



Research Article

Hirisi (Keşkek) as a ceremonial dish in a multicultural society: Culinary traditions in Hatay

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper's focus is on the cultural and symbolic importance of Hirisi (keşkek), a sacred meal served during multiple religious rites in Hatay, a multicultural area. Holtzman and Assmann serve as the theoretical foundation for the study of food and its role in cultural memory formation and building social solidarity. The City of Gastronomy title bestowed upon Hatay by UNESCO in 2017 reinforced the role of hirisi in connection to regional gastronomic identity and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Design/methodology/approach: In this study, which adopts a qualitative research approach, two data collection methods were used: non-participant observation and document analysis. The primary data collected in this study consist of non-participant observation data from three major religious and cultural rituals held in Hatay in 2024.

Results: According to the finding, the meaning attached to Hirisi represents more than an edible product in itself, but it is an important representation that can assist the people of Hatay in understanding the many cultural mixes that exist within their cuisine. The sharing of this particular dish (Hirisi) serves as a reminder for individuals of the Christian Orthodox, Armenian, and Muslim Alevis communities that they all share an identity, creates a sense of community, and contributes to the preservation of each community's cultural diversity through their religious practices.

Discussion: This study demonstration of the manner in which food fosters social cohesion and preserves cultural diversity within Christian Orthodox, Armenian, and Muslim Alevi communities supports the international acceptance of regional food identities under the UNESCO label of Hatay. Consequently, future research endeavors shall concentrate on the feasibility of incorporating Hirisi into cultural and costume preservation strategies, as well as its role in facilitating the transmission of Hirisi from one generation to the next, in addition to its function as a source of sustenance.

Keywords: Ceremonial Dish, Hirisi (Keskek), Culinary Tradition, Hatay Cuisine

Introduction

Food isn't just something we need to survive because our bodies require nutrition. When we consider what individuals and communities choose as their daily food source, eat out of tradition, or participate in sharing food as part of their daily lives, food also acts as an expression of societal norms & values. Therefore, the food we consume is an expression of the way we feel about ourselves as individuals in society, where we feel our place in that society, and how we define ourselves as part of that society. As quoted by Malinowski, “any act is tied up with the fulfilment of need(s) [i.e., the food].” (Malinowski, 1992) The basic need of eating and the need to fulfil religious or other special events. food serve not just as a biological function but also as many social aspects including gifting, sharing, developing and sustaining solidarity; growing family bonds (familial or clan-based); cementing relationships as friends or families; developing communication between peers and between families; taking part in religious ceremonies/rituals/magic. In his book "The Function of Culture in Food Cults & Rituals", Malinowski (1990) stated that people use food to maintain connection with their powers of fruitfulness and luck through rites and sacrifices. Beşirli (2010) stated that all the events surrounding food production, transportation, storage, and consumption were one way that culture and food could be viewed together to understand nutrition. Tezcan (2000) argued that culture had the greatest influence on how people ate, while at the same time, these same food habits formed early in life and did not change much throughout life. This supports the fact that food is an important part of culture. The fact that there is a linear and interconnected relationship between culture and food shows that the food of traditions is a cultural construct.

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Culinary traditions are a way of defining our relationships with others and ourselves. The act of producing, distributing, and consuming food serves as a basis for individuals to develop and sustain their closest relationships, which include family members, friends, the departed, as well as deities. therefore, food shapes individuals relationships with others, themselves, and the world. In addition to providing a structure to, and a means of understanding the nature of reality, food also provides the opportunity to construct and maintain meaningful relationships with others. The social and cultural application of food creates an important window into the study of human nature (Counihan, 1999). Traditional cuisine carries a great amount of meaning in terms of symbolism. Traditional food is characterised by the wholeness of the parts it has, which are the ingredients, the way they were prepared, and the way they were served. The way people eat depends on the traditions, customs, rules, and regulations developed and adopted through history (Beşirli, 2023). As proposed by Chee-Beng (2001), food can also serve as a thematic lens to analyze the evolution of culture and identity, as well as the relationships and social bonds among members of multi-ethnic communities. Chee-Beng (2001) argues that food is not a mere item of consumption, but represents a viewpoint through which an individual can examine the relationship of their culture and themselves. Food represents a medium for personal and group identities, in particular those connected to racial or religious ethnicity; as such, food exerts significant influence on social interactions. (Barthes, 2013). Food, religion, and ethnicity have been linked closely together. The way that social groups seek to communicate their individual identity and status or privilege (etc.) is often through food. Privilege has been created by both individuals and communities by their choice of food and their methods of eating, as well as where they actually eat. Privilege is defined by the types of foods used in ceremonies and rituals and can be a defining element of a particular community or belief system (Civitello 2019).

