Food at Cultural Crossroads: Dietary Habits in Cyprus under the Ottomans (1570-1878) as perceived by Foreign Travellers.

Situated at the crossroads of the Eastern Mediterranean, and having been successively occupied by many different conquerors, Cyprus developed a cultural diversity, reflected in every aspect of life, as well as in its traditional diet.
The island was ruled by the dynasty of the Lusignans from 1192 to 1489, and by the Venetians for the subsequent 82 years, before it became a province of the Ottoman Empire. The three centuries of Ottoman rule (1570-1878) were a hard time for the people of the island, who suffered under an unjust government, oppressive administration and heavy taxation imposed by the rulers. Political upheavals were also taking their toll. Furthermore, people had to fight against the calamities of nature, such as the drought, earthquakes, locust attacks, which destroyed the crops of the island, and the frequent epidemics of plague, malaria and cholera. Many died of malnutrition; large numbers emigrated. The results of deprivation and poverty were more obvious among the rural population, which formed the striking majority and lived on agriculture and stockbreeding. Trade was to a great extent in the hands of foreign merchants, most of whom lived in Larnaca, the main port and seat of consuls. Here a community of diplomats and traders was established, with people from different nations, who created a European atmosphere in the small town of about 5,000 souls. Nicosia was the capital of the island, the administrative and religious centre, with a population of about 12,000, two thirds Ottomans and one third Greeks. In 1778 the whole island comprised 84,000 people (37,000 Christians, 47,000 Muslims) (Kyprianos 1788,?…) and in 1814 the decreasing population did not exceed 70,000 souls, half of this number, or more, Greeks and the remainder Turks (Kinneir (1814) and Turner (1815) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 414 and 425, respectively). Although several minorities, like Armenians and Jews, maintained their presence on Cyprus (Grivaud 2000, 43-66), the two dominant ethnic groups were the Greeks and the Ottoman Turks, Christian and Muslim respectively. There was also the Frank society in Larnaca, which was composed of individuals of several nations in Europe.
In this paper, dietary practices are presented through the eyes of travellers coming mainly from Europe, but also from other parts of the world, such as America. Merchant ships of various nationalities touched in Cyprus on their voyages, throughout the period. The proximity of the island to mainland Turkey and the Holy Land made it a convenient stop on the way to the East, and provisions were cheap.
"Our Captain was buying salt at the lake [Salines, Larnaca] *to salt eighteen or twenty oxen and cows which he had bought to provision the ship"* (Villamont (1588), in *Excerpta Cypria*, 175).
"The vessels which have commerce with Syria, Tarsus and Europe or Smyrna, usually put in here for the purpose of procuring bread and provisions for the voyage. Provisions here are cheap and the bread of Larnica is as handsome and good as that which is made of juniper flour. Sometimes men of war also come" (Pease 201).

By the middle of the 19th century the port of Larnaca was receiving 320-385 vessels (Aristides 1984, 57 in Severis note 212). In 1862 arrivals of foreign ships at Cyprus amounted to 882 (Papadopoullos 1980, 66).
As travelling became increasingly popular in the 18th and 19th centuries, Cyprus was visited by various individuals seeking to explore new fields of knowledge: antiquarians and historians, scientists and artists, pilgrims and missionaries, army

officers or men assigned to special duties. Whatever the aim of their journey, all visitors needed accommodation and food. Conditions were far from ideal.
For travellers, the only place to stay would be a khan, a typical Turkish inn built around a courtyard, with stables for mules, donkeys or camels on the ground floor, and rooms for guests on the upper floor. Khans were mainly used by merchants travelling from one place to another. The *Locanda*, mentioned in 1839 by the American Misssionary Lorenzo Warriner Pease, was probably the first inn in Larnaca (Pease (1839), 960). In 1873, the Archduke of Austria, Louis Salvator recorded five khans and one inn or hotel at Nicosia, the *Locanda della Speranza*: "*This idyllic refuge for pilgrims and painters stands in the middle of a small garden, and is kept by a good-natured simple Greek"* (Salvator (1873) 1983, 50).
Very often visitors were offered accommodation in monasteries and convents or relied on the hospitality of the local people, both for lodging in poor houses, and for food:
"Cyprus afforded more accommodation for travelers than Syria; for at every little distance there generally was a convent, where was to be found a sufficiency of most necessaries" (Meryon 1846, 381).
"We arrived at the convent of St. Panteleimon, where we took upon lodgings for the night" (Pease 179). *"As there is no such thing as a tavern on the island, and indeed generally throughout the East, the priests, obliging the injunctions of the apostles, have come to be the entertainers of travelers. They take nothing for their entertainment however long it may be. Their servants are allowed by them to receive a baksheesh or present. The traveler feels bound of course to pay not only for the services of the servants; of the value of the food and lodgings"* (Pease 194).
"we came to the house [of the cadi (**note**: chief authority in judicial and municipal matters) of Batili] and were invited into his receiving room. Our dragoman had previously presented to him our letter from the governor, so that our character and business was made known…He had arranged for us a place in the house of a Greek near, where our floor was the earth, our lamp was a tumbler partly filled with water and olive oil, and our companions fleas"* (Pease 198).

In many cases foreign travellers furnished themselves with letters of introduction to their own consuls or compatriots residing in Cyprus, so as to be able to stay in their homes as guests. The British vice-consul, Anthony Vondiziano, a Cephalonian by birth, has often been mentioned by travellers for the hospitable reception which he gave to the English in his house at Larnaca. He had built a pavilion over the gateway of his courtyard and away from the house, entirely for the reception of strangers (Meryon1846, 363-364).
In a land with hardly any proper road, mules and donkeys provided the standard means of transport. Caravans of camels were often to be seen, as well as rude, wooden ox-carts. Local guides and servants were cheaply hired to accompany visitors. Most guides and muleteers came from Athienou, a village situated half-way between Nicosia and Larnaca:
"The peasants there [in Athienou] *had but one occupation, that of carriers … They, their wives, and children, seemed filthy in their persons and habits. They however ate with knives and forks, sat on chairs, and slept on beds raised from the ground"* (Meryon 1846, 366).
Travellers also had to procure fodder for their transport animals, which sometimes was scarce: *"We have several times been in danger of being stopped on our journey*

for want of barley and straw. Both are very scarce… We take a little with us from village to village and thus our animals live" (Pease (1837), 758).

Trying to ensure lodging and foodstuffs, visitors came into closer contact with the local people, especially the country folk, and observed their way of living. In their accounts, they occasionally offer us a glimpse into the dietary habits of the Cypriots. Their references to nutrition throw light on many different aspects such as natural resources and products, preparation of foodstuffs like bread, cheese, wine etc., food consumed during Lent or in special feasts; occasionally descriptions are made of entertainments and meals offered by Turks or Greeks in the countryside or in urban centres. Some visitors describe ceremonial receptions and the food or other things offered on such occasions; others comment on religious beliefs, customs, rituals and superstitions connected with food.
References to food habits drawn from travellers´ accounts are presented here, grouped separately under the above mentioned subjects.
Information is scanty, fragmentary and scattered in a wide range of texts, however, if assembled together, it gives a fairly good idea of the food culture of those times.

