

## Call for Chapters

### **Foodways to the Divine: Faith and Food in the Middle East, North Africa, and Beyond**

Deadline: 31 October, 2024

We invite scholars to contribute to the forthcoming edited volume *Foodways to the Divine*. The potential publishing house for our volume is Edinburgh University Press as part of the *Food and Foodways in the Middle East, North Africa, and their Diasporas Series*. Selected contributors will be invited to workshop their chapters at a seminar at the Orient Institut Istanbul (OIIST) in April 2025, where they will have the opportunity to engage with other contributors and receive feedback in person. Further details will be provided in due course.

The goal of this volume is to provide a fresh perspective on the intricate interplay between food, ritual, and faith in this region. By exploring how ritualised foods play a vital role in preserving, shaping, and revitalising communal knowledge, memories, emotions, and histories, this collection seeks to illuminate these practices through a range of multidisciplinary approaches. Moreover, it intends to challenge the rigid boundaries often imposed by conventional definitions of ‘region’ and ‘religion,’ particularly in relation to shared and widespread concepts and practices such as ‘votive meals,’ offerings, gifts, and sacrificial foods, which mediate relationships with the divine, as well as ‘sacred ingredients,’ which are believed to possess supernatural qualities that transcend their nutritional or medicinal properties.

Interested contributors are encouraged to explore *foodways* in and from the Middle East, North Africa, and adjacent geo-cultural regions, along with areas to which peoples from these lands have migrated or settled. We seek contributions that bring to life diverse ceremonial foods—from the symbolic sweetness of funerary *halva* and *baklava* for Orthodox Easter to the communal spirit of *imaret* soup kitchens. We are interested in exploring the cultural significance of specific practices of fasting and feasting across the region and in diaspora, such as the joyful custom of *Sham al-Nassim* in Egypt and the rich Lenten culinary practices across the region. Contributors are encouraged to contextualise the intersection of faith and food within the contemporary world – such as contestations around votive foods, dilemmas of institutionalising religious food restrictions like *halal* and *kosher*, practicing *madagh* among the diasporic Armenian communities from Anatolia, and inter- and intra- religious relations through food including culinary sectarianism. Additionally, we especially welcome contributions which consider interactions with the (changing) landscapes, seasons, and (political) climates.

Traditional, text-centred studies of food and religion view votive food as a mere part of religious beliefs or tradition. Drawing on critical studies, this volume will highlight food’s active role and ability in shaping community and cosmology. While traditional approaches can provide an advantageous point of reference, they may overlook the dynamics and evolving nature of the actual practices. Consider the impact of wars, natural disasters, global warming, economic crises, and political upheavals in the region. How do these ruptures challenge and transform people’s engagement with ceremonial meals and related practices? To address these questions, we propose using the concept of “*foodways*”, which encompasses a broad range of social, political, historical, religious, and ecological factors that undergird food practices. This framework

will allow us to explore votive meals beyond their traditional (con)texts and reconsider the religious significance of food in a new light.

We are interested in chapters that engage the following suggested questions and themes, among others:

**Potential Questions:**

- How do sacrament of ingredients or culinary practices contribute to renewal, survival, continuation, conservatism, or resilience?
- When does preparing, sharing, and consuming of ceremonial food serve to enhance boundaries between communities (i.e. between different confessional groups), and when does it foster connections and creative affective bonds among members of diverse groups?
- Can we examine traditional funerary and commemorative foods in the context of current challenges like earthquakes, forced migration, political instability, and increasing sectarian tensions?
- How does the UNESCO framework nationalise, secularise, and commercialise sacred foods, thereby simplifying or stripping away its complex *foodways*?
- How is food mobilised in the mediation of relationships with the divine? What are the debates and discussions which surround intercessory food practices?
- What is the relation between faith, food production, and the environment in the region? How do ethical frameworks shape the way food is produced, prepared, and consumed?

**Potential Themes:**

- The concept of *erzak* (*arzaq* in Arabic) in the context of global-warming, conflict, and natural disaster.
- Critical approaches to terms such as charity, *hayır yemekleri*, votive meals etc.
- Shared religiosity through food and food rites.
- Healing properties of food.
- Food, memory, and knowledge among diasporic communities.
- Multisensorial aspects of votive meals.
- Institutionalisation of food production and consumption in religion.
- Food and Sectarian Relations.
- Religious nationalism and food politics.

**Editors**

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## **Submission Details and Timeline**

Abstract submission date: 31 October 2024

- Abstract (300 words, text only), 5 key words, and short bio

Submission of full chapter draft: 15 January 2025

Feedback on chapters: 15 April 2025

In-person seminar in Istanbul: April 2025

Submission of revised chapter: 15 June 2025

Submission of final manuscript to the publisher: 15 September 2025

Please submit abstracts or any questions to [foodwaystothedivine@gmail.com](mailto:foodwaystothedivine@gmail.com)