Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2023

FOOD RULES & RITUALS

PROSPECT BOOKS

Eating and Feeding Rituals and Edicts in Persianate Societies: From *Sofreh* to *Tārof*, *Nazri*, and Beyond

Nader Mehravari

Persians love their food. They also have a great respect for the complex set of rituals, habits, and rules developed over millennia that govern their culinary practices. Such practices are deeply rooted in Iranian culture, associated not only with the country that today is known as Iran, but also the Persian empire from which it is evolved.

The goal of this paper is twofold. First, I explore an overarching, and as complete as possible, range of behavioural constraints (habits, rituals, protocols, guidelines, unspoken rules, explicit edicts) along with associated culinary practices (preparation, eating, feeding) in Persian societies. Prior attempts to look into the subject have had a narrow scope. For example, Shaida's work considers the differences between Iranian and British culinary table manners, Kassam and Wellman discuss the subject from an Islamic religious perspective, Shirazi focuses on women's perspectives, Daryaee studies the Zoroastrians' views, Chehabi studies the impact of Westernization, Korangy and Sharifian approach the subject from a Persian language perspective, Valle deals with one particular Persian practice that governs not only food but many other situations, Ponita focuses on Iranian culture, and so on.[1] In addition to the narrow scope of such works, there are customs and guidelines that have not previously been explored.

The complexity and variety of culinary rituals and rules are so great that an overarching study benefits from a structured grouping and taxonomy that considers many dimensions and viewpoints. The second goal of this work, therefore, is to present and utilize a categorization framework (Figure 1) that is applicable not only to the study of the subject in Persianate societies but also in other food cultures around the world. To illustrate the utility of such a framework, the structure of the material presented below follows the proposed framework.

Secular Culinary Rituals and Protocols of Persianate Societies

At Any Typical Daily Meal at One's Home

The rituals associated with the presentation of the food along with the expected behaviour of diners are at the heart of Persian culinary culture, and they govern any typical daily meal at one's home and beyond. Some of the most important are detailed below.

Sofreh [Persian: سفره]. *Sofreh* is a critical concept associated with any Persian meal. In the Persian language, for culinary purposes, the word *sofreh* is both a noun and a verb. In the past, most Iranians ate on the floor. A square or rectangle shaped cloth (or plastic these days) called *sofreh* – equivalent to a tablecloth – would be spread on the floor on top of the Persian carpet where everyone would sit to eat. Today, although many Iranians now sit around a dining table, a *sofreh* is still spread on top of the table. In its verb format, it implies the act of setting the table.

Tārof [Persian: تعارف]. *Tārof* is a complex ritual of extreme civility, respectfulness, etiquette, complementing, politeness, and selflessness that is deeply embodied in verbal and nonverbal interactions among Persians. The word *tārof* is both a noun and an action