Natural resources and products

Travellers repeatedly refer to the products of the island:
"It is happy in its climate, which allows its inhabitants to raise of the fruits of the earth more than they need for themselves" (Diedo (1570), *Excerpta Cypria*, 87).
"It abounds in very excellent wines, wheat, barley, cattle, salt, oil, sugar, cheese… great sheep whose tails weigh more than 25 pounds, capers, pomegranates, sweet and bitter oranges, palms, cucumbers, melons, and fruits of all kinds in great plenty" (Villamont (1588) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 177).
"The island abounds in wheat, wine and excellent meat, which it sends to other countries … All kinds of vegetables grow there, and abundance of barley, dates, bananas, carobs, oranges, lemons, citrons … sugar, saffron, coriander, susiman [sesame?], lentisc-seed, honey and sometimes manna; as to vegetables, the cauliflowers are excellent eating, cabbages, Egyptian beans, colocasia…" (Dandini (1596)in *Excerpta Cypria*, 183). It is worth noting that sugar is mentioned only in the early part of the period, as by the 18th century sugar plantations were replaced by cotton.
"Melons, pumpkins and gourds grow in great abundance, and the choicest bananas of exquisite flavour" (Cotovicus (1598-99) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 189).
"Imperfectly as it is cultivated, it abounds in every production of nature, and bears great quantities of corn, figs, olives, oranges, lemons, dates, and indeed of every fruit seen in these climates: it nourishes great numbers of goats, sheep, pigs and oxen" (Turner (1815) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 425).
"The products of the place are olives, oil, grapes, raisins, wine rakee, figs" (Pease (1836), 572). *"Occasionally we find walnuts, almonds, filberts* [*Corylus maxima*, a cultivated hazel bearing longish edible nuts], *pomalidia* [*Mespilus Germanicus*] *etc."* (Pease (1837), 751).
"There are the best oranges, lemons and apricots (caisia and chrysomela) as well as pomegranates etc.." (Pease (1838), 844).

In the great Provision Bazaar of Nicosia, in 1873, Louis Salvator saw: *"citrons, bread, kolokasias, Jerusalem artichokes, carrots, long radishes, turnips, raisins, dates, chestnuts, filbert nuts, big almonds, confections, poppy-seed for soothing children to sleep, linseed, pulse, vegetables of all kinds …"* (Salvator (1873) 1983, 54).
"The oxen are small and lean… The sheep supply the best meat… The lambs are chiefly eaten in the summer. The flocks of goats are beautiful…" (Mariti (1760-1767), 1971, 15).
"Lamb, mutton, game and pork were plentiful, and beef was generally to be had" Meryon 1846, 383).
Birds and other game, as well as fish, provided food from nature, but there were also domestic fowls:
"Hunting is very delightful all over the island, as it everywhere affords plenty of snipes, partridges, hares, wild goats, but it has no deer" (Heyman (1700-1709) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 247-248).
"Among their birds the chief are a very beautiful partridge…and a beautiful bird called in Italian Francolino, and in Greek Aftokinara" (Pococke (1738) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 267).
"The little vine-birds are found in numbers; they are only really delicious on the spot, but are sent abroad pickled. The grapes and the lentisc-seed which they eat make them extremely fat" (Dandini (1596) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 184).
"Among birds the commonest are francolins, partridges, woodcock, quails, thrushes, and every kind of waterfowl: we may say in fact that no winged game is lacking … I must not forget the beccafico … The largest catches are made near Santa Napa. Some are sold fresh, but most of them have the head and feet cut off, are scalded, and then put into vinegar with certain drugs …The sale of these little birds is in the hands of the Europeans at Larnaca … Every year 400 little barrels are exported, some containing 200, others 400 birds" (Mariti (1760-1767), 1971, 13-14).
"Among the domestic birds, I observed a few turkeys in the convent of the Archangel; geese and ducks are kept, but not in great numbers: fowls and pigeons are the principal domestic birds" (Sibthorp (1787) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 333).
"A lake stretching along some distance towards the river Pedieos [near Famagusta] *was covered with great numbers of wild ducks"* (Pease (1839), 982).
"The island abounds in game, such as partridges, quails, woodcocks and snipes… All sorts of domestic fowls, as well as sheep and cattle, are bred in Cyprus, where it is the boast of the natives, that the produce of every land and climate will not only flourish but even attain the highest point of perfection" (Kinneir (1814) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 414).
"In the proper season red-legged partridges and Francolins are very common in Cyprus" (Turner (1815) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 445).
"Its flesh [of the moufflon, Ovis Orientalis] *was considered very delicate"* (Pease (1838), 824).

"The shores of Cyprus receive a great number of Mediterranean fishes… In river fish it is deficient: the rivulets, few in number and inconsiderable in their size, generally dried up in summer, do not lead us to expect a large catalogue of river fish, and upon repeated enquiries I found that the eel was their only inhabitant" (Sibthorp (1787) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 334).

"At such a time [summer] *the governor sends to all parts of the island and brings men who go in* [the lake near Famagusta] *and take to fish in baskets and nets. They give one half to the government"* (Pease (1838), 845).

Preparation of foodstuffs

Descriptions of the laborious, handmade processes of preparation of foodstuffs offer a clear picture of a traditional, almost primitive society in the pre-industrial stage of development:

"Persons who have seen the bread made in the island… have found it not only of excellent quality, but the best and finest you would get throughout Syria and other parts of the Levant. It owes this pre-eminence to the diligence and address of the women, who pick over the wheat very carefully, and take out the grains which would make the bread brownish, but these do not exist in the proportion which some suppose. Even after cleaning it thus they wash it, and reject the grains which have been eaten out by weevil, an easy task, because they float on the water in which they are washed. They never remit their care even in times of famine: thinking, very reasonably, that the loss is hardly felt, while no grinding can make the empty grain into flour, but mere bran; and lastly that they assure their health by cleaning the wheat, and getting rid of other seeds and of earth, which gives no nourishment, and is even very hurtful" (Mariti (1760-1767), 1971, 121).

"The bread made in private houses in Cyprus is unequalled, except perhaps by that which is prepared for the table of the Sultan at Constantinople. It is composed of what is called fiore di farina. The flour is divided into three parts to obtain the kind which is proper for manipulation. The first separated is the coarse and husky part: the next, the white impalpable powder: after which operation remains the fiore di farina, which is neither very finely pulverized, nor remarkably white, and is by far the smallest quantity of the whole mass. This is found to contain the purest part of the wheat, and to make the finest bread" (Hume (1801) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 343).

