multi-functional. Their central space was reserved for prayer and sufi rituals, while secondary spaces like the side *iwans* (rooms) were for sleeping and perhaps eating. Cooking was probably done in a separate building or outside in the courtyard. This flexible space accommodated the various practices of Islam favoured by the *gazi* fighters and their sufi shaykhs, who also provided spiritual guidance for the semi-settled nomads and new converts in the Turkish principalities of western Anatolia and the newly conquered Balkans. Examples include the fourteenth-century mosques of Orhan I and Bayezid I in Bursa, as well as the slightly later ones of Bayezid Paşa in Amasya and Mahmud Paşa in Istanbul, all of which had *imarets*.¹⁸

By the sixteenth century, the term '*imaret*' was more often used exclusively to mean 'public kitchen' (modern Turkish, *aşhane*). The narrowing of the meaning seems to have paralleled the architectural evolution of Ottoman mosques into extensively articulated complexes in which each function was housed in a separate structure. This is reflected in the chronicle of buildings designed by the consummate Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan (d. 1588), which included *imaret* as a separate category or building type.¹⁹ In her study of Sinan, Necipoğlu translates *imaret* as 'hospice', emphasizing the fact that many *imarets* operated in close proximity to accommodation for guests, such as a caravansaray, *han*, *tabhane* or *tekke*.²⁰ In such cases, the *imaret* also fed the guests and sometimes provided fodder for their animals.

Lowry claims that the earliest known Ottoman *imaret*-like institution was the *hanegah* built in 1324 by Orhan Gazi (1326–62), in the village of Mekece, east of Iznik (Nicaea). No explicit provision is made in its *vakfiye* for serving food, only that the manager of the endowment should 'expend what is in the interests of the traveling dervishes, the poor, the strangers and mendicants, and those in search of knowledge'. Lowry makes an undocumented but informed leap to call the place an *imaret*, assuming that food – and shelter – were 'in the interests' of this group.²¹

The fifteenth-century Ottoman chronicler Aşıkpaşazade (d. after 1484) wrote that Orhan Gazi established the first *imaret* in Iznik in 1335, shortly after the besieged city surrendered to the Ottomans in 1331. By the time Aşıkpaşazade used the term *imaret* in the later fifteenth century, he could apparently do so unambiguously. Orhan reputedly inaugurated his *imaret* personally by lighting its first kitchen fire.²² Another *imaret* was founded in Iznik by Murad I (1362–89) in 1388, in honour of his mother, Nilufer Hatun. By the time of the 1530 survey register, Iznik had five *imarets* and

town quarters named for two of them.²³ More than one of these *imarets* was founded by members of the Çandarlı family of early Ottoman commander-vezirs.

Among other prolific founders of early Ottoman *imarets* were Evrenos Bey (d. 1417), one of the most successful Ottoman commanders in the Balkans, and his descendants. They founded at least twelve *imarets* across northern Greece during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, together with other buildings such as mosques and sufi *tekkes*. As in Mekece and Iznik, these institutions probably served many local Christians as well as the Muslim followers of Evrenos, encouraging people to remain in newly conquered areas. Whether appreciated for their practical benefits or as reflections of the value placed by Muslims on charitable endeavours, the endowments may also have played a role in attracting people to convert to Islam. Lowry counted 149 *imarets* altogether in the Ottoman Balkans, mostly dating from the first 200 years of Ottoman rule. Considered according to contemporary national boundaries, they include Greece (sixty-five), Bulgaria (forty-two), Albania (nine), countries of the former Yugoslavia (twenty-nine), Romania (two) and Hungary (two). Alongside the *imarets*, there were over 250 *zaviyes* in northern and central Greece, such that institutions offering food and shelter, even if modest, must have been ubiquitous in the early Ottoman period.²⁴