One of the most popular dishes served at weddings throughout many different parts of Türkiye today is Keşkek. In addition, the act of grinding wheat which is a main ingredient used in the making of keşkek, has become a symbolic ritual for producing the dish. For example; in addition to being prepared at weddings; discovered at weddings and other social occasions by different names; for example, transitional keşkek, holiday keşkek, and votive keşkek, charity keşkek, and festival keşkek (Çekiç and Özkan, 2022). In this regard, keşkek was added to UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (ICHH) in 2011 as an example of Traditional Ceremonial Keşkeği due to the symbolic nature of the dish in Türkiye where it is served in a ceremonial manner at special events, its traditional method of preparation, and its traditional ingredients. In addition, there are ten unique types of keşkek made in different regions of Türkiye registered with geographic indications by the Turkish Patent and Trademark Office. The types of keşkek that have been registered with geographic indications include: Merzifon Keşkeği, Şuhut Keşkeği, Dedeabağ Keşkeği, İskilip Ramazan Keşkeği, Küçükyoncalı Keşkeği, Adapazarı Dartılı Keşkek, Akşehir Hersesi, Amasya Keşkeği, Çarşamba Keşkeği, and Kurşunlu Keşkeği (Türk Patent ve Marka Kurumu, 2024).

The term "keşkek" originates from the Persian word "keşk". The term "keşkek" is written in many different languages in many different ways, including "kaşk", "keşk", and "kişk". The general definitions of "keşkek" found in the written texts are written as: a type of food made from wheat that has been pounded together and meat; food made from flour, meat and wheat that has been beaten together and boiled together and then poured with hot oil; dried yogurt; keşk (dried yogurt); bulgur dried yogurt; food made from meat and wheat that has been pounded together and boiled for a long period of time (Uhri, 2015; Çekiç and Özkan, 2022). In Türkiye, the meal prepared by pounding the meat and wheat together until they are well combined is known as "döğme aşı" in Turkish; but throughout Türkiye, the meal is generally known as "keşkek", "herise/hirisi", "herse", and "asur". This particular food has widespread distribution throughout many different regions of the world, including Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, South Caucasus, Armenia, the Balkans, and Türkiye. The food basically displays a ceremonial association (Işın, 2010; Akçay, 2017). Keşkek has been an important part of the traditional Turkish cuisine and is considered a national dish of Türkiye. From the comparison of Keşkek across Türkiye, there are slight differences in the ways it is prepared as well as the type of ingredients used to prepare the food item within the various regions. In some communities, keşkek is served as a wedding meal, while in some communities it has religious rituals. The food is consumed as a special meal during day of memory celebration of life.

The majority of previous research conducted on keşkek has mainly utilized descriptive methodologies and concentrated on exploring its ceremonial uses as well as regional characteristics found throughout various regions in Türkiye including how it is traditionally prepared and served (e.g., Daldaban et al., 2001; Sağır, 2012; Alyakut and Üzümcü, 2017; Akçay, 2017; Kaymaz, 2018; Ersavaş and Özkanlı, 2018; Seçim and Genç, 2019; Özmen and Eren, 2020; Özer, 2020; Usta and Şengül, 2022; Çekiç and Özkan, 2022; Yel, 2024). While none of the existing studies have discussed the specific nature of Hirisi as a collective culinary tradition that

