The Ottomans | Table Culture

‘Almost every dish had a different chef: head of soup, head of helva and so on.’

Table culture in the Ottoman Palace had unique status. Almost every dish had a different chef: head of soup (çorbac#ba##), head of helva (helvac#ba##) and so on. At banquets and Ramadan dinners (iftar), cushions were laid out on a textile that covered the floor. In the middle of the cushions a copper, silver or gilded-metal tray was placed upon which were put spoons of turtle-shell, coral, ivory or bone. The dishes followed a traditional order: the first dish was soup served in individual bowls; a main dish of red meat or chicken would follow that was served in very large metal vessels with lids (to keep the food warm), known as ku#hane. The main dish was accompanied by drinks and sweets such as zerde, baklava and helva were served as the last course.

Name: Topkapı Palace

Dynasty: Construction began in hegira 9th century / AD 15th century, during the reign of Sultan Mehmed II (his second reign: AH 855–86 / AD 1451–81); the last addition was made under Sultan Abdülmecid ['Abd al-Majid] (r. AH 1255–77 / AD 1839–61) in hegira 13th century / AD 19th century Ottoman

Details: Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Turkey

Justification: An exterior view of the kitchens and their colossal chimneys. The palace kitchens served about 2,000 residents and more than 8,000 day-workers.

Name: Large plate with floral decoration

Dynasty: Around Hegira 957–63 / AD 1550–5 Ottoman

Details: Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum
Berlin, Germany

Justification: Iznik ceramics used at table were to be, ‘as beautiful if not better than the royal porcelain of China’.

Name: Dish

Dynasty: Hegira last quarter of the 10th century / AD around 1575–1580 Ottoman

Details: The Burrell Collection, Glasgow Museums
Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom

Justification: Iznik ceramics used at table were to be, ‘as beautiful if not better than the royal porcelain of China’. 
Name: Dish

Dynasty: Hegira first half of the 11th century / AD first half of the 17th century Ottoman

Details: Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities (Medelhavsmuseet) Stockholm, Sweden

Justification: Iznik ceramics used at table were to be, 'as beautiful if not better than the royal porcelain of China'.

Name: Lidded bowl

Dynasty: Hegira 10th century / AD late 16th century Ottoman

Details: Royal Museum, National Museums of Scotland (NMS) Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom

Justification: Ceramic lidded bowl, similar bowls are still used today in Turkey to serve sugar.