

# Time for Producing and Consuming Food in Traditional Cypriot Society. Changing Eating Habits in the Course of the Twentieth Century (Fig. 1)

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The aim of this paper is to examine food with regard to time in the recent past and to underline the changes which have taken place in eating habits in the course of the twentieth century. What we define as “recent past” roughly includes the last century of Ottoman rule (late 18<sup>th</sup> / 19<sup>th</sup> c.) and the period of British administration (1878-1960). Habits in general -not only in connection with food- have always been changing with the passage of time, so that it is almost impossible to separate the way of life during the recent past from that of the present with a clear-cut line. The distinction we actually attempt to trace is between Cyprus as a land of tradition and “primitive” self-sufficient peasant life based on a subsistence economy, and the modern, western style of life on the island of Aphrodite. Our focus is food in connection with time.

Until about a century ago, the calculation and sense of time were completely different from what they are today, as was also the pace of life in general. Only a few wealthy persons could afford to have a watch; people, especially farmers and shepherds in the villages, used empirical methods for calculating the time: at night they watched the moon and specific stars, and during the day the position of the sun and the shadows of buildings or trees. Such observations were also helpful in arranging seasonal agricultural works. At harvest time, the early workmen were guided by the stars. Those that started later, observed the course of the sun, and arranged the time for breakfast and lunch accordingly. They stopped work and returned home by sunset. In general, work in the fields lasted from sunrise to sunset with short breaks.<sup>1</sup> Even the sharing of water from rivers or springs for the operation of corn grinding mills or for the irrigation of farms was regulated by such things as the length of a man’s shadow, or the rise of the Pleiad or Orion.<sup>2</sup>

Time is a multidimensional phenomenon with many different meanings. As far as its connection with food is concerned, there is time spent for producing foodstuffs, for preparing meals and of course for eating. This paper refers mainly to the rural population, which at least until the second decade of the twentieth century comprised about 80% of the island’s inhabitants; agriculture (**Fig. 2**) and stock-breeding (**Fig. 3**) were the main occupations; all basic and supplementary foodstuffs, with the exception of those that could be extracted from the wild (procured by nature), were produced by the family. Ensuring the daily food -a task that cost most of their energy and time- was people’s main concern. Furthermore, foodstuffs had to be safely stored in houses, in adequate quantities to last for a year’s time and, in the absence of refrigerators, special treatment was necessary for their preservation. Although time spent for the preparation of principal foodstuffs is not recorded, even short descriptions of these laborious manual processes, such as given below, indicate the incredible amount of time needed for ensuring the

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<sup>1</sup> Detailed description of time calculations see in Xystouris, Savvas, *The Small Town of Lysi* [in Greek], Nicosia 1980, 297-9.

<sup>2</sup> Christodoulou, Demetris, *The Evolution of the Rural Land Use Pattern in Cyprus*, Bude 1959, 89-90.

survival of the family over the year's cycle. Every activity took its time and had to be carried out at the right time.

For financial reasons and because of the abundance of natural produce on the island, the traditional Cypriot diet was based mainly on the consumption of green vegetables, legumes and home-made pasta, always with bread, while meat from the home-fed animals and chickens rarely reached the table except at weddings, on major feast days and when a visitor came or someone in the house was ill. The olive and oil were integral elements of traditional life and the staple ingredients of daily food. Because of poverty, the daily diet of the rural population, even in the last days of British rule, consisted of a lump of bread, a few olives, an onion or, on better days, a piece of lard or *halloumi* cheese. The olives, which were always counted, together with bread, constituted the everyday meal of the farmers, the workers and the craftsmen. They cherished the olive as their eyes or their sweetheart; all this is summed up in the proverb "he looks after her like the olive on his plate".<sup>3</sup>

In Cyprus agricultural production remained at the pre-industrial stage until about the mid-twentieth century. Therefore, the year's provision of olives and olive oil was a real struggle, involving the cultivation of the trees, the collection of the fruit and the extraction of olive oil in primitive olive mills and presses.

The olive trees (**Fig. 4**) were planted in deep pits and, if grafted, produced olives in three years.<sup>4</sup> Ploughing and hoeing, thorough watering and skilful pruning were necessary tasks; according to a proverb "the olive tree needs a crazy pruner and a sensible picker".<sup>5</sup> Picking started in August with the green olives which would become *tsakkistes* (crushed) (**Fig. 5**); the other olives were left to turn black and were picked in October/November. A certain amount was salted to keep for food for the whole year, while the main crop was to be turned into oil. Before taking the olives to the mill, in big baskets of 40 okes, they spread them out in the yards or on the flat roof tops for about ten days, to shrivel.