"We now do our baking in our house [in Larnaca]. *It is surprising how much labor it brings. First we must have a woman, who sifts [the dirt and small kernels] of wheat through a very coarse sieve, made of sheep skin, and throws out stones etc. She then washes it, [when much light wheat is taken out for the fowls], spreads it on mats in the sun, dries it, again sifts it and picks out the stones, smut and bad wheat. Then the miller is brought, who weighs it, and takes it to the mill and brings it back, weighs it again having ground but not boiled it. The woman is again brought, who sifts it, when (the sieve being very close) the bran rises to the top, the finest flour falls through, and the semi stale, or coarse flour remains in the sieve. The bran is again sifted, when a kind of shorts is separated from it, which is used for servant´s bread. The semi-dale is also shaken, when the bran remaining in it rises to the top and is put with the shorts. Thus we can make bread out of shorts, which is graham bread, fine flour, which is pretty white, and semi dale (very coarse flour) which is very white and sweet. All this work would be done in a few hours in America by a machine, while here we must spend at least three days in processing 150 lbs of flour"* (Pease (1837), 743).

"The people take wheat, clean it, boil it, dry in the sun and crack it at the mill and use it in this way as they do rice for pilaf. It is very good boiled as a pudding" (Pease (1835), 557). This is *pourgouri*, a common dish in Cyprus to this day. The mill he refers to was the traditional hand mill.

"Macaroni is made by twisting dough into small curls. The bran is sifted from the flour by a hand sieve" (Pease 139). This is the common traditional method, but Pease, in 1835, also described the process of making macaroni with a machine: *"To day I saw the process of making long macaronia. The dough appears to be made like dough for bread, with the exception, perhaps, of raising with yeast. The machine is a large press, like a book binder´s press. Under the platen (?) is a short iron circular box. The bottom is pierced with holes of such size as the maker pleases. They had different bottoms the holes of which varied in size. The dough is put into this and the platen is screwed down until all the dough is pressed through in long strings. It is dried and then ready for use"* (Pease (1835), 513).

"From this place the Christians in all parts are supplied with excellent hams which they cure in a particular manner by salting them, pouring the rich wine on them, and when they have pressed them very dry, they hang them up (Pococke (1738) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 267).

Being the guest of Mehmet Kourshid Aga, a Greek who changed his faith and name in 1821, to save his life, and served as secretary to the governor at the serail, L. W. Pease had the opportunity to see and describe the milking of goats: *"They* [the goats] *were all driven into one enclosure. Two shepherds sat in a small door, which opened a communication with another and with their pails. A boy drove up the goats; as the men wanted them they would call or whistle to them, and catch them. They milked them from behind. The goats stood as patiently as could be desired. The operation was soon performed as each animal on an average gave only from a gill to half a pint"* (Pease 542). Milk was seldom drunk as most of it was turned into cheese, especially challoumi, the preparation of which is also described: *"They make cheese of goats´milk, which is famous all over the Levant, and is the only good cheese to be met with in these parts; they are small and thick, much in the shape of the ancient weights, and are kept in oil, otherwise when they are new they would breed a worm, and when old soon grow dry"* (Pococke (1738) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 267). *"The people make chaloumi in the following manner. They boil the milk of the goat, and put into it some of the dried coagulated milk from the stomach of a sucking lamb, which coagulates.They then press it, cut into slices, and boil it in the whey until it rises to the top. This is preserved in whey as long as they please. Anari is another kind. When they have separated the whey and the curd, they take a little whey and put into new milk, which they boil until it curdles. This is then pressed in a small basket and is ready for use. It is a very pleasant condiment. Caimak is the cream, which rises upon boiling milk, when they make leban. Leban is sour milk, when the milk is boiled, a little sour milk is put in it is then put aside, and in few hours is ready for use. It is eaten with sugar dibs etc. and bread"* (Pease (1836), 547-548). A Greek fable is also mentioned in connection with chaloumi: *"A skipper in a chaloumi was asked, "of what is the world made?" – "chaloumi" was the reply"* (Pease (1836), 551).

"The delicious birds called beccafiquo´s are caught in the latter end of August; these are pickled in salt and vinegar, pressed down in casks, and carefully secured, and thus sent to Venice and England. They have a manner of dressing them here with Cyprus wine, than which I think few things can better please a dainty palate" (Heyman (1700-1709) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 247).

"The way they [the beccaficos] *are generally prepared here for the table is to cut them in two, and put them on the gridiron with bread crumbs and a little parsley which gives them an excellent flavour"* (Mariti (1760-1767), 1971, 14).

"The aga says that he preserves the seeds of water and musk melons, dries them in the sun, pounds them in a mortar, soaks them in water, and expresses the juice and then, mingles it with sugar: He says that it is a very cooling drink" (Pease (1836), 561).
"Oil is made by heating the olives in boiling water, grinding them in the mill, and pressing the pulp. The process is aided by addition of hot water. A tree will yield in good years from 5 to 50 okes of oil – average15: and then yields very little for one, 2 or 3 years. A rain before they ripen adds much to their quality. They injure the trees by beating them off before they are ripe, as they are afraid of losing them by theft. One year people could not collect all their olives on account of their quantity. A bushel of olives will make about 7 ½ okes of oil. Good olive trees were more than 100 and less than 200 years old. They were among the largest I ever saw" (Pease (1836), 572).
In 1873 Salvator saw in Nicosia *"a sesame-oil mill, consisting of a horizontal wheel, which turns upon a round stone with a wooden hoop, through which the oil runs into a vase underneath. The oil is strained from this vase into salt water, left there twelve hours, and put into an oven for six hours more. The white paste is sold to make Halava; of the red residue more oil is gained by putting it into a cauldron with cold water and treading it, which makes the oil rise to the surface. Sesame-oil is consumed in great quantities by the Greeks during Lent"* (Salvator (1873) 1983, 68). *Halva*, a solid, crumbly sweet is made of sesame paste, sugar and the root of *Saponaria officinalis* (soapworth), called *riza tou halouva*, in Greek (Egoumenidou and Michaelides 2002, 60).
In one of the Bazaars of Nicosia there were little shops with "Turkish delight", *Halava*: *"It is interesting to watch them preparing the favourite Halava at distances of a few yards apart. They use for this purpose large copper cauldrons, mixing up the Halava paste with an enormous wooden ladle stuck into a ring hanging down from the ceiling on a rope. The paste consists of dried syrup made of grapes, Halava, which is a special kind of seed, and sesame oil. All this is kneaded up first in the cauldron for about an hour, then left standing in a flat tin dish, and after another hour the whole thing is ready. The operation lasts about five to seven hours"* (Salvator (1873) 1983, 55). The "Turkish delight" described above, the paste of which is made of grape syrup, is a different sweetmeat, also called *Halva*; the same name is still used for a variety of sweetmeats.

"In making wine, commanderia, etc., they pick the grapes, put them on the roof of a house, very thick, 6 inches and more, to be partially dried, then put them into a vase of water, until they have undergone fermentation, and afterwards press them. This makes sweet wine, otherwise it would be sour" (Pease (1836), 562).
"Wine is made from grapes, either dried in the sun or on the vines, by picking. The juice ferments 30 or 40 days, and if it be good, it will probably pass the next August in safety, when there is little danger of its spoiling. If it remains good two years, there is no longer danger, it may be carried anywhere. If it be not good, it will probably ferment again in May or July, when it either becomes vinegar or is preserved.