has been maintained by various ethnic and religious groups. They primarily focus on the different they examine the different types of keşkek that exist around the globe, but do not examine the multicultural and intercultural elements of Hirisi in any significant manner. Keşkek, or "hirisi" is a dish that should be categorized as having both ceremonial and symbolic importance as it is infused with deep religious and cultural significance in Hatay cuisine. Hirisi has special ceremonial properties and is traditionally prepared during special occasions or times of celebration (religious and/or cultural) that are reflective of the multicultural nature of the population of Hatay (Tekin, 1993). Hirisi symbolizes the feelings of unity and solidarity among communities of different beliefs and ethnic origins, functioning as a cultural common denominator that transcends its status as a mere culinary product (İflazoğlu, 2023). In this respect, Hirisi constitutes an important research field in the study and promotion of Hatay's cultural diversity and multicultural heritage. Moreover, being designated as a "City of Gastronomy" in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in the year 2017, has further brought out the importance of culinary traditions like Hirisi in preserving and promoting cultural heritage at the global level. The objective of this research project is to undertake a comprehensive examination of the role of Hirisi in the gastronomic identity of Hatay and its cultural context. In view of the aforementioned information, the primary issue that this research seeks to address is as follows: To what extent does the Hirisi dish play a significant role in the maintenance of rituals and socio-cultural cohesion within the multicultural structure of Hatay? The primary rationale for examining Hirisi in this context is the absence of a comprehensive study on the subject in the extant literature. Accordingly, the present study will examine the Hirisi (Keşkek) tradition within the context of the coexistence of Muslim and Christian communities in Hatay, as well as the diverse ethnic groups associated with these religions. The objective of this study is to elucidate the role of the dish in shaping the cultural identity of the region.

Literature Review

Hatay is of considerable significance historically, as it was here where Jews formed a settlement approximately 2300 years ago. The religious life of the area was influenced by various religious traditions including paganism, Christianity and Islam during the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Crusader periods; also during the Arab, Seljuk, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods of Islamic history. The result of this process has given rise to a very rich and diverse cultural mosaic which is based on an amalgamation of exotic beliefs, Greek culture, the grandeur of Rome, and the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For this reason, Hatay is referred to as the "mosaic of religions" (i.e. adhan, bell, hazzan). Hatay is an important part of Christian history. Within the borders of Türkiye are eight out of ten of the most important holy places, outside of Jerusalem and the Vatican. It is considered one of four major patriarchal centers. Besides, it has also become a main centre of the Islamic religion (Hatay Valiliği, 2024). Hatay has stood out among the Mediterranean provinces because of its diversity and the duration of its religious and ethnic structure. From 1800 BC to the present day, civilizations such as the Akkads, Hittites, Assyrians, Sham-Imaras, Urartians, Persians, Macedonians, Phoenicians, Armenians, Arab Muslims, Alevi Hamdanis, Byzantines, Fatimites, Seljuks, Mamlukes, Ottomans, French and finally Türkiye ruled the region (Şahin, 2010).

Hatay has been at the epicentre of numerous civilisations throughout history and therefore has developed a multi-identity structure since its inception. The way this diversity is reflected in the culinary culture of Hatay is one of the most distinctive characteristics of the region. In this geographical area where Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities coexist; Ethnic groups belonging to different religions have established a common food culture. Many religious communities prepare and eat a lot of different dishes every day as well as during special events (Canbolat, 2017). According to Şahin (2012), the fundamental feature of these dishes is the recognition that we receive food (and drink) as both sustenance from God and as a bounty from him. Within this context, religious rituals represent a set of interconnected meanings that exist in all human communities. They have a predominantly religious nature, contribute to social unity, and play a vital part in creating the religious identity of their members. Religious rituals are represented in diverse ways – for example holidays, festival days, religious holidays, etc. A festival is symbolic and experienced by the entire community. Festivals symbolize that connection between communities and their constituents, i.e., community members, or individuals in the community, other communities, etc., and a link exists between different aspects of the universe, which is fused as a unity through continuous contact as well as similar collective affinities (Tambiah, 2002). Feasts that stem from faith have the ultimate aim of creating a relationship between humans and God and showing appreciation to him. As a remembrance ritual, feasts play a crucial role in the development of cultural memory. However, the way feasts are held and what they intend to do differ, depending chiefly on the religion through which they are held. The differences in culture and beliefs are what lead to these differences.

Hatay feasts are characterised by their association with a mystical epoch as well as food and drink customs. Religious feasts are unique to each religion. In Islam, there are two feasts of religious significance (Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha), and days of high religious significance, such as Mawlid and Berat Kandili. In contrast to the feast of commemorative occasions which has retrospective significance in both Christianity and Judaism, there are three (3) specific days of great importance to Christians: i. Wednesday of when Jesus was captured; ii. Friday of his crucifixion; and, iii. Sunday of his resurrection. On the other hand, Muslim Alevi share identical feast days with Orthodox Christians such as Easter, Ras el-Seni (Christian New year, Kıddes and St. Barbara (Türk and Şahin, 2004; Şahin, 2010). In addition to this, the Muslim Alevi community has a multitude of unique celebrations, all of which are significant in their own way. Food and beverages have been an immense part of religious celebrations. The relationship between food and drink and religious rituals is a significant aspect of the latter (Yenmiş, 2010). During religious feast days in Hatay, the food becomes symbolic. For example, Hirisi and coloured eggs are associated with Muslim Alevi, Orthodox Christians, and Armenians while sugar is associated with Muslim Sunnis, and unleavened bread is associated with Jews. Under this context, food and drink bear a symbolic role in the religious rituals associated with this Eid. Because of the multicultural nature of Hatay, the religious and cultural meanings of feast are displayed in different ways among many different groups of people.