The process of extracting the oil was done in two stages at special installations, which were open air (**Fig. 6**) or housed in buildings (**Fig. 7**). The first stage was the crushing of the washed olives with a cylindrical millstone which turned in an upright position in a circular stone basin (**Fig. 8**). The millstone was turned by men or animals by pushing the beam that formed the horizontal axis of the millstone. The second stage was to squeeze the pulp in a press with a screw (**Fig. 9**). They put the pulp into round woven baskets with a hole in the middle, and placed five to seven of them one on top of the other in the base of the press. Here they squeezed the filled baskets, again with muscle power, turning the screw with the help of a wooden beam. After the first pressing, virgin oil came out, at the second pressing, however, and the third, they threw hot water onto the baskets which contained the pulp, for the rest of the oil to come out; this was collected in a container; as it floated they scooped it up with their cupped hands or even with their palms. The oil was left for about twenty days for the sediment to settle before use. From three to five okes of olives they could extract one oke of oil; it was kept in glazed jars or in glass demijohns. The picking of olives was collective work, as was also the extraction of the oil. The whole family was involved in these long processes. Some interesting information

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<sup>3</sup> Xioutas, Pavlos, *Proverbs of the Cypriot Folk* [in Greek], vol. I, Nicosia 1984, 231, no. 771.

<sup>4</sup> Mavrokordatos, Yiorgos, *Dikomo: A Contribution to the History and Folklore of the Village* [in Greek], Nicosia 1987, 47.

<sup>5</sup> Xioutas, *op. cit.*, vol. II, 1985, 20, no. 1955.

concerning time is that they used to extract oil with the olive press throughout the night, because they were busy with other works during the day.<sup>6</sup>

In traditional households special provision had to be made for having olive oil in the house during the pre-Christmas fast because the year's provision was running out and the new olive oil was not yet ready. In contrast, for the major Lent before Easter, it was necessary to have wheat for bread. "The forty days olive oil and the fifty days bread", says the proverb.<sup>7</sup>

In a primarily agricultural economy, olive oil was only second to wheat as a food staple. Therefore, interregional exchanges were essential; itinerant merchants and even producers would exchange olive oil with grain.

Another common and time demanding product was wine. According to the survey made by Surridge in 1929, each family consumed about 50 bottles of wine and 20 bottles of *zivania*, the Cyprus eau de vie annually.<sup>8</sup> Wine was also used in cooking but mainly as a food preservative, especially for meat. It was very important in nutrition as were other products made from grape juice (**Fig. 10**). Vine growing has always been associated with much toil; As a Cypriot proverb says, "The vine needs a hump-backed man". Vineyards were usually planted in terraces and dry stone walls had to be built in order to retain moisture and prevent soil erosion (**Fig. 11**). The ground had to be ploughed three times with a wooden plough driven by oxen (**Fig. 12**); the planting of the vine cuttings was a kind of ritual in which the family, relatives and friends participated. Weeding and pruning were indispensable (**Fig. 13**); "Give me hits to the head and I will give you wine in the jar".<sup>9</sup> At harvest time the grapes were gathered in baskets and carried with donkeys (**Fig. 14**) to the communal wine-presses, spacious oblong rooms with flat roofs on which the grapes were spread (**Fig. 15**). The installation comprised a lever-and-screw press, functioning like a nutcracker (**Fig. 16**). A stone weight at one end of a huge beam counterbalanced the grapes at the other end. The weight was raised and lowered when two or three men turned the screw (**Fig. 17**), and the grapes, which were covered with layers of planks, were pressed accordingly (**Fig. 18**). Depending on the quantity of grapes, this laborious task could take many days and nights. In simpler small wine-presses, found in village houses (**Fig. 19**), the grapes were first trampled and then pressed in a barrel with the help of a hand-rotated screw. Must was also extracted by men pressing the grapes barefoot at a stone-built pressing ground (**Fig. 20**), or with a hand-driven grinder (**Fig. 21**). The procedure of fermentation in huge wine jars required about forty days (**Fig. 22**).