Bursa, the first Ottoman capital, had many *imarets*, but, unlike in Iznik or in the small towns of the Balkans, they were mostly part of large imperial mosque complexes. These complexes, funded by the spoils of conquest, were built by Orhan Gazi, Murad I, Bayezid I (1389–1402), Çelebi Sultan Mehmed (1413–21) and Murad II (1421–51). That of Orhan Gazi, destroyed in 1935, was the earliest in the city and the first *imaret* to exist as a free-standing building. It was erected in close proximity to the founder's mosque and its other attendant structures. The earliest surviving free-standing *imaret* building belongs to the Yeşil complex built by Çelebi Sultan Mehmed I. Compared to later *imarets*, its two rectangular rooms of brick and uncut stone, originally roofed in wood, seem casually planned, plain and functional.²⁵ Surviving fourteenth-century structures such as the Nilufer Hatun *imaret* in Iznik or the Evrenos *imaret* in Komotini/Gümülcine afford little sense of how food preparation and distribution were managed. Murad II's Bursa complex shows the structural direction taken by imperial *imarets* in the mid-fifteenth century, with huge indoor hearths for cauldrons and refectory spaces. Unfortunately, the kitchens of Murad II's two complexes in Edirne – the Üç Şerefeli and the Muradiye – have disappeared, as has that of Fatih's enormous complex in Istanbul. What imperial *imarets* had become by the later fifteenth century is readily observed, however, in the *imarets* of Bayezid II's extant complexes in Amasya (1486), Edirne (1487–8) and Istanbul (1505–6), all free-standing stone buildings within the general perimeter of the complex.²⁶ In 2003, the Amasya *imaret* was in use as a soup kitchen, while that of Edirne was restored in 2010.

The largest *imarets* were built in the sixteenth century. Over twenty were constructed under the direction of the imperial chief architect Sinan, of which only eight survive. Five of these were buildings with their own independent courtyards (e.g., Süleymaniye in Istanbul, Muradiye in Manisa), spaces that integrated cooking, storage and dining facilities, housed separately from the other activities of the complex. Three others, however, shared their courtyards with the mosque of the complex (e.g., Sulaymaniyya in Damascus).²⁷

Eighteen *imarets* functioned in Istanbul during the sixteenth century, all connected to mosque complexes. Nine had been built by sultans, nine by vezirs or other

high-ranking persons. Yet, large as they were, these facilities could not have fed everyone in need of a meal, whatever the source of their need. Yerasimos has identified an additional 116 endowments that provided food in Istanbul, all of them smaller and based in neighbourhood mosques (*mescid*), *zaviyes* or schools, mostly feeding local poor people. These distributions were not daily, but occurred primarily on religious holidays, and complemented those provided by endowments for clothing, water supply, urban maintenance and tax assistance.²⁸

Some *imarets* were constructed by incorporating older structures associated with previous rulers. The Salimiyya mosque and *imaret* in Damascus took over the Māristān al-Qaymarī while the Haseki Sultan *imaret* in Jerusalem took over the house of a prominent Mamluk woman. This strategy afforded the founder a space in an existing urban fabric, essentially introducing an Ottoman presence while erasing the monuments of previous rulers and their affiliates. The buildings and their activities then became a focus of Ottoman identity and attention. Selim I gave his Damascus *imaret* preferential treatment in distributing foodstuffs, and perhaps for this reason it was closed during a local revolt against Ottoman rule in 1520.²⁹

Recalling the Seljuk *hans*, some complexes with *imarets* were also built in more isolated places, specifically in order to ensure the safety and comfort of travellers on the main roads of the empire. A very early example of this is the *imaret* built at one end of Uzun Köprü, the ‘long bridge’ erected by Murad II and part of a project to secure the marshy, bandit-ridden road south of Edirne. According to the sixteenth-century historian Mustafa Ali, Murad himself served food there when it opened. *Imarets* were included in the defensive complexes built by Süleyman I at Belen and Sokollu Mehmed Paşa at Payas (1574–5) on the road between Adana and Aleppo.³⁰ In Syria, *imarets* seem to have been tied more to pilgrimage routes. In Damascus and Jerusalem, they are both disproportionately large, emphasizing their role in sustaining pilgrims to the holy sites.³¹