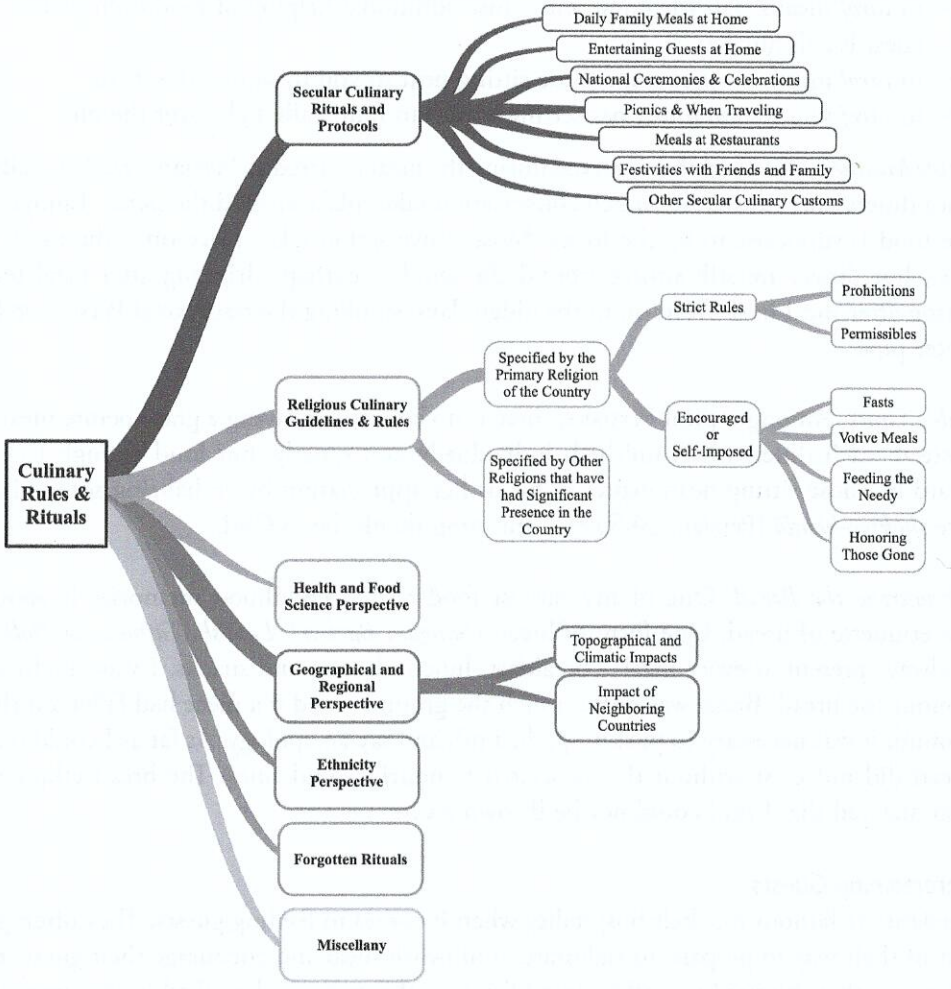

Figure 1. A Categorization Framework for Eating and Feeding Rituals and Edicts in Societies.

verb. The associated rituals are displayed in a wide range of daily situations including at mealtimes, in negotiations, while buying and selling goods and services, and in such trivial situations as going through a doorway – you first, no, you first. Here are some examples of how the concept of *tārof* might come into picture at mealtimes:

- to *tārof* means that as soon as the guest arrives, he or she is offered tea, sweets, and fresh fruit.
- to *tārof* means that the guest will (initially) refuse the offer of refreshments not wanting to inconvenience the host.
- to *tārof* means that the host is expected to offer to the guest whatever is desired.
- to *tārof* means the host will offer more food over and over again to the guest if the host feels that the guest has refused merely out of courtesy.
- to *tārof* means that the guest will refuse additional helping of food even if the guest is still hungry.
- to *tārof* means to encourage those sitting next to you to start eating first.
- to *tārof* in a restaurant or bar setting means to frantically fight over the bill.

Table Manners. The food that is served during the meal is sacred to Persians. Traditionally, once diners start eating, not much conversation takes place around the *sofreh*. Enjoying the food is supposed to be the focus. Most conversation takes place once the meal is over, but diners are still sitting around the *sofreh* – perhaps drinking after-meal tea, eating after-meal fresh fruit, or, in the olden days, smoking the traditional Persian-style water pipe.

Table Grace. Among typical Persians, there is no concept of saying a grace before meals. Instead, each diner, when finished, individually and quietly, but loud enough to be heard by those sitting near, expresses his or her appreciation by verbalizing something like *shokr-é-khodā* [Persian: ادخ رکش], meaning thanks be to God.

Honouring the Bread. One of my earliest food-related childhood memories is about the etiquette of bread. One form of bread (*Sangak, Barbari, Lavāsh, Tāftoon*, or *Bolki*) is always present at every meal – breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks. I was taught to honour the bread. Bread was not to touch the ground – and if a piece had fallen on the ground, it was necessary to pick it up, dust off, and say an apology. As far as I could tell, bread did not exist without the associated honouring guidelines. The bread etiquette also dictated that bread could not be thrown away.