Rakee is distilled either from the remnants of the grapes or wine turning into vinegar. An alembic is used the tube of which passes through a large jar of cold water and is distilled into a jar on the opposite side" (Pease (1836), 572).

"Grapes are left to dry on the vines or else are picked and dried on the roofs of houses for raisins. Those who pick the grapes have the raisins on the vines for their share" (Pease 1836), 580).
"It [St. John´s bread, carob] *is of a very agreeable taste, and from it is expressed a kind of juice or honey, used as a sauce in several favourite dishes"* (Heyman (1700-1709) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 247).
"To preserve them [bananas] *for any time they must be picked unripe, and buried in the sand, then they are hung up in bedrooms, or exposed to the sun, and they ripen."* (Cotovicus (1598-99) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 189).

"Onions are used chiefly as a relish for food, in soups or salad, fish, greens, beans" (Pease (1838), 819).

"The people ripen figs at pleasure by putting a little olive oil on the end, while on the tree. They thus become fit to eat in about a week" (Pease (1837), 720).
"They dry figs and boil them and then role them in flour and make them soft and delicate" (Pease (1838), 926).

Food consumed during Lent (fasting)

Several travellers noticed the long periods of fasting in Cyprus, which, when put together, actually cover more than half the days of the year (see Egoumenidou and Michaelides 2002, 55-64), and give interesting information about the kind of food consumed during this time:
"Their Lent, which they observe very strictly, lasts a week longer than that of the Catholics. During this penitential season they eat neither meat, fish nor cheese. They have scruples even about the use of oil, so their food is reduced to bread and a few olives" (Ali Bey (1806) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 397).
"I dined with him [Mr How, in his house at Larnaca] *on some salt fish, and some delicious small artichokes; for as it was the Greek Lent no meat could easily be had"* (Turner (1815) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 427).
"Lent had now begun, and I resolved to live with Mr. Vondiziano´s family as if I had been of their own religion, in order to see how I could bear a meager diet … The eldest of Signor Vondiziano´s daughters, about twelve years old, had been so schooled by their confessor, that she fed on bread and olives only. Our meals consisted generally of rice soup, made with oil, instead of meat or butter; fish done in oil; wild and garden artichokes; salads, peas, beans, or other vegetables, fried in oil; botarga, caviar, olives, anchovies; and some other things, which I forget. The children vie with each other in undergoing privations of this kind: and the maidservants were their abettors. Signor Vondiziano, under the plea of a weak stomach, obtained an exemption for himself twice a week" (Meryon 1846, 405-406).
Botarga or *botargo* is the salted and dried roe of grey mullet and occasionally tuna, an ancient product of the Mediterranean and several other areas (Turkey, Brazil, Venezuela, Senegal etc.). The word is thought to be Arabic, but this goes further to

the Greek *avgotaraho*. This delicacy is often mentioned along with caviar, as in our case; in effect they were not dissimilar products in a period before technology developed to preserve caviar in plump salty little balls of individual fish eggs (*The Art and Mystery of Food* (Google); *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*). According to consular reports, *botargo*, *caviar* and *anchovies* were imported to Cyprus in the 18th century (salaison including harengs, saumon et anchois, en barril, anguilles d ´Antioche, en milliers, caviar et boutargue, merluches et stocfich, en ocques, are recorded in the French archives as imports for the years 1776-1781: Pouradier Duteil – Loïzidou 1991, tables II, VII, VIII). According to 19th century consular reports, salt fish in barrels and dry-salteries were imported to Cyprus from Greece, Turkey, France, Austria, Italy and England (Papadopoullos 1980, 11-12, 107, 201-202, 217-218, 235-236).

"On my arrival at the monastery, the archbishop received me civilly ... His dinner, as being Lent fare, was no better than the repasts which I had left behind me at Larnaka" (Meryon 1846, 408).
As an example of the strictness of fasting among the Greeks, Otto von Richter, in 1816, mentions that the wife of the consul Peristianis, during a dinner, did not try the salad on the table, because her husband had touched it with the knife he had previously used to cut the meat in his plate (Richter 1822, 312).

"We have now [in March] *a long fast till Easter… the fathers in the church prescribed them for the health of the people…meat is injurious at this season of the year"* (Pease (1838), 819).
"The Greeks do not eat on Wednesday and Friday, i.e. meat" (Pease (1837), 766).

"Our Turkish midwife is fasting or preparing to fast tomorrow by eating tonight two meat suppers. On the strength of that she will fast for about 20 hours" (Pease (1838), 910).

Food and drink in feasts

"Today we dined at Mr. Mattei´s upon invitation. As it is the close of meat eating time, the people feast as much as possible" (Pease (1835), 521). Here Pease refers to *Apokreo*, the last week and especially the last Sunday before the beginning of Lent. It is the week of carnival celebrations during which special meat dishes of smoked ham, sausages etc. are consumed.
"Today is a festa amongst the villagers in honor of the conclusion of harvest. It is in honour of Bacchus: When the villagers, as in duty bound, drink wine. The aga gave them today to satisfy their needs". On this date (24 June) is the Festival of St. John the Torchbearer (Pease (1835), 521, and note 142: by Severis).

In 1865, Edmond Duthoit had an unforgettable culinary experience on a feast day in the village of Kornos:
"Fifty feet away from the table, a tender mutton had been slaughtered and cut to pieces, a big hearth of blazing fire let out the smoke of ten spits two metre long that were being turned by urchins. In order to accelerate the roasting, the mutton was cut into small pieces and put on enormous skewers. The sight was extremely picturesque,

the dinner succulent, the toasts numerous and noisy; we drank to the health of King George, to the liberation of Cyprus, to France the protecting power, to our own health". "In a beautiful orchard of trees of the Levant, orange and lemon trees, mulberry and olive trees, we set up a long table that did not shine by the finery of the tablecloth nor by the uniformity the crockery" (Severis and Bonato (eds) 1999, 97).

Meals and Entertainments

It seems that travellers did not consider meals worth recording; they usually mention them but only rarely give descriptions of the dishes offered, or make remarks on food practices of local people:

"Their food is of coarse wheatbread and herbs, with, at rare intervals, an occasional home-fed chicken, and the wine of the country, which, fortunately for them, is bought very cheap" (Turner (1815) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 448).
"The famine is so great that many poor country people have bread only once or twice a week, that they live on marrows, roots and without even lemon juice or oil to put on. They are becoming sallow from famine" (Pease (1838), 810).