Kitchens in Ottoman *imarets* and sufi *tekkes* had similar elements: kitchen (*matbah*), refectory (*me’kelhane* or *ta’ambhane*) and pantry or storeroom (*kiler*). *Tekke* kitchens also often had a spiritual dimension lacking in *imarets*, since cooking food was sometimes part of sufi rituals and the person in charge of the kitchen held a high rank in the order’s hierarchy. The kitchen could also be a place of study and initiation, notably for the Mevlevi, who were taught to whirl there. For the Bektaşis, the person responsible for educating novices was called *aşçı dede* or *ser tabbah* (head cook). The mythical black cauldron (*kara kazan*) symbolized the order itself, and was also adopted by the Janissaries, representing their particular attachment to the Bektaşis, as well as signalling revolt when overturned.³²

CLIENTS

Contrary to early twenty-first-century expectations, not all or even most of the people who ate in Ottoman public kitchens were impoverished. Rather, the right to a meal was a function of social or economic status, employment or profession. *Imarets* imposed different kinds of restrictions on their clients: who could eat, how, what, where and when. All of these conditions point to a system conceived not only to assist people or distribute to them food they deserved, but also to control them and to reinforce existing socio-economic hierarchies.

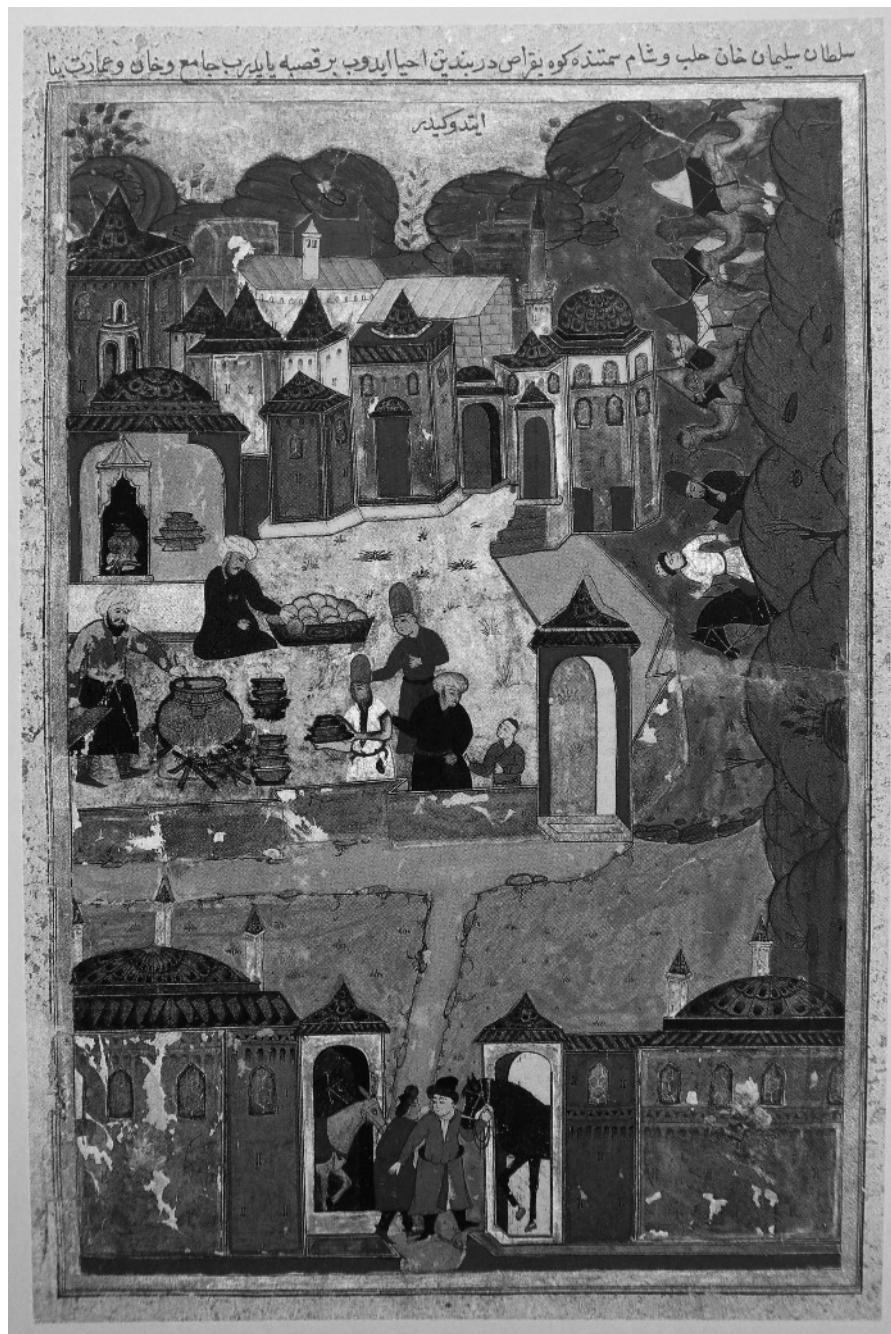


Figure 5.2 Illustration of the *vakif* complex built by Süleyman in the 1550s at Belen (Bakras), a halting station on the route from Anatolia into Syria, through the mountains north of Aleppo. The complex included two caravansarays, a mosque and a dervish convent which provided food for travellers. From Seyyid Lokman, *Hünername* (1587–8), Topkapı Saray Library, H. 1524: 288b.

In Istanbul, the *imaret* of Fatih ('the conqueror') Mehmed was perhaps the largest anywhere in the empire. By the mid-sixteenth century, approximately 1,500 people were fed there twice a day. Among its regular clients were visiting dignitaries, travellers, scholars and students at the colleges attached to the mosque; the doorkeepers and guards of these colleges; the students of three other nearby colleges and four nearby dervish lodges; 600 student candidates and their eight proctors; fifty-six members of the *imaret* staff; forty-seven hospital staff members; and fifty-one other functionaries of the complex, including employees serving at the mosque and tombs. When all these people had been fed, leftovers were distributed to the indigent poor.³³