Entertaining Guests

Persians are famous for their hospitality when it comes to feeding guests. They often go out of their way to prepare an elaborate, multi-dish meal and encourage their guests to eat as much as humanly possible. In addition to the customs described in the previous section for a daily meal at home, here are some additional protocols followed when

Persians entertain guests at their homes:

- The variety, number, and amount of food served per diner, when entertaining guests, is much greater, compared to normal daily family meals.
- Much higher quality ingredients are used when preparing dishes for guests. In fact, there is a dedicated Persian adjective for such higher-quality dishes. They are referred to as *majlessie* [Persian: مجلسی], which literary translates into 'parliamentary' or 'congregational.'
- The guests are invited (directed) to sit at the most prominent spot around the *sofreh* (i.e. at the head of the table).
- The primary host or the primary cook is the last person to sit, to serve themself, or to eat. He or she may not even sit down much, instead going back and forth to the kitchen to fetch more food and to ensure all guests have been well taken care of.
- Multiple bowls or platters of each of the dishes is placed on the *sofreh*. The host will make sure that there is a complete set of dishes easily reachable by two or three diners so that they can easily serve themselves as soon as the dishes have been placed on the *sofreh*.
- If the guests don't start serving themselves soon after the dishes have been placed on the *sofreh,* the host will start serving them.
- As soon as any of the guests' plates are getting near empty, the host will press the guest to eat more. This process could repeat multiple times. This may turn into another *tārofing* exercise where the host offers and the guest refuses!
- Each diner, guest or not, will encourage the individuals sitting next to them to eat first. This may go on for a minute or so before anyone starts eating. This is another *tārofing* exercise.
- The host will probably verbalize the phrase *nooshe-jān* [Persian: نوش جان] several times which is the Persian equivalent of 'bon appétit'. The corresponding phrase for drinks, equivalent to 'cheers', is *bé-salāmati* [Persian: به سلامتی].

At Picnics and When Traveling

In addition to being great food lovers, Iranians love the outdoors. They will use any excuse – cultural events, certain religious occasions, holidays, social occasions – to get away from their homes and indoor spaces to enjoy food in an outdoor setting with friends and family, and will even invite strangers in the vicinity of their picnic setting to join the festivities. To Iranians, picnicking is both an art and a craft. The Iranian picnic has its own culture that has developed over the centuries – its own rituals, its own paraphernalia, its own choreography.[2]

The central focus of Iranian picnics is food that ranges from simple to elaborate. Picnic meals include a full range of food items: cold and hot; savoury and sweet; many prepared ahead of time at home, some bought on the way, and some cooked onsite; including snacks, starters, mains, desserts, and fruit.

National Ceremonies

Each of the important Persian secular national celebrations have their own culinary characteristics, and among them are the following four:

Norooz [Persian: نوروز]. *Norooz* means the 'new day'. It is the celebration of the Persian New Year which takes place at the Spring equinox, and has three distinct culinary dimensions:

- At the exact moment of Spring equinox, family members gather around a special New Year *sofreh* called *Haft-Seen* [Persian: هفت سین], meaning 'seven Ss'. Seven food items whose names in Persian start with the letter that sounds like 's' are carefully arranged.
- New Year's Day dinner is traditionally comprised of Persian steamed rice mixed with aromatic green herbs, pan-fried fish, and green herb *kookoo* (an egg-centric dish somewhere between a quiche without crust, a frittata, and a soufflé).
- During the first few days of the New Year holiday, families visit each other's homes, and a slew of New Year-specific sweets and snacks are served.

Sizdah-Bedar [Persian: سیزده بدر]. *Sizdah-Bedar* means 'taking out the 13' and takes place on the thirteenth day of the Persian New Year marking the end of the annual *Norooz* celebration. *Sizdah-Bedar* is the most popular Iranian picnicking occasion. Some common items for this special picnic are: *Kahoo-va-Sekanjebeen* (hearts of romaine lettuce dipped in a thick vinegar and mint flavoured sweet syrup); *Kotlet* (pan-fried patties of ground lamb, mashed potatoes, and eggs); *Sālād-é-Olivieh* (one of the most popular salads of Iranian people comprised of a medley of chopped chicken, potatoes, eggs, sour cucumber pickle mixed with a bit of mustard, some mayonnaise, and lots of olive oil); *Polow* or *Tahchin* (Persian steamed rice dishes where the rice is combined with other ingredients during the steaming phase); a variety of traditional Persian grilled *kabābs*; a variety of Persian flat bread such as *Sangak, Barbari, Lavash*, or *Taftoon*; and watermelon.