Table 1. Christian Festivals and Rituals Where Hirisi is Cooked in Hatay

Name	Objective
Christmas (Miladi/Gregorian) Feast	The Feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ holds particular significance for Christian communities in Hatay. During this period, traditional foods such as Jesus Halva and Hirisi are prepared. The holiday is celebrated jointly with Alevi Muslims, which contributes to a sense of social cohesion.
Feast of St. Pierre (St. Piyer and Pol)	The Feast of St. Pierre and Pol, celebrated in June in Hatay, represents a significant religious occasion for Christian communities. During this feast, Hirisi is prepared and consumed in large quantities.
Feast of the Virgin Mary and the Feast of the Grapes	In mid-August each year, grapes are blessed in honor of the Virgin Mary. In addition, sacrifices are slaughtered and Hirisi is prepared. This ritual reflects both the religious and social aspects of the feast.
Kıddes (Feast of Baptism)	Kıddes, celebrated six days after Christmas, commemorates the day on which John the Baptist baptized Jesus. It is one of the holidays shared with Muslim Alevi.
Feast of St. Tekla (Mar Takla)	Hirisi is prepared and consumed en masse on this feast day, which is celebrated to commemorate St. Tekla.

Source: Compiled by the author

Hatay is home to many religious festivals that help to create cultural diversity and social solidarity across many local communities. This is particularly shown in the making of traditional meals such as hirisi, on religious days dedicated to St. Pierre or the Virgin Mary and St. Tekla. Therefore, the preparation of these traditional meals contributes a vital role in expressing the religious element of the Festival as it relates to the social aspect.

Method

The objective of this study is to examine the social, cultural, and ritual functions of the Hirisi dish within five distinct communities (Turkish Sunni, Arab Sunni, Arab Alevi, Arab Orthodox, and Armenian) that have coexisted in Hatay for centuries. Hirisi is not merely a traditional dish; rather, it constitutes a part of intangible cultural heritage. It serves as a symbol of religion, culture, and tradition; an indicator of collective consciousness and social unity; a bond between different social groups; and a means of transmitting culture from one generation to the next. Therefore, in this study, which adopts a qualitative research approach, two data collection methods were used: non-participant observation and document analysis. The primary data collected in this study consist of non-participant observation data from three major religious and cultural rituals held in Hatay in 2024. The observations were made during the Gadir-i Hum Feast of the Arab Alevi community (June 23, 2024), the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and the Grape Feast (Surp Asdvadzadzin) (August 18, 2024), and the Arab Orthodox Christian community's Feast of Saint Thecla (Mar Takla) (September 24, 2024). The selection of these ceremonies was predicated on the premise that Hirisi symbolizes a ritual meal, reflects a shared culinary culture across different faith communities, and is prepared and consumed as a communal dish. The researcher did not interfere with the rituals during the observation period; rather, the researcher merely observed them. No interviews were conducted with participants, no surveys were administered, and no personal information was collected. The researcher's prolonged residency in Hatay and

profound comprehension of the region's sociocultural framework enabled a thorough examination of the observed practices within their natural contexts (Musante and DeWalt, 2010). This method has assisted various religious groups in preserving a shared culinary tradition, maintaining it through ritual practices, and emphasizing the significance of Hirisi in relation to cultural identity, social cohesion, and multicultural coexistence (Spradley, 1980; Jorgensen, 2020). In this study, the unit of analysis is not individuals, but rather the publicly held Hirisi ceremonies and the ritual practices within them. Consequently, the study's data collection process was based on non-participant observation and document analysis, as no participant sample could be formed.