The Süleymaniye *imaret*'s list of around 1,000 diners resembled that of Fatih, although the *vakfiye* noted that orphans and children of the poor who were present in the primary school (*mekteb*) on any given day should also be served.³⁴ At the smaller establishment of Haseki Hurrem Sultan in Jerusalem, two meals per day were served to 400 people described in the endowment deed as 'poor and pious', together with the kitchen staff of fifty, whoever was staying in the fifty-five guest rooms in the complex, and the local sufi Shaykh Ahmad al-Dajjani, as well as sixteen of his followers.³⁵ Still more modest was the kitchen of Fatma Hatun in Jenin, which was to feed approximately fifty people once a day.³⁶

The *vakfiyes* often stipulated that people were to eat in a specific order, which reflected a social hierarchy among the diners. The conditions in which their meals were served and the type or amount of food each person received reinforced the order. At Fatih, the guests ate first, followed by the college scholars, students and staff; after them came the students from the nearby colleges, the resident dervishes, and the 600 candidate students and their proctors. Next to eat were the staff of the *imaret* and the rest of the Fatih complex. At the Sulaymaniyya in Damascus, people staying in the guest rooms were served privately in their rooms, twice a day. In Jerusalem, people also ate in shifts: *imaret* employees, then caravansaray residents, and finally the poor, who were too numerous to eat together, so the men were fed first, then the women.³⁷

Some *imarets* forbade people from removing food, with specific exceptions. At the Süleymaniye no strangers could remove food in buckets. However, food could be taken to poor scholars, the descendants of the Prophet, the blind, the paralyzed and the sick.³⁸ In Jerusalem, Shaykh Dajjani and his sufis collected food from the *imaret* and brought it back to their residence across the city.³⁹ Everyone else ate in the *imaret* refectory.⁴⁰ Even in the last-known *imaret* planned in Istanbul in 1890, the removal of food was explicitly prohibited, except in the case of someone sick at home who had the right to eat there. Such cases, however, required approval from the local imam and the *muhtar* of the quarter.⁴¹

Imarets often served *medrese* students (*suhtelsoftia*), like a university cafeteria in the mid-sixteenth century. Students' mobility and potential for disruption were nuisance enough to have them occasionally denied access or for guarantors to be demanded for their behaviour, since complaints were filed that they plundered the kitchens and threatened the staff. A certain standard of decorum was expected in *imarets*. However, according to Mustafa Ali, the quality of food in Istanbul *imarets* was enough to raise a protest.⁴²