Shepherds raised their flocks outside the settlements (**Fig. 23**), but every peasant household kept several sheep and tethered goats (**Fig. 24**) that provided milk, most of which was turned into cheeses. Following the annual life cycle of the animals, people knew by experience the right time for making different kinds of cheeses and other milk products. The best season for making cheese was spring time when there was an abundance of milk, after animals had their young ones early in the year, and were well-

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<sup>6</sup> Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou, E., "Olive Oil Production and Traditional Olive Presses in Cyprus during the Recent Past", in *"The Olive Tree and Oil"*, Fourth Workshop, Kalamata, 7-9 May 1993, Cultural Foundation of the Hellenic Bank of Industrial Development – ELAIS, Athens 1996, 324-339.

<sup>7</sup> Xioutas, *op. cit.*, vol. III, 1985, 173, no. 4613.

<sup>8</sup> Surridge, B.J., *A Survey of Rural Life in Cyprus*, Nicosia 1930, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Xioutas, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 1984, 297, no. 1056.

fed with new fresh grass. This was also the time that special cheeses were needed for the *flaounes*, the Easter specialty in Cyprus, made of pastry stuffed with grated cheese mixed with eggs, raisins, mint, mahlep and mastic (**Fig. 25**). Also for a whole week before the Easter Lent, people used to eat cheese preparations or handmade pasta with grated cheese or filled with cheese. Cheeses, especially *halloumi*, the most renowned Cypriot cheese, were generally produced at home by the women folk (**Figs 26-28**).<sup>10</sup>

Meat, which was not a common dish, was mainly provided by pigs. As late as the mid-twentieth century, there was one pig per Greek rural household, which was reared through the year and slaughtered for Christmas; this was the time for meat consumption but also for preparing the annual meat for the family. Meat cured with salt, wine and lard, was nearly the only meat consumed by the peasant families.<sup>11</sup>

Cyprus produced wheat and barley in abundance and bread formed the principle staple of nourishment and the main part of the daily diet (**Fig. 29**). People produced their own bread from the grain they cultivated and literally lived on bread. For all stages of cultivation, from the preparation of the fields for sowing to the storage of grain, primitive tools and methods were used until well into the twentieth century. The wooden plough, drawn by oxen and donkeys (**Fig. 30**), was similar to that described by Hesiod in the eighth century B.C. Reaping was done with sickles in the same way as in Antiquity (**Fig. 31**). The cut wheat was bound into sheaves, which were stacked up in risks and were later taken to the threshing floor (**Fig. 32**); here a threshing sledge studded with cherts was dragged by animals over the cut wheat (**Fig. 33**); the chaff was then blown away by winnowing with wooden forks and shovels, as in Antiquity (**Fig. 34**).<sup>12</sup> The heap of the grain was measured and sealed (**Fig. 35**) by the tax-collector; until 1926 one tenth of the produce was given as tax, called *dekati* (tithe). The remaining grain was stored as the year's food for the family, the straw as animal feed. Grain was turned into flour in primitive, mostly water-powered mills (**Figs 36-37**). Due to lack of water, in Mesaoria, the granary of Cyprus, corn was ground in man- or animal-driven mills based on rotary motion (**Fig. 38**). Most of the grain, however, was brought by animals from far away to the 32 mills of Kythrea (**Fig. 39**). Access to the mills was also very difficult, due to absence of a proper road system. Old people still remember how hard it was to cover long distances on foot and to cross flooded rivers with mules laden with wheat and barley or flour. Grain had to be sifted through a sieve, washed, dried and put in sacks in order to be carried to the mill, where people might spend days and nights, waiting their turn. Bread was baked at home once or twice a week, and because flour could not be preserved in

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<sup>10</sup> The long procedure of the traditional method of making *halloumi* is described by Welz, G., Andilios, N., "Modern Methods for Producing the Traditional: The Case of Making *Halloumi* Cheese in Cyprus", in Lysaght, P., (ed.), with Burckhardt-Seebass, Chr., *Changing Tastes. Food Culture and the Processes of Industrialization. Proceedings of the 14<sup>th</sup> Conference of the International Commission for Ethnological Food Research, Basel and Vevey, Switzerland, 30<sup>th</sup> September – 6 October 2002*, Basel 2004, 218-20; see also references by travelers in Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou, E., "Food at Cultural Crossroads: Dietary Habits in Cyprus under Ottoman Rule (1570-1878) as Perceived by Foreign Travellers", in Lysaght, P., (ed.), in collaboration with Ann Helene Bolstad Skjelbred, *Food and Meals at Cultural Crossroads. Proceedings of the 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the International Commission for Ethnological Food Research, Oslo, Norway, 15-19 September, 2008*, Oslo 2010, 60-1.