The secondary data source for the study is document analysis. A comprehensive review of pertinent written sources was conducted to substantiate the observation findings and to illuminate the historical, cultural, and gastronomic context of Hirisi (Bowen, 2009). The documents selected for analysis encompass a diverse array of sources, including master's and doctoral theses (Sahin 2010; Bozkır 2013; İflazoğlu 2023), publications on Hatay cuisine (Tekin, 1993; Şahin 2012), peer-reviewed scientific journals (Yenmis 2010; Turk and Sahin 2004), institutional publications (Budak 2021), and the Aşur Geographical Indication Registration Certificate issued by the Turkish Patent and Trademark Office (2025). The information obtained from these documents was interpreted in conjunction with the collected observational data.

Finding

Culinary traditions and preparation of (Keşkek) Hirisi

Eating food is one way that people interpret the sacred and re-enact revered stories. In sacred contexts, food acts as a medium of connection between an individual and their beliefs, creating a "strong link between food and memory" (Mintz and DuBois, 2002). In some cases, because of its symbolism and relation to historical processes, the food itself is seen as sacred.

Fig. 1 Feast of St. Tekla (Mar Takla) (Arab / Orthodox Christian in Hatay)



Fieldhouse (1995) proposes that there are three forms of food practices related to religion. First, the food practices described in the sacred text are practised in accordance with God's will. Second, the food practices are ordered by both religious leaders and political leaders using the sacred text as a reference. Thirdly, the existing food practices are adapted and selected for religious purposes. For example, in Hatay Vakıflı Village, the time grape ripen coincides with the week of Virgin Mary Ascension, therefore, both events are celebrated together each year based on the Armenia religion. The celebration of grapes is also known as "Verapokhum Surp Asdvadzadzni" (Celebration of the Ascension of the Virgin Mary) and its celebration day is the Sunday closest to August 15 th. descending from regions all over Turkey (e.g., Istanbul), as well as Armenia, Syria, Lebanon, and other regions of the world, traveling to Vakıflı Village, to Participate in the Feast Day of the Virgin Mary.

Fig. 2. Feast of the Virgin Mary and the Feast of the Grapes (Armenian /Gregorian in Hatay)



The festivities commence on Saturday evening and extend through Sunday night. The event features seven Cauldrons arranged in a linear configuration within the courtyard of the church. The cauldrons are then used to boil the hirisi overnight, and it is served during morning worship services. The number seven is imbued with symbolic meaning in this context, as it is associated with the meal consumed as a memorial for the migrations that occurred in 1915. The cauldrons, each distinct yet interconnected, serve as a poignant representation of the collective memories of the people of six Armenian villages that once existed in the region. They also symbolize the memories of the inhabitants of one district (neighborhood) in Vakıfli village, namely Kebusiye, Bityas, Hacı Habibli, Yoğunoluk, Hıdırbey, Vakıflı, and the Yezzur neighborhood, which is located in proximity to Vakıfli village. During the Sunday service, the grapes and the hirisi are blessed. This blessing is bestowed upon the fruit in order to conclude the grape fast when the fruit is consumed at the culmination of these festivities. Consequently, the conclusion of the name day festivities marks the culmination of this phenomenon (Bozkır, 2013).

Alevi Muslims and Christians come together to celebrate several shared feast days; the basis of this commonality stems from the assistance they received from the Christians, their long-standing coexistence, their mutual respect for all religions, and their belief in the sacred nature of all prophets (Şahin, 2010). Because they both speak Arabic and constantly converse in a mutual language, their cultural relations are strengthened, and consequently, Alevis have embraced numerous traditions from the Christians. Practically speaking, almost every day of the year is celebrated as a holiday for Alevis due to their belief in the sacredness of all religions. These feasts are held in commemoration of various events, including the birth and death of an individual, or a holy anniversary, as well as anniversaries of seasonal changes, migration, and significant historical events such as armed conflict. The role that sacrifice plays in feast celebrations is an extremely vital and fundamental one. One of the unique practices during the feasts is the preparation of hirisi (keşkek), which has become a tradition that has deep historical significance for both groups (Yenmiş, 2010). Hirisi is a traditional staple dish of Hatays cuisine in many ways - religious, cultural, and social. It represents feelings of community and togetherness between different faiths, most notably Christians and Muslims (İflazoğlu, 2023).

Fig. 3. Feast of the Gadir Khumm (Arab /Muslim Alevis in Hatay)



Hirisi is a dish that is primarily composed of wheat and meat. Its preparation requires a significant investment of time, both for the cooking process itself and for the procurement of the necessary ingredients. The Hatay people do not consume hirisi on a daily basis; rather, it is prepared in large cauldrons and served at large gatherings where hundreds of individuals may be present. Consequently, it is not recommended to prepare a modest quantity of hirisi (Tekin,1993).