Christians, local and foreign, seem to have been regular clients at some *imarets*, becoming targets of the ideology and policy they embodied. At the end of the fourteenth century, the Bavarian Johann Schiltberger noted that 'the city [Bursa] contains . . . eight hospitals [*spitäler*] where poor people are received, whether they be Christians,

infidels [Muslims] or Jews'.⁴³ Visiting Bursa several decades later, Bertrandon de la Brocquière wrote: 'There are very nice places, like hospitals. In three or four of these, bread, meat and wine are distributed to those who want to take them in God's name'.⁴⁴ The serving of wine may indicate that Christians were welcome guests. According to the English traveller George Wheler, Bursa's *imarets* were still open to all comers in the later seventeenth century.⁴⁵ Theodore Spandugnino, writing in the early sixteenth century about the Fatih Mehmed complex in Istanbul, described

a superb building . . . the hospital is open to all, Christians, Jews and Turks; and its doctors give free treatment and food three times a day. I have seen men of the upper class and other grand persons lodging here, their horses being cared for.⁴⁶

In the early eighteenth century, the *imaret* of Haseki Hurrem in Jerusalem served bread and soup 'made with olive oil and some vegetables' to each poor person who asked for it.⁴⁷

No first-hand account in a Jewish source has yet confirmed that Jews also availed themselves of food in *imarets* and, if they did so, how this accorded with the dietary laws of *kashrut*. However, Jews were a minority population in the empire, and so were not a factor comparable to Christians in Ottoman political considerations. Moreover, Jewish communities traditionally organized food distributions as part of a broader poor relief system.⁴⁸ Free meals worked as Ottoman propaganda to persuade newly conquered populations that Ottoman rule did not aim to create hardship; nor was Islam a miserly religion. Rather, *imarets* were part of Ottoman *istimalet* (good will or accommodation), which also encouraged assimilation and conversion.⁴⁹

One key question with only sporadic answers is how people might acquire the right to eat at an *imaret* if they were not included among its originally defined beneficiaries. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the right to eat could be claimed for a variety of reasons. Poor neighbours of an *imaret* – widows, *hacis*, dervishes – were sometimes granted food shares through certificates.⁵⁰ Formal petitions could be submitted to the government requesting food from an *imaret*. Thus, the *kadı* of Konya appealed to have the dervishes at the tomb of Mevlana Celaluddin Rumi included in distributions from the newly built adjacent *imaret* of Selim II.⁵¹ In Istanbul at the end of the sixteenth century, one Ahmed, a crippled soldier, petitioned for meal rights because he could not work.⁵² Such rights could be willed or inherited, even divided in the next generation.⁵³

Another phenomenon remains to be further investigated. In some *imarets*, individuals received food distributions far in excess of their daily needs, either because they were assigned a large quantity of bread or because they held more than one job, each one entailing meal rights. In at least one case, receiving multiple meals was expressly forbidden. However, in others, the excess food was a matter of record. Meier's research on eighteenth-century Damascus shows people who received entitlements authorized by the *kadı* and comprising combined distributions of bread from the two Damascus *imarets* of Selim I and Süleyman I, as well as from what was called *hinta al-fuqara* ('wheat of the poor') from the village of Daraya. Some recipients were from well-known local families, whose entitlement could be inherited from one generation to the next.⁵⁴ One can speculate that, in cases like these, people either fed other members of their families or redistributed food to those needier than themselves, thereby becoming patrons and benefactors as a result of the charity they themselves received.