"Chicken is our everyday food. Twice a day chicken with rice and wholemeal bread, the wine is quite good but we only drink it at dinner" (Severis and Bonato (eds) 1999, 97).
"The Greeks eat a small piece of bread with a small cup of coffee in the morning, with a spoonful of sweet meat. At noon, eat again of bread, cheese etc., and make a dinner at night or else at noon. But they are irregular in this respect" (Pease (1836), 569). *"People .. do not generally become habitual drunkards because they do not eat breakfast as we do, but just take a small piece of bread in the morning.."* (Pease (1837), 758).
"The desserts on their tables consisted of the finest fruits, musk and water melons, apricots etc." (Hume (1801) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 341).
"The black wine is used at table with the food and does not produce any intoxication easily. The commandery wine is drank in small quantities, upon eating fruit or cheese, etc." (Pease (1837), 748). *"The men drink more or less wine at dinner, while the women seldom drink at all"* (Pease (1839), 1068).
"I was received here [at the convent called the Madonna of Cheque] *with civility by the superior, who met me without the gate, conducted me to the church, and then to their apartments, where I was served with marmalade, a dram, and coffee, and about an hour after with a light collation, and in the evening with a grand entertainment at supper"* (Pococke (1738) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 262).
We found and ate in this place [the church of Agia Nappa] *a large quantity of beccafichi, called by the Greeks sycalidia, which at this season are caught in such abundance that besides the numbers that are consumed in the island itself thousands are exported, preserved in vinegar, to Venice and elsewhere"* (Della Valle (1625) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 213).

"Today we had a dish of the little bird called αμπελοπούλια,[ampelopoulia, beccaficos] *which now* [end of August] *begin to appear. They are very small, exceedingly fat, and very much prized by the people"* (Pease (1835), 566).

"The Agha of the village [Poli, in Paphos], *a venerable man, received us with much politeness, and having spread before us a frugal repast of yaourt and ricemilk, he left us and retired to his harem"* (Sibthorp (1787) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 332).
"Many different varieties of the gourd, or pumpkin, are used in Cyprus for vegetables at table. The young fruit is boiled, after being stuffed with rice. We found it refreshing and pleasant, partaking at the same time the flavour of asparagus and artichoke" (Clarke (1801) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 379-380).
"The venerable pair with whom we rested in the village of Attien were the parents of our mule-drivers, and owners of the mules. They made us welcome to their homely supper, by placing two planks across a couple of benches and setting thereon boiled pumpkins, eggs, and some wine of the island in a hollow gourd" (Clarke (1801) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 385).
"I slept at Lataniscio [the village Plataniskia on the way to Limassol] *where the kind Turkish mountaineers were waiting for me with a delicious supper of cheese, cream and the like"* (Ali Bey (1806) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 409).
"I became one of the family of the vice-consul, and conformed to the unwholesome custom of making a heavy meal at mid-day" (Henry Light, "Captain of the Royal Artillery" (1814) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 420).
"We went to the house of a peasant [a Musulman at the village of Idalion], *who admitted us very cordially and his wife shook hands with us on our entering, contrary to the custom of countries in the Levant, which is either to kiss hands, or to carry the hand to the forehead. They gave us some eggs, which with bread and cheese and wine brought by Ibrahim, made me a good dinner"* (Turner (1815) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 430).
"We passed a little after sunset the village of Aracipou [Aradippou], *where I got some delicious milk, warm from the goat, the flocks being just returned"* (Turner (1815) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 430).
"This [Athiainou] *being the village of our guide, we dined here off some eggs cooked for us by his wife"* (Turner (1815) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 436).
"At Kakotopia we stopped in a mud cottage, which we left after devouring a couple of fowls" (Turner (1815) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 438).
"We reached the village of Ieros Kypos. We went immediately to the house, or rather cottage, of Signor Andrea [Zimboulakis], *an old Zantiote, who has for many years been English consular agent for Baffo … He gave us a supper of delicious fish, and a room in which were made up for me two tolerable beds, on which we slept like tired people"* (Turner (1815) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 440).
"We returned to the convent of the Bishop of Baffo, for whom Mr Vondiziano had given me a letter, but he was at a village two hours distant, where we made a bad dinner off onions and cheese" (Turner (1815) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 441).
"At the termination of the mountains we stopped to snatch a bread and cheese dinner, near a small pool of bad water … we were glad to stop at the village of Mazoto, where, in the cottage of a Greek peasant, we got a good supper of fowls, which, as usual with us, were killed, picked, cooked and eaten in twenty minutes" (Turner (1815) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 445).

"I ate [on the house of the chief person in the village of Kythrea] *some excellent pork, boiled down to a jelly and dressed with a sour sauce in the manner of the French. The female part of the family, although seen occasionally bustling about in*

the duties of the house, did not sit down to table with us" (Meryon 1846, 373). The above described dish, brings to mind *zalatina*, a traditional Christmas speciality.

"We found in the monastery [of St. Chrysostomos] *one monk, an old woman, and a boy. Some rice, which I had with me, a little leben, procured from the hamlet, and some rammakins, dressed in oil, afforded a comfortable supper"* (Meryon 1846, 375). *Leben, labna, labneh*, a sour milk product, which was described by another traveller (see above in preparation of foodstuffs), had spread all over Mediterranean countries from the Middle and Near East during the Ottoman dominion. It is still popular in the Arab world. The boiled milk, mixed with yoghurt or sour cream, is put in a bag of thin cloth and drained off. It is eaten plain, also with sugar or honey (Severis (ed.) 2002, 548, note 145). *Ramekin* is a small dish for making and serving an individual portion of food; further, the food served in such a dish, in particular a small quantity of cheese baked with breadcrumbs, eggs and seasoning (*The Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English*, 2008; see also *Wikipedia*, 3 June, 2008). It seems that the traveller was served a cheese dish, most probably eggs and cheese fried in oil.
"He [the aga of Famagusta] *paid us special attention, gave us pipes and coffee twice and lemonade once. The coffee was sweetened with sugar"* (Pease (1839), 980).

"He [the cadi of Famagusta] entertained us himself in a very hospitable manner. We sat at our divan a la Turque, ate our soup from one dish with wooden spoons and pulled our meat apart with our fingers. The operation was so new to me that I performed it with great awkwardness. I succeeded however in performing my part" (Pease (1835), 211). In the house of the cadi in the village of Batili *"chibouques and coffee had been presented"* (Pease (1835), 198).

"Yesterday [January 17, 1839] *several Turks came from Constantinople. They are now in quarantine, and have been ordering a lamb stuffed, wine, rakee, etc. and finally they have even asked for a fiddler for the night! Truly the Turks are fast becoming Christians!"* (Pease (1839), 966).

"*We went into a coffee house* [in Ktema, Paphos], *where we were welcomed by several Turks. We sat to take our coffee…On the return we went to see Mr. Christodoulos, the demogeron of the place, who received us with much ceremony, urged us to dine with him, etc…He gave us bread and cheese for the journey…"* (Pease (1837), 774).

"Today we remained at Varosia, where we ate coucia [broad beans] *not always ripe however. These are certainly very delicious"* (Pease (1838), 844).