Chāhānshanbeh-Soori [Persian: چهارشنبه سوری]. *Chāhānshanbeh-Soori* means 'Fiery Wednesday' and takes place on the eve of the last Wednesday of the Persian calendar. On this evening people jump over small bonfires in preparation for Persian New Year. A few of the most common food items that are served during this celebration are: *Ajil* (a special mixture of nuts and dried fruit), *Resteh-Polow* (steamed rice with Persian wheat noodles), and *Āsh-e-Reshteh* (a thick soup of green herbs, legumes, and Persian wheat noodles).

Shab-é-Yaldā [Persian: شب یلدا]. *Shab-é-Yaldā* literally translates into 'the night of *Yalda*' which is the Persian celebration of the winter solstice – the longest night of the year. This is generally celebrated at home, after dinner, when family members gather around a colourful spread that includes pomegranates, watermelon, persimmons,

mixtures of dried fruit and nuts, various Persian confections, and a book of poems by the fourteenth-century Persian poet Hāfez.

Meals at Restaurants

Traditionally speaking (i.e. not counting the contemporary Western-like fast-food eateries), there were two very different types of restaurants in Persian communities. Those that specialize in, and serve, one and only one dish and sit-down restaurants with menus.

With regards to the latter category, most of those in Iran, and practically all in the Iranian diaspora, serve their customers in courses unlike home settings where everything is served all at once, family style. The other important thing to keep in mind when eating at a restaurant with Persian friend is that a lot of *tārofing* will go on before deciding who pays the bill.

Festivities with Family and Friends

Shirini-Dādan [Persian: شیرینی‌دادن] and *Soor-Dādan* [Persian: سوردادن]. Although it might not be apparent from what one reads in the news these days about Iran, Persians love to, and will go out of their way to, culinarily celebrate good things that happens in one's life. In fact, there is an expectation that an individual who has experienced a positive life event (e.g. buying a new car, moving to a new house or apartment, winning a lottery, getting that dream job, graduating from college, having a baby) will invite family and friends to celebrate. Such festivities are always food centred. These could range anywhere from buying and sharing a box of pastries to taking people out for lunch to a full-fledged dinner party. There are two terms for this ritual in Persian. One is *shirini-dādan*, which literally means 'giving sweets', and the other is *soor-dādan*, which translates as 'throwing a party or a banquet'. Neither word is used generically for events that take place normally or on a regular basis: for example, when a parent gives a cookie to a child or when a banquet is arranged to celebrate Persian New Year or a birthday. Both words are only used in the sense of celebrating a positive, at times unexpected, life event.

Birthdays. Like other cultures around the world, birthday celebrations in Persianate societies are centred around food. There is, however, one difference: traditionally, in Iran, the birthday celebrations often take place on the eve of the birth date.

Religious Culinary Guidelines and Rules Observed in Iran

Iran became a Muslim country following the Arab conquest of Iran (a.k.a. Muslim conquest of Iran) in the second half of the seventh century CE. Islamic dietary laws, that define permissible and forbidden food, along with such formal Islamic devotional practices of fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, as well as religious-based self-imposed pledges to obligate one to perform a righteous act, have been present in, and have impacted, the Persian culinary landscape for centuries.

Strict Islamic Culinary Rules Adhered to in Iran

Halāl [Persian: حلال] and *Harām* [Persian: حرام]. When it comes to religious dietary laws, Iranian Muslims adhere to the same Islamic dietary laws as all Muslims around the world. Islamic jurisprudence defines two categories of food. Those that are lawfully permissible, called *halāl,* and those that are forbidden, called *harām.* Examples of *halāl* food include:

- Many herbivores such as sheep, cattle, goat, deer, camel, rabbit, and antelope, as long as they are slaughtered according to Islamic animal slaughtering guidelines.
- Some animals hunted by trained hunting animals, such as hunting birds, are allowed.
- Many (but not all) fish and other sea creatures are allowed.

Examples of *harām* food include:

- Pork and products made from pork.
- Animals without blood such as insects; most reptiles; most pests such as mice; birds of prey such as falcons; predatory animals such as lions; etc.
- Animals that were beaten to death, attacked by wild animals, or died naturally.
- Blood and any by-product of blood.