<sup>11</sup> Christodoulou, *op. cit.*, 193-4.

<sup>12</sup> For references see Ionas, Ioannis, "Subsistence Economy in Cyprus", *Epeteris tou Kentrou Epistimonikon Erevnon* XX, (Nicosia 1994), 437.

storage for a long time, frequent visits to the mill were necessary. According to B.J. Surridge's survey of rural life in Cyprus in 1929, a family with three children consumed three kg of bread a day.<sup>13</sup> A detailed description of the preparation of flour for making bread, in terms of time, is found in the diaries of the American Missionary Lorenzo Warriner Pease in 1837:

*"We now do our baking in our house [in Larnaca]. It is surprising how much labor it brings.... 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".*<sup>14</sup>

The making of bread, the preparation of the yeast with holy water, the kneading and the baking of the loaves in traditional private ovens (**Fig. 40**), was another time consuming common practice.

All the above described processes, clearly show the immense amount of time spent by the rural population in ensuring the daily food, and offer an insight into the lifestyle of a traditional society in the pre-industrial stage of development. Time, however, was not only spent in daily activities that were absolutely necessary, but even more so in what was considered important because it was dictated by customs and religious beliefs (**Fig. 41**). A vast variety of dough preparations (**Figs 42-43**), which were connected with feasts and celebrations, such as the feasts of the Virgin Mary and the Saints, the twelve days of Christmas, Green Monday and Easter, also for the main events in a person's life, like birth, marriage and death, were made with great care and strict observance of customs (**Figs 44-45**); they had to be of the best quality and were produced in quantities, in order to be offered to the church and distributed among neighbours, relatives and friends. A lot of time was devoted to the shaping and decoration of each special kind of bread or pie with religious or other symbols which were regarded protective (**Fig. 46**); there was always competition among housewives as to who would present the most beautiful shapes and designs. It was the best case for women to show off their skill, imagination and creativity. Decorated breads and pies are often masterpieces of folk art (**Fig. 47**).<sup>15</sup>

Time for consuming food is hardly countable and depends on many factors. There is a great difference between time spent for meals during working days on the one hand, and during feasts and celebrations on the other. People used to eat three times a day; peasants, shepherds and workmen carried their food -bread, olives, onions, cheese- in a leather bag called *vourka*, and had a break in the morning and another about mid-day, just enough to repose and resume work. Coming back home after sunset, they usually cooked pulses and vegetables with olive oil in the hearth. Food was served in a common plate placed on a big straw-tray, called *tsestos* (pannier).

The beginning or end of seasonal collective works, like the planting of vineyards, sowing and harvest of cereals, gathering of olives, etc., were marked with feasting involving special food; the same is true for important religious feasts, mainly Christmas and Easter, as well as important events like baptism and marriage, the latter lasting a whole week of feasting, eating and drinking. The dinner for celebrating a betrothal would last "until the ant became visible", namely until dawn.<sup>16</sup> There was special food prepared in each case

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<sup>13</sup> Surridge, *op. cit.*, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Severis, Rita, (ed.), *The Diaries of Lorenzo Warriner Pease 1834-1839. An American Missionary in Cyprus and His Travels in the Holy Land, Asia Minor and Greece*, London 2002, 742-3.

<sup>15</sup> Kypri, Theophano, - Protopapa, Kalliopi, *Traditional Dough Preparations of Cyprus. Their Use and Importance in Customary Life*, [in Greek], Cyprus Research Centre Publications XVIII, Nicosia 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Protopapa, Kalliopi, *Customs of Traditional Marriage in Cyprus* [in Greek], Cyprus Research Centre Publications, XLV, Nicosia 2005, 46.

and it was consumed by many guests; in villages the whole community was invited. Spending a lot of time eating and drinking together after the accomplishment of collective work or for celebrating an important event, offered the opportunity to create and preserve social relations, to promote the solidarity and cohesion of the community.