The preparation of Hirisi involves a series of ritualistic practices and a significant amount of manual labor. The initial step entails the slaughter of the animal and subsequent division of the carcass into substantial meat portions. Subsequent to the placement of the meat in large containers, water is introduced to the vessels to facilitate the removal of blood, which results in a white coloration of the meat. The performance of traditional rituals constitutes a component of the preparatory process for the meal. Subsequent to the blessing of the meat, it is introduced into the cauldron, which has previously been positioned over the fire. Subsequently, water is incorporated to submerge the meat, thereby initiating the cooking process at a low temperature. Once the meat has achieved a specific texture, the mixture is augmented with pounded wheat. The wheat is subsequently subjected to a cooking process in the broth, during which it is continuously agitated to ensure an even distribution. Subsequently, additional workers partake in the culinary process, including the act of stirring and mixing, utilizing porous sifters. The process of stirring also necessitates the extraction of bones and cartilage. The cook's primary responsibility is to ensure the consistency of the mixture and to continue cooking it until it is fully prepared. Subsequent to the verification of the readiness level through the use of visual cues, the smith is prepared to initiate the process of forging steel in its optimal state. During the forging process, two individuals collaborate on opposite sides of a specialized apparatus. In the event that either individual experiences fatigue, the other individual will assume their position, thereby ensuring the uninterrupted continuation of the forging process. Subsequent to the completion of the forging process, the cook will undertake a re-evaluation of the consistency of the forged product. Subsequent to the conclusion of the process, the hirisi is transferred to storage containers for public distribution. The traditional meal of the people of Hatay, known as hirisi, is an important aspect of the Hatay cuisine. It is not only a significant food ingredient; it is also a representation of the community's togetherness and willingness to communicate with one another (Yenmiş, 2010; Budak, 2021).

Fig. 4. Aşur as a daily dish (Sunni Turkish and Sunni Arab Muslim in Hatay)

According to İflazoğlu (2023), the Christian Orthodox, Armenian, and Muslim Alevi communities in Hatay prefer to consume the dish *hirisi*. Conversely, a derivative of *keşkek* known as *aşur* is most commonly preferred by Sunni Muslim Turks and Sunni Muslim Arabs. There are distinct differences and similarities between the two dishes (i.e., type of equipment used, cooking method, ingredients, cooking time, and purpose for which they are made). Compared with *hirisi*, which requires considerable time and large cauldrons for preparation on a special occasion using wood fires, *aşur* is typically cooked in the pot regardless of daily or special occasions and is also considered a delicatessen product in the local food restaurants. Hatay Ashure, has a very significant location within the culinary heritage of Hatay region and was registered with a GI (Geographical Indication) by the Turkish Patent and Trademark Office in the year 2025 (Türk Paten ve Marka Kurumu, 2025).

Table 2. The Cultural Context of Keşkek Across Different Ethnic-Religious Communities in Hatay

Local Name	Community (Ethnic/Religious Identity)	Occasions of Preparation	Ingredients & Preparation Characteristics
Hirisi	Arab Orthodox Christian	Feast of Saint Takla (September 24), Assumption of Mary (August 15), New Year (January 1), Christmas, Feast of St. Pierre and Paul, Baptism Feast (Kıddes)	Only male animals (rooster, pig, beef) are used. Slaughtering rituals are highly symbolic and spiritually significant.
Hirisi	Armenian Apostolic (Gregorian) Christian	Closest Sunday to August 15 (Verapokhum Surp Asdvadzadzni), Christmas, Feast of St. Pierre and Paul, Baptism Feast (Kıddes)	"Seven pots of Hrisi" are prepared by men in remembrance of six villages exiled in 1915. This is a commemorative act symbolizing cultural memory and solidarity.
Ashur / Döğme	Turkish Sunni Muslim	Ashura Day, weddings, daily life	Prepared with wheat and beef/lamb. In recent decades, tomato paste and spices (e.g., cumin, black pepper) have been increasingly added, reflecting culinary adaptation.
Ashur	Arab Sunni Muslim	Religious nights (Kandil), weddings, Ramadan, Eid holidays, Daily life	Made with wheat, beef or rooster meat, onions, chili or tomato paste, spices (black pepper, cumin), and various oils (e.g., sunflower oil).
Hirisi	Arab Alevi Muslim	Sacred days, especially Gadir Khumm	Prepared exclusively by men. Includes wheat, sacrificial meat (beef or lamb), tail fat, and salt. Distributed to the poor following religious prayers and sermons.