Even from the small amount of research on *imarets* in different periods, it is clear that the population eating in them varied over time. At Süleymaniye, for example, the number of employees seems to have decreased while the number of beneficiaries rose.⁵⁵ The most significant change seems to have occurred during the nineteenth century, as the clientele gradually included more indigents. The change probably resulted from several factors: the reorganization of *vakıf* administration that accompanied the *tanzimat* reforms; changing ideas about how to care for the poor, their proper role and place in society; and the dislocations of population, which became more marked in the latter half of the nineteenth century as a result of successive wars and gradual loss of territory.⁵⁶

Earlier changes in the way *imaret* beneficiaries were defined, as well as larger variations in local practice than those we currently understand, may also be revealed with further research. In 1859, Istanbul had fifteen functioning *imarets*. In April 1911, all but two were closed by official order after the Young Turk revolution of 1908, in which older institutions, identified with Abdülhamid II, were eliminated and replaced by modern ones. However, the substitutes were not adequate to distribute food to the poor, and by 1914 the *imarets* of Fatih, Süleymaniye, Nuruosmaniye and Atik Valide were allowed to reopen.⁵⁷

MENUS

The focus on what were perceived to be the more noble elements of an urban complex of buildings is mirrored by the historiographical attention to foods of elite households and especially of the imperial kitchens (*matbah-i amire*) of Topkapı Palace. The imperial palace kitchens, although funded by the state budget and not by charitable donations, operated in part like an *imaret*, and were denoted thus by Evliya Çelebi.⁵⁸ The palace kitchens fed the sultan, the imperial family, the entire palace staff, visitors to the palace, and soldiers when they came to collect their salaries. Foodstuffs and prepared foods were also distributed from the imperial palace and from the grand vezir's residence at the Sublime Porte (*bab-i ali*) to a wide variety of clients in Istanbul, notably poor and needy people in the city on special occasions. In the nineteenth century, these included the sultan's accession, royal birthdays and religious holidays. While Topkapı was the model for distributions, these occurred in a similar way from the imperial palace in Edirne, from the Old Palace in Istanbul, and later from the nineteenth-century palaces of Dolmabahçe, Çırağ an and Yıldız.⁵⁹

In terms of capacity, Topkapı in the later sixteenth century fed over 3,000 people daily, and on special occasions as many as 10,000. To accomplish this, the palace operated nine kitchen units, employing sixty cooks, 200 assistants, and a total staff of 2,000 to 2,200. In the nineteenth-century, palace distributions of cooked food rose significantly, and under Abdülhamid II the palace kitchens functioned as *imarets* for their neighbourhoods. The situation reached a point where people were said to be moving to the palace vicinity in order to save money on food. This situation was seriously addressed under Mehmed V Reşat (1909–18), after the deposition of Abdülhamid II.⁶⁰

The menu at the palace kitchens was mostly rice pilav, meat, bread and sweet saffron rice (*zerde*); special meals included rice soup cooked with meat and parsley and accompanied by *baklava* made with honey and walnuts.⁶¹ The quantity and quality of

ingredients in imperial palaces surpassed those in *imarets*, as did the variety of foods served to the imperial family and important guests. But, for the staff and visiting subjects, meals may have resembled those served in *imarets*.

Meals were mostly served twice a day in *imarets*, except during Ramadan, when only one was served. They always included bread. The regular cooked dishes were starchy and mostly savoury. The most basic and common food was cracked wheat (*bulgur*) or rice soup, with or without meat, perhaps enriched with salt, parsley, onions, cumin, pepper, chick peas, squash and sour grape or yogurt and chard, plus bread. On Fridays holidays and festivals, or for diners of higher status, richer foods such as *dane* (meat, chickpeas, butterfat, salt and rice) were served, as well as sweet dishes such as *zerde*, *zirbaç* (starch, honey, dried fruit, saffron), *aşure* (a pudding cooked with dried fruit and nuts, and whatever was available) or *baklava*. The special fare of *dane* and *zerde* constituted holiday and ceremonial staples, expected and so placed on every table, no matter the rank of the guest. At the circumcision feast of Süleyman's sons Bayezid and Cihangir in 1539, *dane* and *zerde* also appeared on the tables of rich and poor alike.⁶²