Alcoholic Beverages. Alcoholic beverages are generally forbidden in Islam. Under the current laws of Iran, established after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Muslim citizens of Iran are strictly forbidden from producing or consuming any form of alcoholic beverage. The current Iranian laws recognize the right of a very small number of non-Muslim religious minorities to produce and consume alcoholic beverages for their religious rites, as the Holy Communion for Iranian Christians. It is, however, interesting to note that vineyards, wine making, and wine drinking had been an integral part of Persian culture, literature, and history since the ancient times.[3]

Rules Governing Methods of Animal Slaughtering. Iranian butchers follow Islamic laws that define methods for slaughtering animals. The slaughtering has to be swift and as painless as possible. The blood of the slaughtered animal should be allowed to drain by hanging the carcass upside down. Electrocution is not allowed.

Rules Specific to Shia Branch of Islam. It is estimated that 90-95% of Iranian Muslims belong to the Shia branch of Islam. There are a few additional culinary rules specific to the Shia Muslims. For example, the meat of mules and horses is not allowed. Eating certain sea creatures such as eels is also forbidden.

Formal Food-Centric Islamic Devotional Practices

Of the five formal Islamic devotional practices, one, fasting, is very much food centric. *Roozeh* [Persian: روزه] is the Persian word for fasting. Although it can be used to refer

to any type of fasting, it primarily refers to the act of fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. Each day, there are two meals that mark the beginning and end of each day's fast. The pre-dawn meal is called *sahari* [Persian: سحری] and the post-sunset meal is called *eftār* [Persian: افطار]. Typically, in Iran, the morning meal is more breakfast-like and is simpler than the evening meal. Some home cooks spend much time during the day – while fasting – preparing the evening meal. Their challenge is that, while they are allowed to taste the food they are preparing, they cannot do more than taste. During Ramadan, heavy and rich dishes are more frequently consumed, as well as highly sugary sweets. For example, various types of *āsh* – a thick soup-like class of dishes full of chopped herbs and legumes – and *halim* – a porridge-like dish of mashed wheatberries and lamb – are quite popular. On the sweet side, *sholeh-zard* – a saffron and rosewater laden rice pudding – and *zoolbia-bāmieh* – a pair of deep-fried and syrup covered sweets are often served.

Religious-Based Self-Imposed Food-Centric Pledges Popular with Persians

Although all Muslims make vows, Iranian Shi'ites are known for elaborate traditions of votive giving including many that are food-centric like the following three:

Nazri Food [غذای نذری]. The Persian word *nazr* has a well-defined translation as 'vow'. Generally speaking, *nazri* food refers to a large-scale preparation and distribution of food as an act of meeting the obligation of a personal religious vow. It could be anywhere from a massive amount of a single dish prepared and distributed to many people to an elaborate full meal serving a large number of individuals all at once. In Iran, these meals become more frequent during certain periods of the Islamic calendar. The two most important such periods are the holy month of Ramadan and the sacred month of Muharram – the first month of the Islamic calendar, which is particularly important to Shi'ites.

Kheyrāti Food [غذای خیراتی]. The Persian word *kheyrāt* means 'charity'. Generally speaking, compared to *nazri, kheyrāti* food is a smaller and less formal food-centric votive scenario. It could be, for example, as simple as a box of sweets left anonymously on a pedestal on the sidewalk for anyone to take. Such simple votive acts are at times associated with honouring a loved one who has passed away. Traditionally, those who take one of the offered sweets are expected to say a prayer for the cause or person, even if unknown to them.

Istgah-e-Salavāti [Persian: ایستگاه صلواتی]. The literal translation of *Istgah-e-Salavāti* is 'station for blessing'. These are often staffed, non-permanent, kiosk-type, small setups where light refreshments are handed to passers-by. It could be anything from an individual holding a large tray full of glasses of water to a tableclothed table staffed by several individuals serving hot tea and cookies. The expectation is that those who are served will say a rather specific blessing called *salavāt* to honour prophet Mohammad.