Source: Compiled by the author

Table 2 gives us an idea of the importance of the dish *Hirisi* (known as *Ashur* or *Döğme* among Sunnis) in the culture and community life of the various ethnic and religious communities in Hatay and the surrounding areas where this dish is prepared and consumed according to traditions that differ from one community to another. Among the four mentioned communities (Arab Orthodox Christians, Armenians, Arab Alevis, and Arab Sunnis), *Hirisi* serves as the central ceremonial food and has unique meanings attached to its preparation and eating rituals. The Arab Orthodox Christians prepare the dish during major religious feasts, such as the Feast

of St. Takla and New Year's Day, and thus instill spiritual meanings and represent Christianity. For the Armenians, it is prepared during the "Grape Festival" and during gatherings to remember the villages that were exiled, and therefore Hirisi plays a significant role in collective memory and identity. For Arab Alevis, the Hirisi is prepared by men only on holy occasions such as the Ghadir Khumm to represent traditional gender roles within the context of religious practice. Although the essential ingredients, namely cracked wheat and meat (beef or lamb), do not change from region to region, differences occur in terms of the type of fat (butter, sunflower oil, tail fat), and the spices added to the dish (cumin, black pepper, chili paste). Hirisi is traditionally prepared by Arab Sunnis for wedding ceremonies, on special religious nights, and during community gatherings and is often called Ashur or Döğme. Hirisi is a dual function food, providing nutrition and also representing cultural tradition, religious commitment, social unity, and traditional gender roles.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the context of theoretical approaches emphasizing that food is a multidimensional subject encompassing social, psychological, physiological, and symbolic aspects, and that it plays an important role in defining the present through historic identity markers (Holtzman, 2006), the traditional food dish Hirisi is a primary symbolic representation of the historical and cultural differences among the various ethnic and religious groups found within the multicultural fabric of the Hatay region. In Hirisi's case, not just does it serve to represent an identity through its role as a food, but also represents a linkage between people that therefore creates a certain degree of solidarity amongst them. Through food rituals that communities attribute meaning to provide cohesion within that community (Douglas, 2013), and rituals and symbols that are capable of preserving the culture's memory (Assmann, 1995), Hirisi is not only consumed for sustenance but also acts as a symbol of the culture's collective memory, spirituality, and togetherness.

Hirisi represents a significant component of the religious ceremonies observed by the Christian Orthodox, Armenian, and Muslim Alevi communities in Hatay. This collective ritual, in which the three communities prepare and dispense the Hirisi together in a large pot, serves as a potent exemplar of communal engagement in traditional practices. The act of sharing is known to have profound social ramifications, particularly in terms of fostering a sense of belonging and fortifying social bonds among community members (Durkheim, 1915). Culture provides individuals who belong to that community with shared meanings and forms of collective identity (Niglio, 2014), therefore it gives individuals a collective sense of identity and culture creates for an individual an understanding and linkage to the historic past of their community. For Example, the Orthodox Christians attribute significant importance to the Hirisi through the sacrificial and distributive practices that accompany two major Christian holidays, i.e., the Day of St. Takla and the Day of the Virgin Mary. On the other hand, in the Armenian community, the commemoration of historic hardship, or the year of 1915, is associated with the tradition of making and consuming Hirisi. The meal provides everyone who participates in the meal with the opportunity to engage with other people from other different communities in some common tradition, and therefore can be described as a "cultural bridge." As a matter of fact, The Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and the Grape Festival are significant events which are held at Vakifli village shows how the religious ritual, cultural memory and social solidarity can be connected. The importance of food as holy objects and the way it is used in ceremonies helps people to strengthen their faith, while at the same time helping to preserve shared memories of a group.

The symbolic aspects used in making Hirisi represent not only the unfortunate historical events but also offer a method for passing on this memory to the next individuals or generations. Cultural memory is continuously rebuilt through written and/or unwritten laws and passed down from generation to generation through tradition (Sahin, 2010). In this regard, the religious festival is not a major faith-based occurrence but also services in retention of community identity, remembering the past, and sharing of values. Hirisi emerges as one of the most important symbols of the multicultural structure of Hatay and the ways in which the communities come together. Shared customs and traditions create a sense of unity among different ethnic and religious communities. Therefore, the Hirisi dish serves more than just food for the community. It is, therefore, an identity object, too.