The development which Cyprus experienced after the Second World War, and the economic boost which the island has known since her independence in 1960, brought about profound changes in a way of life that had remained almost unaltered over centuries. However, the process of progress (electricity, better transport and other facilities of modern life) was much slower in the countryside than in the urban centres, which have always been the first to adopt new ideas or technological achievements, fashion or food. Furthermore, innovations did not affect at the same time or to the same extent all classes/groups of the society. This was also the case in the past: though living under foreign rule, Frankish, Venetians, Ottoman, the wealthy classes which formed a small part of the population, could afford to enjoy the “value of the unnecessary” and indulge in conspicuous consumption far beyond the essentials of daily existence. Under Ottoman rule the elite of Cyprus enjoyed a variety of imported foodstuffs (delicatessen) and the best of local products. Refined food habits are indicated by special equipment, such as skewers for roasting meat, grills, sets of European casseroles, china tea and chocolate cups, pots for mustard, spoons for serving punch, cutlery for dessert, etc.<sup>17</sup> Travellers’ accounts offer further evidence about luxurious receptions with many courses of dishes cooked and served by servants.<sup>18</sup> Again, the upper classes were the first to adopt the western lifestyle; among other innovations, they abandoned the oriental style low sofas on which they sat for hours to enjoy meals served on copper trays, and replaced them with wooden chairs and tables. The gradual Europeanization of the island was enhanced under British rule. In the course of the twentieth century, the rise in the standard of living affected the food habits of wider strata of the population; there were several other factors, however, that transformed the traditional self-sufficient communities into a modern consumer society, such as the improvement of means of communication, the mechanization of production and the expansion of import trade. The development of tourism brought people from all over the world to Cyprus. After independence (1960), every year increasing numbers of young Cypriots who study abroad, get used to the food habits of foreign countries. When they return, they do not only bring new experience but in many cases, a husband or wife; what do they cook? The large communities of Cypriots living abroad, throughout the world, tend to preserve and promote traditional Cypriot cuisine, but at the same time they are influenced by the food habits of the country they live in, and transfer this knowledge to Cyprus. On the other hand, many thousands of foreign people, mainly from the Far East, who come to work in Cyprus, introduce their home eating habits as part of their culture.

Having lived in Cyprus since 1978 and carrying out research on the material life of the island, I had the opportunity to experience the rapid changes in the way of life during the last three decades; as far as food is concerned, there are striking differences even with the very recent past. Restaurants offering various European dishes, as well as Indian,

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<sup>17</sup> Rizopoulou – Egoumenidou “Lifestyle and Social Behaviour of the Elite of Cyprus, c1775-1821”, *Folk Life. Journal of Ethnological Studies* 48:2 (2010), forthcoming).

<sup>18</sup> Rizopoulou – Egoumenidou “Food at Cultural Crossroads...”, *op. cit.*, 67-8.

Mexican, Japanese, Chinese, Levantine etc. specialties, sprang up like mushrooms all over the island, especially in tourist areas. Fast food is now available in almost every street; at lunch time and at nights the streets are full of motorcycles rushing to deliver an immense variety of dishes; one gets the impression that all inhabitants in urban centres live on delivery menus; there is a flood of advertisements everywhere; for those who insist on cooking, supermarkets offer all sorts of foodstuffs, fresh or frozen; the products of bakeries and confectioneries surpass all imagination; there is also an increasing number of shops selling foodstuffs imported from the Far East or Africa, to be consumed by people from those countries who live in Cyprus; even the weekly street market is full of exotic products, fruits, vegetables, spices. Cyprus entered the European Union as late as 2004, yet European eating habits, tendencies and problems connected with food, arrived much earlier; the mass media, TV first of all, the indispensable companion in every household, have played their role most effectively. In Cyprus the general pattern resembles that of developed or developing countries: people consume much more food and work manually much less than in the past; consequently, a great percentage of people, even schoolchildren, are overweight, and diabetes, heart diseases, etc. are flourishing. Various TV programmes showing cooking and eating, are on the screen everyday. At the same time, mass media advertise every possible way to lose weight (medicaments, exercise, various devices), and skinny models are presented as the ideal of beauty; as an alternative to the consumption of mass-produced food, a healthy diet is promoted; it is based on biological foodstuffs provided by special shops.

The trends and attitudes described above are well known in most developed countries as is also the nightmare of famine in countries of the Third World. However, each country has its own peculiarities. How did Cypriot food tradition react or respond to the provocations of the twentieth century?