Culinary Rules and Rituals of Non-Muslims with Significant Presence in Iran

Although Iran has been a Muslim country since the seventh century CE, other religions – in particular Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity (Armenian, Assyrian, Russian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant), and Bahai – have had a long-term, significant presence in Iran, with some dating back to ancient Persia. Naturally, over the centuries, the non-Muslim Persians also had an impact on the Persian culinary landscape. However, many of these characteristics have disappeared (or are in the process of disappearing) since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Two such situations are:

- Prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, when the consumption of alcoholic beverages was allowed, there were many small, standing-room-only bars in Teheran that also served snacks and appetizers – somewhat similar to Venice's *cicchetti* pubs. They were primarily owned and operated by Iranian Armenians. Many of them were located close to movie theatres. I have vivid childhood memories of my cousin and I stopping at one of these shops to grab some light snack before going to a see a movie. I am still trying to replicate the taste of their cooked pinto beans flavoured with crushed dried Persian hogweed that my taste buds still remember.
- Prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the majority of the delicatessens in Tehran and many other cities in Iran were owned and operated by Iranian Armenians. They served a wide range of preserved meat, pickles, olives, cheese, prepared cold salads, and sandwiches. They were particularly famous for their mortadella with small chucks of white fat and bright green pistachios.

Health and Food Science Beliefs of Persians

Since medieval times, Persians have subscribed to and practiced a somewhat simplified version of the Greco-Roman humorism. The Persians' version of the four humors and temperaments is based on the work of the famous Persian physician-philosopher Avicenna (a.k.a. Ibn Sina) as documented in his medical encyclopedia, *The Canon of Medicine*.[4] In the Persian system, the following four properties are assigned to ingredients as well as to dishes:

- *Sardi* [Persian: سردی] coldness
- *Garmi* [Persian: گرمی] warmness
- *Khoshki* [Persian: خشکی] dryness
- *Tari* [Persian: تری] wetness

Sardi/garmi are the two properties that are most often used and referred to by Persian home cooks. Generally speaking, warmness is associated with high-calorie, sweet, aromatic, and rich ingredients or dishes, whereas coldness is associated with lower calorie, sour, and pale ingredients or dishes. The idea is to consume food items that collectively balance the coldness and warmness properties of their ingredients.

Geographical and Regional Aspects of Culinary Customs of People of Iran

Extreme geographical and regional diversity has shaped the Persian culinary landscape for centuries with two very different facets. There are customs and dishes that are very well known across the entire country but look and feel drastically different depending on which geographical regions of Iran you are in. At the same time, there are elements that are well established in one corner of the country but have never been heard of in other parts of the country.

A relatively recent Persian-language, encyclopedic culinary book, whose title translates as 'Iranian Native Food', published by an Iranian academic/research/medical institution has thirty-one chapters corresponding to thirty-one different provincial regions of Iran.[5] There are culinary facts listed in this book that are not even referred to in any of the approximately sixty Persian cookbooks that sit on my physical bookshelves or in another dozen or so books that are in my virtual Kindle library.

In addition to purely geographical (topographical and climatic) impacts, societies living in the neighbouring countries have had an influence on, and have been influenced by, the diversity of Persian cuisines. For example:

- The culinary habits of the three most north-western provinces of Iran – Ardabil, East Azerbāijan, and West Azerbāijan provinces – have been highly impacted by the cuisine of the neighbouring countries of Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Armenia.
- The customs and dishes of the southwestern corner of Iran, on the shores of the Persian Gulf, have been shaped by those of the Arabian Peninsula.
- There are similarities between the culinary habits of Iran's northeastern provinces with those of the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan and Turkmenistan where dialects of Persian language are spoken.

Impact of Ethnicity on Food Preparation and Eating of Persians

Historically speaking, Iran was the bridge between the Far East and the Near East. Ever since the early days of the Persian empire, wars, predatory campaigns, takeovers, and migratory influxes have constantly changed not only the national boundaries of Iran, but also the nature of its citizens. As a result, although people of varying origins have found shelter under a common Persian lingual umbrella, they have been able to keep and exercise the traditions of their distinct ancestors. For example, today's population of Iran is comprised of such people as Persians, Azeris, Kurds, Lurs, Arabs, Baluchis, Turkmen, Qashqais, Assyrians, Armenians, Georgians, Turks, Gilaks, Mazanderanis, and Sistanis.[6] All these groups have contributed aspects of their respective culinary traditions into the larger Persian cookery landscape.

Miscellany and Disappearing Traditions

There are many other important cultural traditions of Persians that involve food that

do not fit perfectly in any of the categories discussed above, and, importantly, many of them are in danger of being lost. Here are a few examples:

Not Returning a Dish Empty

The tradition among Persians (and some other cultures) had been that if someone brings food to one's house in a dish that needs to be returned, the dish is never returned empty. The returnee would place a small gift (not necessary food) in the dish being returned. Unfortunately, due to the proliferation of disposable tableware, this is almost a lost tradition.

