In the tenth century, a scholar named Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq produced an Arabic manuscript called *Kitab al-Tabikh* (“The Book of Cooking”). This volume, which compiled and discussed the recipes of eighth- and ninth-century Islamic rulers (caliphs) and their courts in Iraq, represents the oldest known surviving cookbook of the Arab-Islamic world. Many more such cookbooks followed; in their day they represented an important literary genre among cultured elites. As one food historian recently noted, “there are more cookbooks in Arabic from before 1400 than in the rest of the world’s languages put together”.

This course will take the study of Ibn Sayyar’s cookbook as its starting point for examining the cultural dynamics of food in the Middle East across the sweep of the Islamic era, into the modern period, and until the present day. It will use the historical study of food and “foodways” as a lens for examining subjects that relate to a wide array of fields and interests. These subjects include economics; agricultural, environmental, and urban studies; anthropology; literature; religion; and public health. With regard to the modern era, the course will pay close attention to the social consequences of food in shaping memories and identities – including religious, ethnic, national, and gender-based identities – particularly among people who have dispersed or otherwise migrated. It will also focus considerably on the politics of food, that is, on the place of food in power relations.

Among the questions we will debate are these: How does food reflect, shape, or inform history? By approaching the study of Middle Eastern cultures through food, what new or different things can we see? What is the field of “food studies”, and what can it offer to scholars? What is “food writing” as a literary form, and what methodological and conceptual challenges face those who undertake it?
intrinsic part of the final project. Final papers are due on April 30, 2012. Students must submit the paper in two formats: paper (placed in my NELC department mailbox) and electronic (sent as a Word file via email).

Throughout the semester we will devote time to discussing practical techniques for planning oral presentations; structuring, writing, and revising essays; and conducting independent research. Together we will also debate and explore the possible ways of approaching the study of food.

Assorted Policies: Students can bring food or drinks to class! Students can bring laptops but must not keep the laptops consistently open during class. Please: no Facebook-checking, web-surfing, and texting during class time. If you wish to see me during office hours, contact me by email in advance to schedule an appointment (no drop-ins). Students’ papers must follow the Chicago style for citations and bibliographies. The professor does not routinely grant extensions for papers, and will not accept papers that are more than one week late. A daily five-point penalty deduction applies to late papers.

Grades result from this calculation:

- attendance, participation, and oral presentations: 30%
- short essay #1: 20%
- short essay #2: 20%
- final paper: 30%

Books and Articles

The following books are available for purchase at the Penn Book Center, 130 South 34th Street (34th & Sansom), Philadelphia. They are also on reserve in Van Pelt library. All other readings are available as PDF’s on our class Blackboard site.


No class January 16 – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

GETTING STARTED

Week 1, January 23: How can we, and why should we, study food and its pasts?

Questions for Discussion: How does food reflect, shape, or inform history? By approaching the study of Middle Eastern cultures (past and present) through food, what new or different things can we possibly see? What is the field of “food studies”, and what can it offer to scholars like us? What role does food play in our own lives, imaginations, bodies, and memories? How many of us vote with our forks, as Michael Pollan advises? How is our food – the food we eat as individuals, and as members of groups – political?

Week 2, January 30: Big Issues: Power, Sensation, Technique, and Prejudice vis-à-vis Food and Its Making

**Questions for Discussion:** What is the relationship of senses – and especially smell – to our food? What do you think of Constance Classen’s claim that senses of smell have declined in modern societies? And what about Anita Mannur’s claim, from the vantage point of literary and media studies, that “food organizes the discursively constructed worlds of the South Asian diaspora in more ways that we have been willing, or able, to acknowledge, either in literary studies, postcolonial studies, or Asian American studies” (p. 17)? What role do food and foodways play in making “selves” and “others”? How, in Mintz’s view, does “power…advance (or retard) changes in food habits” (p. 18)? Do you agree with Mintz’s assessment that, “No other fundamental aspect of our behavior as a species except sexuality is so encumbered by ideas as eating; the entanglements of food with religion, with both belief and sociality, are particularly striking” (p. 8)?

**Week 3, February 6: Introducing Islamic World History**

* In class. Discuss the restaurant review assignment for next week. What are the ground rules? Where should you go? What tone should you strike in your writing: conversational or more formal? How should you structure, draft, and revise your essay?

**Questions for Discussion:** How did Islam emerge, and what food habits or customs did Islamic societies foster? What did the expansion of Islamic empire, beginning in the seventh century, arguably do for changes in the diffusion of crops and farming techniques? Was there – and today is there – an “Islamic cuisine”? 

**Week 4, February 13: Cookbook History**

* In class: Pick one recipe from Zaouali’s volume and be prepared to discuss it in class. Can you interpret it as a historical text? What does the recipe tell you?


Questions for Discussion: Who were the Abbasids and what was Abbasid court cuisine? What can we learn from old cookbooks? What challenges confront scholars and cooks when they try to reconstruct thousand-year-old recipes like these? Why did the cookbook become a respected literary genre of the early Islamic world? Who wrote such books, and who read them or used them? How might court cuisine have differed from the cuisine or say, a peasant or merchant?

Week 5, February 20: High Class Food: Ottomans and Turks
• Suraiya Faroqhi, “Introduction,” in The Illuminated Table, the Prosperous House: Food and Shelter in Ottoman Material Culture, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi and Christoph K. Neumann (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2003), pp. 1-32, skim.
• Dariusz Kolodziejczyk, “Polish Embassies in Istanbul, or How to Sponge on [sic] Your Host without Losing Your Self-Esteem,” in The Illuminated Table, the Prosperous House, pp. 51-58.
• Christoph K. Neumann, “Spices in the Ottoman Palace: Courtly Cookery in the Eighteenth Century,” in The Illuminated Table, the Prosperous House, pp. 127-60.