"Last night two little girls of our host [in the village of Pera] *came in with a load of the roots of the αγκινάρα* [artichoke] *to give as food to their donkeys*, *so great is the dearth*. *They as well as their mother also ate of these roots"* (Pease (1837), 746).

"Visitors always receive jam made of melons, cherries, quince, apricots, the juice of the crataegus plant, or rose-leaves. With this sweet- stuff, called Tatli in Turkish, Glikon in Greek, the servants bring little baskets of silver-wire with small ornamental spoons: these are divided into two compartments, one for the clean spoons, the other for those which have been used. After that comes the coffee, as a sort of invitation to leave, especially with the Turks. If the visitor bores his host, a second cup of coffee

will soon follow: if he is liked, he is on the contrary kept waiting a long while for his coffee. After the coffee, cigarettes are usually offered, and a servant brings small brass plates for the ashes ... The musicians are frequently treated with Mastica (firgum brandy) or sparkling Comandaria" (Salvator (1873) 1983, 60-61).

Ceremonial receptions

Travellers become more eloquent when they come to describe official receptions by high ranking persons, the Turkish Governor or the Archbishop.
Drummond describes the visit of a consul to the pasha in the serail:
"The consul sent to know if the Vazir pacha would please to give him audience… we passed to the presence-chamber [of the seraglio] *… There we stood until the entrance of the pacha…nobody sat but the pacha on his divan, and the consul on an elbow-chair of state…After some common-place speeches, and hollow assurances of friendship, which gold alone can realize, we were entertained with coffee, sweet-meats, and sherbet, and lastly, with perfumes, which always imply a licence to withdraw"* (Drummond (1750) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 285).

Mariti gives details of a typical consul´s reception by the Governor each time the latter arrived at Larnaca:
"An official is deputed to receive the consul at the door of the Governor´s palace, and to conduct him to the hall of audience …The Governor enters from another room ... The consul takes his seat on a chair which he has sent expressly from his own house, and the Governor sits on a divan or sofa ... A choqadar then kneels before the Governor and spreads a napkin of some gay colour over his knees: with a bow only he offers another to the consul. They are then served in due order with candied fruits preserved in syrop, then coffee made without sugar and served in cups which are not quite full, a custom which the Turks think more polite: and lastly with a kind of sherbet smelling of musk and amber. The talk continues as long as the Governor pleases: finally one choqadar bears a vase of rose water, another a kind of thurible, the first lightly sprinkles the face and hands of the Governor and his guest, the other censes them with burning aloe chips. This is a graceful way of indicating that the audience is over ..." (Mariti (1760-1767), 2971, 131-132).

Some 20 years later J. Sibthorp presents another official reception accompanied with dinner:
"He [the Governor of the island] *received me with great politeness; our Ambassador, Sir R. Ainslie, had procured me letters for him… he offered us his firman and ordered his dragoman to prepare a magnificent dinner…Our dinner was served after the Turkish fashion; a great variety of dishes well dressed, gave us a favourable idea of the Turkish cooking, and the Governor´s hospitality. I had counted thirty-six, when the dragoman made us an apology for the badness of the dinner; and that he had not assistance enough to prepare it"* (Sibthorp (1787) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 328-329).
In 1801 Edward Daniel Clarke found himself in the Governor´s palace accompanying the English Dragoman, a rich Armenian called Mr. Sekis:
"The Governor desired us to be seated upon the divan opposite to him ... he next strove to dazzle our senses with his splendour and greatness. Having chapped his hands , a swarm of attendants, most magnificently habited, came into the room, bearing gilded goblets filled with lemonade and sorbet, which they presented to us ... Next came a fresh party of slaves, bringing long pipes of jasmine wood with amber

heads to all the party; these were suddenly followed by another host of myrmidons in long white vests, having white turbans on their heads, who covered us with magnificent cloths of sky-blue silk, spangled and embroidered with gold. They also presented to us preserved fruits and other sweetmeats; snatching away the embroidered cloths, to cover us again with others of white satin, still more sumptuous than before. Then they brought coffee, in gold cups studded with diamonds; and the cloths were once more taken away. After this, there came slaves kneeling before us with burning odours in silver censers, which they held beneath our noses; and finally a man, passing rapidly round, spattered all our faces, hands, and clothes, with rose water" (Clarke (1801) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 387-388).
"After dinner we all went to call upon the Mutesellim in the house of the Khoja-bashi. … We found his Excellency seated upon his divan, and surrounded by his Albanian guards. We were ushered into his presence with considerable pomp, and invited by him to seat ourselves on his divan. … As usual we were regaled with pipes and coffee, after which we were each presented with conserves in little filigree cups of silver (closed at the top by a hinged cover); then followed excellent sherbet with embroidered napkins; and next we were sprinkled with rose-water, and perfumed with incense contained in filigree silver censers" (Frankland (1827) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 457).

In 1835 the American missionary L. W. Pease accompanied a consul in his visit to the Governor and gives us a full description of the ceremony and offerings:
"Today I accompanied our consul and suite in making a call on the governor of the island. It is the custom of the latter to come here [in Larnaca] *annually for the purpose of receiving such visits. The consul sends by hand of one of his dragomen (interpreters) a diamond ring or something else, worth about 1,000 piastres or50 dollars, with compliments informing him of his intention to visit him. The dragoman receives from the governor a robe of small value…He returns and accompanies the consul to the palace. The governor enters by one door and receives his visitors standing, who come in by another. Immediately coffee is brought in, in small cups containing about 2 tablespoonfuls. Afterwards pipes with stems 6, 8, 10 feet long, adorned with elegant amber mouth pieces….Conversation is then carried out in Turkish, Arabic, Greek, Italian, English…for half an hour. The same servants reenter.. take the pipes.. and carry them out … Immediately, one returns, having in his hand a cambric handkerchief wrought with gold flowers and stitched on paper, folded, one of which each visitor receives … Another servant follows with a silver vase in which is perfumed water, which is sprinkled on the handkerchief and anything else you wish. Another follows him with a vase of burning incense the smoke of which each one is allowed to smell. This is the signal for retiring, when some persons kneel down and kiss his excellency´s hand or garment, while others perform the ceremony in a less devout manner. I had the honor to put my hand on my heart and bow to his excellency, which I thought full polite enough. I should have added that sweetmeats are also brought and presented to each person. It is expected that a servant of the consul should pay a very petty sum to the servants who brought in the coffee etc. The consul himself receives from the governor, in return for his diamond ring a present of a little greater value… And thus ends this farce…"* (L.W. Pease, letter to his parents, 19 October 1835; Pease 501, note 2).

In 1814 John Macdonald Kinneir, "Captain in the service of the Honourable East India Company", was conducted to the Episcopal palace in Nicosia:

"The Archbishop, dressed in a magnificent purple robe, with a long flowing beard, and a silk cap on his head, received me in the vestibule, and ordered an apartment to be prepared for me in the palace … At seven o´clock supper being announced, he took me by the hand, and led me through a gallery into the refectory, a long and dirty hall: about thirty priests and bishops sat down to table. The wine and provisions were excellent and abundant, and the bread which was white as snow, and baked with milk instead of water, was the best I remember to have tasted" (Kinneir (1814) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 416).