The Chicken Wishbone Memory Game

When a whole or bone-in parts of a chicken was being served at a meal, whoever would find the unbroken wishbone would start a two-person memory game with another person of their choosing at the table. The two players would first decide on a very simple prize to be given to the winner by the loser. After grabbing the two ends of the wishbone, they would then break it. That would signify the start of the game. From then on, every time one of the two players would hand something to the other, the recipient had to say, 'I remember.' If the item was taken without saying 'I remember,' the game would be over, and the other player would be declared the winner. The game could on for hours, days, or weeks. This was a favourite meal-time game of my childhood, but my dad was often the winner.

Glass of Water on Saucer

If one asked for a glass of water in someone else's home, the glass of water would always be given to the requester placed on a saucer or a small plate. The glass of water would have never been simply handed over by itself. It was a sign of respect for water and for the requester.

The Luck Brought by an Unexpected Glass of Water

There is a famous Persian proverb that says 'a glass of water that has been offered to you without you having asked for it brings you luck' [Persian: آب بطن بدی دارم تمنا].

Closing

It is impossible to fully comprehend the principles and practice of Persian cookery without considering associated habits, rituals, edicts, and guidelines. They are so integrated it makes them inseparable. With the aid of a structured categorization and taxonomy, this paper has attempted to provide a comprehensive discussion of the complex set of rituals, habits, and rules developed over millennia that govern the culinary practices of Persianate societies.

Notes

1 Margaret Shaida, 'Manners Maketh the Meal: Table Etiquette in England and Iran', in *The Meal: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2001*, ed. by Harlan Walker (Devon: Prospect Books, 2002), pp. 216–22; Zayn Kassam and Sarah E. Robinson, 'Islam and Food', in *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics*, ed. by Davis M. Kaplan (Dordrecht: Springer, 2019), pp. 1671–79; Rose Wellman, *Feeding Iran: Shi'i Families and the Making of the Islamic Republic* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021); Faegheh Shirazi, 'The Sofreh: Comfort and Community among Women in Iran', *Iranian Studies*, 38.2 (2005), 293–309; Touraj Daryaee, 'Food, Purity and Pollution: Zoroastrian Views on the Eating Habits of Others', *Iranian Studies*, 45.2 (2012), 229–42; H.E. Chehabi, 'The Westernization of Iranian Culinary Culture', *Iranian Studies*, 36.1 (2003), 43–61; Alireza Korangy and Farzad Sharifian, *Persian Linguistics in Cultural Contexts* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2020); Julihana Valle, 'The Persian Art of Etiquette', *BBC*, 14 November 2016 <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20161104-the-persian-art-of-etiquette> [accessed 10 November 2022]; Pontia, '12 Traditions and Customs only Iranians Will Understand', *My Persian Corner*, 28 July 2019 <https://www.mypersian-corner.com/12-traditions-and-customs-only-iranians-will-understand> [accessed 4 April 2023]

2 See Nader Mehravari, 'Picnicking in Iran: From Cemeteries to Ski Slopes, Caves, Traffic Circles, and Beaches', in *Portable Food: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2022*, ed. by Mark McWilliams (London: Prospect Books, 2023).

3 Willem Floor and Hasan Javadi, *Persian Pleasure: How Iranians Relaxed Through the Centuries with Food, Drink, and Drugs* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2019).

4 Jill Tilsley Benham, '"Is That Hippocrates in the Kitchen?" – "Sardi/Garmi" in Iran', in *Cookery: Science, Lore and Books, Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 1984 and 1985*, ed. by Tom Jaine (London: Prospect Books, 1986), pp. 102–14.

5 Ali Akbar Hagh Veysi, Zahrā Abdollāhi, and Sara Jānghorbān, *Khorākhayeh Boomi-e Iran* (Qhom, Iran: Andisheh Mondegar, 2015).

6 Zohreh Mehrjoo and others, 'Distinct Genetic Variation and Heterogeneity of the Iranian Population', *PLoS Genet* 15 (2019) <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgen.1008385>