At the Fatih *imaret* in Jerusalem, approximately 3,300 loaves of bread were baked and distributed daily. Travellers who came to stay at the caravansaray of the Fatih complex were served honey and bread at the *imaret* immediately upon their arrival, to revive them after their journey. The Fatih *imaret* could accommodate about 160 high-ranking guests per day served at tables (*sofra*) laid for four. These guests received daily meals of *dane* and sometimes *zerde* as well, the dishes that most others ate only once a week. Sometimes guests had meat stew with plums and fresh fruits. Visitors of higher status, such as the *eşraf* (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad), had sheep's trotters (*paça*) served for breakfast as a great delicacy, as well as a dish made of pumpkin, honey, jam, cinnamon and cloves, and generous portions of meat and rice. In contrast, every two children were to share a bowl of soup, a portion of meat and two loaves of bread. The standard serving for the majority of staff, college students and scholars, though unspecified, was probably one serving of soup apiece and a loaf of bread.⁶³

Everyone at the Haseki Sultan *imaret* in Jerusalem ate the same wheat and rice soups with bread, similar to those served at Fatih, with larger servings specified for the staff and travellers. Employees at the Jerusalem *imaret* received one ladle of soup and two loaves of bread per meal, the guests one ladle and one loaf, while the sufis and the largest category of the poor received one half-ladle and one loaf each per meal. On Fridays, each person received *dane* and *zerde*, but the poor had to share a piece of meat between every two of them, while the others had a whole piece each.⁶⁴

CONCLUSION

The earliest *imarets* seem to have been relatively small institutions, founded by the sultans, vezirs, and Ottoman frontier commanders such as Evrenos. As the empire expanded, the buildings and their capacities also grew larger and more magnificent, reflecting the increasing power and prestige of the Ottoman dynasty. Since *imarets* and other imperial endowments were tied directly to the prestige of the dynasty, their ability to function could reflect well or badly on the sultan and his government. An inactive or badly run kitchen, as well as criticism like that written by Mustafa Ali, could work to undermine its legitimacy.⁶⁵ Yet it was no simple matter to maintain the large kitchens. Although they may not have been either the most expensive structures

to build in any complex or the most prestigious, *imarets* often seem to have consumed a larger share of annual endowment revenues than any other single institution in the complex. Not only did they require wages and maintenance, like every other building, they also required regular supplies of food, firewood, water, and cooking and serving equipment to accomplish their role, which included sustaining all the other employees of the complex as well as guests, students and some indigents.

The *imarets* served an additional function, beyond those of distributing food and contributing to the legitimacy of the dynasty, as noted above. In the fact of their endowment, their names, their numbers in the empire, and in the manner of their functioning, including their menus, *imarets* were distinctly Ottoman. Far from the capital and the major cities, they served similar food, every day, at the same time of day, to a predictable list of clients, with roughly identical variations on holidays and festivals. Within this uniformity, however, variety did exist. The shapes of buildings were modified by local materials and artisans. While the basic types of soups, festive dishes and bread unified the *imarets*, local variations of additives, local varieties of wheat, and traditions of what to add to *aşure* pudding affected what was served, as did local or temporary scarcity or availability. However, the overall tone was reflected in the *vakfiye* instructions for two *imarets* in Syria, which said that food should be served ‘as it was established in other *imarets* and *takiyyas*’. This deed also had to define explicitly dishes that needed no description in the central Ottoman lands, a fact emphasizing that the Ottomans had extended their reach beyond the boundaries of a shared food culture. *Imarets* were a stable fixture in the Ottoman landscape, not only a tool of conquest, settlement and perhaps Islamization, but also a means of Ottomanization. They helped create a commonality of experience among Ottoman subjects in the Balkans, Anatolia, and the Arabic-speaking provinces of the empire.⁶⁶