In 1817 the physician of Lady Hester Stanhope was also entertained by Archbishop Kyprianos, to whom he had a letter of introduction:
"I was ushered into his presence by several priests, and found a man about forty-five years old, handsome in person, and richly attired in a sable pelisse … Coffee and pipes were served, after which, it being now noon, the time of the first repast of the Orientals, we went to table. If a number of servants could constitute greatness, this prelate might vie with the first duke in England; for we had no fewer than twenty to wait at table, and I was told that he had fifty in the palace. The repast was what is called excellent in Turkey, but would seem strange to a European …Eastern enjoyment, or a priest´s idleness, was exemplified in the mode in which the archbishop washed his hands after dinner. The chair in which he sat was swung round by his attendants, and another armchair was brought, with the back between his knees, on the seat of which was placed a broad basin. The arms of the chair afforded support to his arms; and, whilst the water was poured on his hands, the back prevented the wet from falling on his clothes" (Meryon 1846, 369). It is worth noting that what the visitor describes as enjoyment or idleness, is in fact the very old and important ritual of handwashing at the table before and after dinner. It was practiced since Homeric times, and was common among Christians, Jews and Muslims. The special utensil for this purpose was a set of basin and ewer; it was called *hernivoxeston* by the Byzantines and *ibrikoleeno* all over the Ottoman Empire (Rizopoulou – Egoumenidou 2006, 116-117, with further references).

Religious beliefs, customs, rituals and superstitions connected with food

Religion, often impregnated with pagan beliefs, was a determinant factor in the everyday life of the people, who were in close contact with the church and priests. The remark that *"Servants [know how long to] boil eggs by saying the Lord´s prayer, or the Symbol of faith"* (Pease (1837), 743), is a small indication of this.
Muslims also had to follow the prescriptions of their religion:
"I could not but feel a little for the cadi, who appeared to long for sunset that he might indulge in the luxuries of the table, coffee and chibouques"(Pease 198). During Ramadan, Muslims were allowed to eat only after sunset.
"They all crossed themselves at the close of the meal, as a return of thanks" (Pease (1836), 558). The traveller refers here to a common Christian custom.
"It is the custom to bring some fire in a vessel with olive leaves on the coals, to smoke strangers. It is a mark of respect which the villagers shew, so they pour rose water on your hands and face, for the same reason" (Pease (1837), 767). This custom is met with on many occasions, among other in weddings, which in the past were often conducted in the house of the bride or groom: *On entering the house, we were*

presented with smoking incence which we smelt of, and then wet our hands with rose water… On sitting we had cakes and coffee" (Pease (1837), 730).
"We entered [an Orthodox church] *and remained during the service… At the close we partook of the antidoron (the love feast) which seems to be offered to all Christians of every manner. At the close having retired we were invited to sit in the porch and partake of some boiled wheat and sesame with raisins. I am not sure whether this is done on account of the dead or not, but I think it is"* (Pease (1839), 996). The wheat preparation referred to, is called *kolliva*, and is offered in memoriam of the dead.
"They [the Cypriotes] *retain here the barbarous custom of the other Eastern nations of treating their wives as servants; they wait on them at table, and never sit down with them, unless in such families as are civilized by much conversion by the Franks; for having been under the Greek emperors , and the Venetians, they have come very much into the European customs. They make use of chairs and tables"* (Pococke (1738) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 268).
"The villagers have a custom to present the first fruits to some wealthy person with the expectation of receiving a present much greater than their value. Thus a villager brought several αμπελοπούλια [ambelopoulia, literally "vine-birds"] to Mr. Charalambos the other day (the first he had taken). He presented them to him with great respect and then waited sometime without saying anything. At last Mr. Charalambos thought of the cause and offered money, which the former would not receive from his hands, but requested him to throw on the ground, so that he might receive it from the earth". "Today [8th September] I received a visit from the priest of the village who brought me a present of a basket of figs. After a variety of complaints against the people for not paying him etc. at last requested me to lend him 50p. [Mr. Charalambos says of such, he brought a flea and expects a camel!]" (Pease 1838), 887-888).

"Tomorrow is the feast of St. John the Baptist and the Greeks will not eat anything but bread and olives, not even onions because they must behead them. [I told our servant she must blend them in the mortar" (Pease (1838), 889). In order not to "behead" the onions, as St. John the Baptist was beheaded, people used to cut them sideways or cut the bottom end (Pharmakides 1938, 47).
"The feast of St. Mavra they will not open a chest or eat anything but milk" (Pease (1838), 889). On 3 May, the feast day of St. Mavra, people used to drink milk in the belief that otherwise their skin would turn black (Mavro = black). The shepherds did not make cheese on this day, but offered milk to all guests (Papacharalambous 1965, 219).
"They plough with their cows, which, as I was informed, they do not milk, looking on it as cruel to milk and work the same beast; but perhaps they may rather have regard to the young that are to be nourished by them" (Pococke (1738) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 267).
"The Greeks do not eat beef, upon the principle that the beast that tills the ground should not be used as food for man" (Mariti (1760-1767), 1971, 15).
"The peasants of Cyprus have a curious superstition, which seems to have descended to them from the time of the ancient Egyptians, viz. they never eat flesh of oxen, cows or calves, not even drink cow´s milk. They nourish them however to sell to the ships at the Scala" (Turner (1815) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 448).
"In many villages the people do not eat meat, and refuse to eat it when they come to be servants in our houses" (Pease (1838), 903).