Hirisi reflects the culture of Hatay and, as such, provides an important basis for research that provides understanding and promotes the multi-cultural dynamics of Hatay. This can provide a strong foundation for future research around the relationship between food and culture. Hatay's designation as a City of Gastronomy provides for the promotion of local culture to an international audience while supporting Hatay's multicultural identity through ensuring sustainable preservation. Not only should we examine the Hirisi Product as food, but we should also look at it as a representation of Hatay's multicultural heritage, and this idea is worthy of further exploration.

Theoretical Implications

One thing that emerges from studying the theories of Holtzman (2006) and Assmann (1995) is the idea that food is more than just an essential component of biological survival, food plays a vital role in connecting and preserving cultural memory. The use of Hirisi is an example of how people in Hatay connect with their culture; keep community memory alive, as well as religious symbolism remain important to their religious rituals. The individuals of Hatay have prepared and consumed Hirisi in a way that demonstrates to others that cultural memory can be passed down through Ritual. Theorists such as Durkheim (1915) and Douglas (2013) argue that rituals, such as ritual meals, are important in creating social cohesion and constructing collective identities. The fact that multiple religious and ethnic groups within Hatay continue to prepare and eat Hirisi as one of their shared traditional foods, serves to demonstrate that eating this meal has become an activity that unites all of the different members of the community, despite their different cultures. The presence of the dish as a link between groups of people who are otherwise separate makes this dish an act of creating unity and social cohesion between those who eat it. Barthes (2013) and Bezirli (2023) define food culture as a basis for cultural and social identity development; therefore, Hirisi serves as a credible symbol to provide evidence of the ethnic diversity and food identity of Hatay cuisine. There are two points to be made regarding the above dish: it is a source of nourishment for the body and mind, and it is a testament to the peaceful coexistence of the population and their ability to express their cultural diversity. The example of the ritualistic and social functions of hirisi is a very effective demonstration of the effect of food identity on culture building.

Practical Implications

Hirisi's role in preserving the cherished food traditions of Hatay cannot be overstated. The promotion of local foods at national and international levels is crucial to maintaining the UNESCO City of Gastronomy title for Hatay; however, dishes such as Hirisi, which are loaded with culture and history, should be promoted by the government and cultural organizations. In addition, using Hirisi as a ritual symbolizing unity through sharing is an example to build social cohesion programs on. The experience of religious holidays and festivals offers valuable opportunities for building social solidarity by fostering cultural exchanges between different community groups. In addition to this Hirisi is likely to be a great centre of attention when it comes to gastronomic tourism in Hatay. The manner by which events relating to the preparation and service of this particular food item are arranged expands awareness of local traditions among tourists and assists in the growth of tourism through food. The introduction of the social significance and ritual component of Hirisi into schools and public educational programmes will help generate more excitement about traditional foods among younger generations. The use of educational and informational programmes enhances the protection of and transfer of this cultural heritage to future generations over the longer term.

Limitations and Future Research

This research study provides comprehensive qualitative information about the multi-faith culinary traditions of one region of Hatay through the use of non-participant observation and document analysis techniques. It should be noted that the study does not include the personal, individual experiences of the people who make these foods, as interviews were not conducted. A future research project would entail the conduction of semi-structured interviews with individuals who are familiar with the dish known as Hirisi, with the objective of gathering oral histories from them. Furthermore, subsequent research endeavors may entail the examination of additional comparative case studies. The objective of this examination would be to ascertain the methodologies employed by displaced and diaspora Hatay communities in the maintenance of their ritual food-making practices.

Further research may involve the application of quantitative methodologies to ascertain the extent to which the urban transformation of Hatay impacts the propensity of the emerging generation, particularly those belonging to Generation Z, to engage actively in the establishment of these formerly ritual/communal multi-faith culinary traditions. This encompasses traditions that necessitate considerable time and effort to cultivate and that emphasize the exploration of the nexus between sustenance, intergenerational transmission, and cultural expression.

Ethics Statement: This study was conducted using non-participant observation and document analysis methods. No interviews were conducted with individuals, and no questionnaires or scales were administered. Furthermore, no intervention was made, and no personal data were collected during the research process. In the event that any contrary situation is identified, the *Journal of Gastronomy, Hospitality and Travel (JOGHAT)* bears no responsibility, and all responsibility rests solely with the author(s).

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