NOTES

- * This research was supported by the Israel Science Foundation, grant # 657/07
- 1 Koran 76: 8–9.
- 2 Meier (2007: 123) also notes this contradiction and points out the political agenda evident in the list of *imaret* beneficiaries.
- 3 Zysow 2002; Weir and Zysow 1995; Singer 2008.
- 4 For a general introduction to *vakıf* (Arabic: *waqf*), see Peters *et al.* 2002; on renovations, see Ergin 2007.
- 5 Nasir-i Khusraw 1881: 57–8.
- 6 Sanders 1994: 28, 52, 75, 79; Singer 2002a: 145–52; Zarinebaf-Shahr 2007; Kiel 2007.
- 7 Ergin 1939: 5–16; Ayverdi 1966: 84–8; İnalçık 1990b: 10–11; Singer 2006: 124–7.
- 8 Barkan 1962–3a; Gerber 1983; Yerasimos 2007: 242. The rough calculations done by Barkan and Gerber for *imarets* in Istanbul and Edirne, respectively, have recently been challenged in Orbay 2007a.
- 9 Huart 1927; Waines *et al.* 1989; Goodwin 1971: 455–7; Barkan 1962–3a; İnalçık 1990b.
- 10 Kazancıgil 1991; Gerber 1983.
- 11 Singer 2002a.
- 12 Peri 1983, 1992.
- 13 Singer 2002b.
- 14 Ergin *et al.* 2007.
- 15 The most extensive studies of these registers were begun by Barkan (1962–3b, 1964 and 1971) and have recently been continued in depth by Orbay (2001, 2007a).

- 16 Faroqhi 2007: 199–200.
17 Lowry 2008: 44, 67; Lowry 2007: 69; Kiel 2007: 97.
18 Necipoğlu 2005: 49–50, 92–5; Goodwin 1971.
19 Tanman 1988: 333; Sâi Mustafa Çelebi 2003: 104, 190.
20 Necipoğlu 2005: 71; Neumann 2007: 279.
21 Lowry 2003a: 76; also Lowry 2007, 2008.
22 Âşıkpaşazade 2003: 368.
23 Ibid.: 366–8; Lowry 2008: 67–8.
24 Lowry 2008: 16–64, 70–74, 79, 93.
25 Ergin *et al.* 2007: 27; Goodwin 1971: 68; Tanman 1988: 335.
26 Tanman 1988: 336–7.
27 Ibid.: 338–51.
28 Yerasimos 2007.
29 Meier 2007: 126–9; Singer 2002a: 73ff.
30 Necipoğlu 2005: 71–2, 355–62.
31 Meier 2007.
32 Tanman 2007.
33 Ünver 1953: 3–6, which is a distribution list from 952/1545.
34 Kürkçüoğlu 1962: 42–3.
35 Singer 2002a: 54–64.
36 Meier 2007: 142.
37 Singer 2002a: 63; Meier 2007: 130.
38 Kürkçüoğlu 1962: 31, 76–7.
39 Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi, Defter 3628/20.
40 Stephan 1944: 193.
41 BOA, Y.PRK BŞK 19/25 25 Muharrem 1308 (10 Sept. 1890), described in the catalogue as: Hamidiye Camii ile Ertuğrul Tekkesi arasında padişah tarafından yapılacak imaretin nizamnamesi ile müsveddesi.
42 Neumann 2007: 278; Tietze 1982: II, 27, 144.
43 Schiltberger 1879: 40, cited in Lowry 2007: 73.
44 Kline 1988: 83, cited in Lowry 2007: 73.
45 Wheler 1682: 216, cited in Lowry 2007: 73.
46 Spandounes 1997: 134.
47 Morison 1705: 378–9.
48 Ben-Naeh 2004.
49 Lowry 2007: 71–2.
50 Orbay 2007a: 186ff.
51 Konyalı 1964: 977.
52 Topkapı Saray Arşivi, E.5411/7.
53 Orbay 2007a: 176–80.
54 Orbay 2007a; Singer 2003; Meier 2007: 145.
55 Orbay 2007a: 179–80.
56 Ener 2003; Özbek 2002.
57 Öztürk 1995: 175–81; Özbek 1999–2000: 125–9; Pakalın 1946–56: II, 62.
58 Faroqhi 2003: 23–4; Evliya Çelebi 1996: 152a.
59 Ertuğ 2007: 251, 258.
60 Ibid.: 252, 257–8.
61 Ibid.: 259.
62 Faroqhi 2007: 203–8; on the circumcision feast, Tezcan 1998.
63 Kürkçüoğlu 1962: 42–3.
64 Stephan 1944: 191–3.
65 Neumann 2007: 276–7.
66 Meier 2007: 141–2, 147; Neumann 2007: 286.