"You may find wine of even a hundred years old, for when a father marries his child he presents him with a vessel of the best wine he has, and whenever this is tapped it is refilled with a like quantity of wine of the same kind, so that it always keeps its first goodness, and the older it is the better it is" (Van Bruyn (1683) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 243).
"It is customary on the birth of a child for the father to bury a jar full of wine well sealed, which is kept until the day of his or her marriage, when it is served at the wedding feast, and distributed among relations and friends" (Mariti (1760-1767), 1971, 116).
"Another curious custom of the Greeks, to which they cling tenaciously, is to bake a loaf of bread about new year with a gold coin inside, and to divide it into as many pieces as there are members of the family. The one who finds the coin is supposed to be happy all through the next year. This bread is called Vasilobita, or St. Basil´s bread" (Salvator (1873) 1983, 60).
Referring to Turkish funerals, Salvator mentions the following custom: *"On similar occasions Halava is prepared in great quantities, which, three days afterwards, is offered in front of the gates of the mosque to all passers-by"* (Salvator (1873) 1983, 63).
Some foodstuffs were used as medicaments in the belief that they could cure diseases, while others were supposed to be harmful:
"The wine of the country is said to possess the power of restoring youth to age, and animation to those who are at the point of death ... We tasted some of the Commanderia, which they said was forty years old, and was still in the cask. After this period it is considered quite as a balm, and reserved, on account of its supposed restorative and healing quality, for the sick and the dying" (Clarke (1801) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 380).
"If you drink only two pegs of this [wine thirty years old] *in the morning you can easily pass the rest of the day without meat or drink, so remarkable is the strength and goodness of the wine"* (Villamont (1589) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 173).
"The goats, if wounded, are troubled by the flies, who lay their eggs in the flesh, which generate worms and cause their death. The people remove the worms and put pulverized beans in, which is said to heal them" (Pease (1836), 548).
"The Turks have such an aversion to swine, that the Christians dare not keep them where they have less power than they have in Cyprus" (Pococke (1738) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 267).
"The fevers of Cyprus, unlike those caught upon other shores of the Mediterranean, rarely intermit; they are almost always malignant. The strictest attention is therefore paid by the inhabitants to their diet. Fortunately for them, they have no butter on the island; and in hot weather they deem it fatal to eat fat meat or indeed flesh of any kind, unless boiled to a jelly. They likewise carefully abstain from any sort of pastry; from eggs, cream and milk. The island produces abundance of delicious apricots ... but equally dangerous to foreigners, and speedily causing fever, if they be not sparingly used" (Clarke (1801) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 379).

"The diseases of Cyprus are fevers, chiefly, they have also lunacy and leprosy. The latter prevails almost entirely among the Greeks. It is supposed to proceed from the use of pork. The people in the village, kill in the winter, separate the thick fat from the lean, salt it very strongly and hang it up to dry. In the summer when they are engaged in harvesting, they cut the fat and eat it with their bread. This is supposed to corrupt the blood and produce this disease. For fevers, the people use poultices of mustard,

on the legs, [and raw fresh frogs] and young pigeons on the soles of the feet. For biles, they use onions and a large plant [hung up on doors] for the evil eye, having oil and salt upon them and roasting on the fire. For fresh wounds, they put on arrack, wine and vinegar, but no oil" (Pease 1836), 552).
"The aga says that the lepers are confined almost without exemption to the Christians… and that the cause of the disease is doubtless the fat of pork, salted or smoked, which they eat in the heat of summer instead of butter. The Turks eat everything else as do the Christians" (Pease (1839), 1069).

"They [bananas] *are very sweet and pleasant to the taste, but harmful to the stomach: they fill the caverns of the brains with their fumes, are cloying and decay rapidly; so it is only people of the poorest class who use them for food… There are people who call them the apples of Paradise, and think them to be the same which our first father Adam ate, and so transgressed the commandment of God. There is this indeed about the fruit which I think worthy of note, or even marvelous, that if you cut it into little discs, you will see in each, veins which form on either side the image of the Crucified".* (Cotovicus (1598-99) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 189).

"The musk-melons we seldom tasted on account of their supposed tendency to produce disease, but the water melons afforded a agreeable beverage, pecularly grateful in a hot climate" (Hume (1801) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 341).
"The aga says that watermelons produce the prickly heat when they are eaten to excess, that muskmelons do not" (Pease (1836), 559).

"When a person has a diarrhea he does not have a catarrh, and coffee will check it" (Pease (1836), 562).

In this strictly selective presentation the dietary practices and eating behaviour of people living in Cyprus under Ottoman rule, are seen through the eyes of travellers, mostly Europeans belonging to different nations. Foreign visitors speak for themselves, and their texts directly convey eyewitness and first hand experience.
In their accounts, travellers stress the fertility of an island abounding with all things necessary for life and its potential of becoming a paradise. They unanimously express their admiration for natural products and their appreciation for local foodstuffs, such as wine, cheese, meat preparations etc. Sometimes they get so enthusiastic that they record in detail recipes of specific dishes or other preparations. The value of their recordings, however, goes far beyond that; food emerges from their memoirs as a multi-dimensional cultural phenomenon. In their detailed descriptions of entertainments and meals, they do not only present foodstuffs, but reconstruct the atmosphere, the scenery in which eating and drinking took place. The meagre meals in a rural setting stand in contrast to the rich tables of the well-to-do, which were provided with a variety of delicacies, sometimes imported.
Furthermore, visitors offer a glimpse into the code of behaviour in connection with dietary practices, as well as into the beliefs, superstitions and customs related to food habits. The wives of the consuls and ladies in the urban centres used to sit at the table with the guests, while in the villages the peasant women stood nearby to serve the guests. This extreme case of hospitality is rightly perceived by foreigners as a subordination of the female population. This custom was preserved among the countryfolk even during the 20th century.

The food culture which travellers describe, was the expression of a society made up of heterogeneous parts: Ottoman Turks, Greek Cypriots and Europeans from various countries. However, all of them seemed to share several common food habits, based mainly on the natural products and the traditional food of the island, although religion and social status remained determinant factors.
The confrontation of different cultures is best presented in the luxurious ceremonial receptions; it is reflected even in the way of sitting – the Turkish Governor on the divan, the Consul on his European chair. In such descriptions the oriental flavour appears in relief; offerings apply to all senses: the taste of sherbet and sweetmeats, moderated by the bitter sense of tobacco and coffee, is combined with the refreshing touch of rose-water and the burning odours of amber, musk and aloe chips.
On the other hand, receptions by the Archbishop echo the old Byzantine, religious tradition.
In certain cases, visitors do make a distinction between the dietary practices of Greeks and Turks. The preference of Turks to milk products and rice (*pilav*, boiled rice prepared with mutton fat, butter, etc.) is evident, as well as their aversion to pork and the usual consumption of lamb´s meat. On the other hand, lamb was, and still is, the main food of Christians for Easter, as a symbol of Christ, "God´s Lamb", and not all Turks abstained from pork meat and wine. Travellers more often stress similarities than differences between the Turks and the Greeks of the island. In 1815 William Turner had noticed that *"Many professed Moslem are in secret Greeks, and observe all the numerous fasts of that church. All drink wine freely, and many of them eat pork without scruple in secret, a thing unheard of in Turkey"* (Turner (1815) in *Excerpta Cypria*, 449). Indeed, many Christians, in desperation, changed their religion to Islam in an effort to avoid taxation and deprivation. On the other hand, there is much truth in the remark by L. W. Pease, in 1839, that *"the Turks are fast becoming Christians!"* (Pease (1839) in Severis (ed.) 2002, 966).The three centuries long co-existence and continuous interaction between the two communities resulted in a gradual amalgamation, or rather assimilation, which, despite some divergences, can be observed to-date, not only in food habits but also in other aspects of life.

Dietary habits in Cyprus under Ottoman rule are a typical example of food at cultural crossroads; not only because the position of the island made it a crossroads and a trading post between the Orient and the Occident, but mainly because the local food culture developed under the continuous influence of different traditions which co-existed, interacted and enriched each other.

.
Prof. Euphrosyne Rizopoulou – Egoumenidou
Department of History and Archaeology
University of Cyprus.