Questions for Discussion: Who were the Ottomans, and was Ottoman cuisine? Why is there now a revival of interest in Ottoman food, Ottoman consumption, and Ottoman culture at large? What can we learn from a study as seemingly obscure as Kolodziejczyk’s article on Polish diplomatic banquets in seventeenth-century Istanbul? What sources can we use to reconstruct food history?

Week 6, February 27: Food and Religion
• Deniz Gürsoy, Turkish Cuisine in Historical Perspective, Trans. Joyce H. Matthews (Istanbul: Oğlak Güzel Kitaplar, 2006), pp. 53-64.

Questions for Discussion: What is the relationship of religion to food and dietary practice? What do religious dietary practices seek to achieve? Based on this week’s readings, what can we say about Muslim (Sunni and Shi’i), Jewish, Christian, and Hindu dietary practices? How might Malaysian Muslims understand halal food differently than Middle Eastern Arab Muslims? Again, is there such a thing as “Islamic cuisine”? What about “Jewish cuisine”?

SPRING BREAK, March 3-11

Week 7, March 12: Food and Memory #1: Imaginary Homelands
   [This book, which first appeared in French in 1913, is the first volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, known in English as *In Search of Lost Time or Remembrance of Things Past.*]

**In class.**  (1) Discussing next week’s oral history assignment: how should you approach it? Whom can you interview? (2) Choosing a Final Paper Topic and Planning Your Research

**Questions for Discussion:** Why has Proust’s “madeleine episode” become such a landmark in the intersecting study of food, memory, and literature? What is a food memoir as a genre of food literature? (And what indeed does a memoir seek to achieve?) Reading Colette Rossant’s memoir, what can we glean about the social history of early-to-mid twentieth-century Egypt? How might one apply Salman Rushdie’s notion of “imaginary homelands” to the study of food, memory, and exile?

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**Week 8, March 19: Food and Memory #2: The Immigrant?**


**Questions for Discussion:** What is oral history and what potential does it have for historical researchers? What role does food play in the lives and worldviews of immigrants? Is it possible to recreate the “taste of home” from a distance?

**Essay #2 due ORAL HISTORY ASSIGNMENT:**

Conduct an interview with a person of Middle Eastern origin focusing on food, memory, and identity, and present an account of the interview in approximately 750 words (about three pages). You can choose a format similar to the one presented in Lynne Christy Anderson’s book, *Breaking Bread*, or you can experiment with the Question-and-Answer interview format. Here are two, rather informal examples of the latter:

1) The *Vegetarian Times*, 2011 interview with the [vegan] neuroscientist and actress, Mayim Bialik:
   http://www.vegetariantimes.com/features/1038


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**Week 9, March 26: Food, Ethnography, and Nationalism**

• Charles Perry, “The Taste for Layered Bread among the Nomadic Turks and the Central Asian Origins of Baklava,” in *Culinary Cultures of the Middle East*, ed. Sami Zubaida and
• Ianthe Maclagan, “Food and Gender in a Yemeni Community,” in Culinary Cultures of the Middle East, ed. Zubaida and Tapper, pp. 159-72.

Final Paper Proposal Due: This proposal has two parts. (1) Submit a one-page abstract of your final paper topic, describing what you intend to study and what preliminary hypothesis you have. (2) Submit a bibliography listing at least six relevant published books or academic articles – not internet sources.

Questions for Discussion: Why should we care about the origins of baklava; what is at stake in such an argument? How has food become embroiled in modern debates over national identity and national authenticity? Do men, women, and children eat differently, or rather, do societies expect them to do so? In other words, how do gender, age, and food intersect? To what extent is eating (or feeding) a performance? Considering the newness of political borders in the modern Middle East, have distinct national cuisines coalesced in the region – Egyptian, Israeli, Lebanese, Palestinian, etc? Is there something that we could legitimately call “Middle Eastern food”?

Week 10, April 2: Food and Trauma
• Anna Badkhen, Peace Meals: Candy-Wrapped Kalashnikovs and Other War Stories (New York: Free Press, 2010).

Sign up for final presentations

Questions for Discussion: Do the books of Ciezadlo and Badkhen, who were both war correspondents in Iraq and its environs, represent a new literary sub-genre of the post-9/11 era: the war-and-food memoir? How and why do both authors weave food-based interactions into their accounts of war? Is food the central character of both books? How are these two works similar; how do they differ?

Week 11, April 9: Food Politics
• In class: Pick one country profile from Hungry Planet and one vignette from Food Politics to discuss with the group.

Questions for Discussion: What are the most salient issues in food politics today – in the Middle East, in the United States, locally and globally? Peter Menzel is a photographer: how can we, or how should we, read his pictures?

Week 12, April 16: Final Presentations

Preliminary Draft of Final Paper Due: Submit the introductory section of your paper (approx. two pages). Make sure you have an argument! This introduction should provide an overview of your topic, explain the structure of your paper, and point to your general thesis. I suggest that you also include a roadmap paragraph explaining what the structure of your paper will be and what sources you will use. The introduction is often the most difficult part of a paper to write, so it is critical that you give yourself the opportunity to get feedback before revision.

Week 13, April 23: Final Presentations
APRIL 30, 2012: Final Papers due
Send me a copy by email and put a paper copy in my box!