The present eating habits of the Cypriots have never been a subject of systematic research; therefore, the following remarks are based on personal experience on the subject.

Generally speaking, food habits were differentiated and the traditional kitchen was modified and adapted to the new circumstances; it has been enriched by foreign influences, but at the same time many old traditional dishes have been abandoned. Home-baked bread is now an exception, not the rule; on the other hand, *halloumi* cheese, a main product that has been industrialized about a century ago, is still made in many village households for family consumption and for sale. The same is true for home-prepared cured meats and smoked sausages. What is even more important is that, although ready food is widely available and eating in restaurants and taverns is becoming more and more fashionable, as a rule, Cypriot families insist on home cooking. Most people finish work early in the afternoon and return home for lunch; even in urban centres, distances are close and the majority of people use private cars. It is usually the youngest generation that often takes advantage of delivery food; in many cases, however, the mothers cook for the new couples and the grandchildren; family bonds are still tight in Cyprus. What do they cook? Home cooking covers a wide spectrum of tastes and flavours, such as *pourgouri*, namely cracked wheat steamed together with fried onions to make a light pilaf served with yogurt, *louvia me lahana*, a mixture of greens cooked with black-eyed beans and served with olive oil and lemon juice, *koupepia*, rolled vine leaves stuffed with meat and rice, also stuffed vegetables, tomatoes, onions, courgettes, peppers, aubergines or marrows, lamb or beef cooked with tomatoes, lots of onions, potatoes and cumin in earthenware pots, *stifado*, a rich stew of beef or rabbit cooked with plenty of onions,

vinegar and wine, *moukentra*, lentils combined with rice and onions, *keftedes*, meat balls, roast meat with potatoes, artichokes and other vegetables fried with eggs, etc. These are only some of the favourite dishes, which are now also served in taverns. For a large family meal, *souvla* is very popular, especially during weekends or on a picnic: large chunks of lamb, flavoured with fresh herbs, are threaded onto a spit and grilled over charcoal. If there is a traditional sealed oven in the garden, then *ofto kleftiko*, baked meat, is the order of the day. As for sweetmeats, Cypriot housewives have a real flair with homemade puddings with pastry or rice puddings; many of them still prepare a variety of fruits preserved in syrup (*glyka*) annually. Sweets with milk, like *mahalepi*, a creamy pudding floating in rosewater syrup, is much loved, especially by the Turkish Cypriots. Dinner parties with Cypriot families are a delightful experience; local specialties can easily co-exist on a buffet with an Indian curried dish, Italian pasta and Chinese sweet and sour. Cypriot cuisine is flexible and selective; it welcomes innovations and has the ability to assimilate them. Old housewives do not hesitate to try new recipes presented on TV programmes. It is interesting to see a Paphian lady in her nineties instructing a girl from Sri Lanka on how to cook Cypriot food; she then watches how the girl cooks her own spicy meal. It takes time until the two cultures meet to form a couple of dishes acceptable by both.

In June 2010, the Pope visited Cyprus. The meal offered at the Archbishopric in Nicosia included salmon and beans, the first a luxury foreign food, the latter traditional Cypriot. On the other hand, the menu served during the Cyprus Airways flight back to Rome, was an Italian menu, which comprised aubergines with mozzarella and parmesan cheese in tomato sauce, then pasta and finally beefsteak in wine sauce, accompanied with mash potatoes and grilled vegetables. The dessert was a juicy chocolate cake. The Pope described his meal as perfect!

In conclusion, nowadays Cyprus presents an immense amount of eating choices, depending on what one can afford. Cypriot cuisine is part of the Mediterranean diet combined with oriental flavours; in principle, it offers a healthy diet based on olive oil, cereals, wine, pulses, vegetables and fruit. Successive conquerors, both from East and West, made their contribution to the local food, which with the passage of time became a rich, sophisticated traditional cuisine. Recently, as a counterbalance to the threat of globalization, there developed a strong tendency to preserve and promote traditional food with all its regional variations and communal differentiations, as an essential aspect of cultural identity.

The study of the eating habits in Cyprus, from Antiquity to the present, is the main target of a new two-year programme (2009-2011) of the University of Cyprus, funded by the Research Promotion Foundation, Cyprus, and European structural funds. Within the framework of this project, which is called “Cyprus Food Virtual Museum”, a database will be created, which will be accessible to the wider public through a virtual museum.