

## ***Boza Consumption in Early-Modern Istanbul As an Energy Drink and a Mood-Altering Substance<sup>1</sup>***

*Erken Modern Dönemde İstanbul'da Bir Sağlık İçeceği ve Keyif Verici Olarak Boza Tüketimi*

**İklil Selçuk**

### **Abstract**

The consumption of substances such as coffee is known to have gained popularity in the early-modern period along with increased urbanization and the proliferation of public places such as coffeehouses, and bathhouses in towns. Marshall Hodgson refers to the use of such substances in the Venture of Islam, underlining their increase in popularity in the Islamic world, particularly following the Mongol era.<sup>2</sup> Boza is a sweet and fermented drink made from millet, chickpeas or barley, which is known to have equivalents in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Crimea and the Balkans. Its consumption partly falls under the category of mood-changing substances along with alcoholic drinks as boza is alcoholic when fermented long enough. This article focuses on boza consumption in seventeenth-century Istanbul based on the travelogue of Evliya Çelebi. I compare this narrative with some aspects of my previous study of bozahane affairs in fifteenth-century Bursa, wherever the contents are relevant.

**Keywords:** Bozahane, Early Modernity, Urban History, Consumption, Istanbul

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2 Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, II, 3 Vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 58-69.

**Öz**

*Erken-modern dönemde şehirleşme, kahvehane ve hamam gibi kamusal mekanların çoğalmasıyla birlikte kahve türü maddelerin popülaritesinin arttığı bilinmektedir. Marshall Hodgson, the Venture of Islam adlı eserinde bu tür maddelerin İslam coğrafyasında özellikle Moğol istilası sonrasına denk gelen dönemde yaygınlaştığına işaret etmiştir. Darı, nohut ya da arpadan yapılan tatlı ve fermante bir içecek olan boza ve benzerleri Akdeniz, Ortadoğu, Kırım, ve Balkanlar'da bu dönemde kullanılmıştır. Boza tüketimi bir yönüyle keyif verici maddelerin kullanımına girer çünkü boza uzun süre fermante edildiğinde alkol içeriği artar. Bu makale, Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi'ne göre onyedinci yüzyılda İstanbul'un boza tüketimini incelemektedir. Evliya Çelebi'nin bu konuda verdiği bilgiler, daha önce onbeşinci yüzyıl Bursa bozahaneleri üzerine mevcut bir çalışmanın ilgili kısımlarıyla karşılaştırılmaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Bozahane, Erken Modernite, Kent Tarihi, Tüketim, İstanbul

Ottoman consumption studies often focus on material consumption, distinguishing consumption patterns between ordinary and elite households, based on inheritance inventories of ordinary subjects (*tereke* registers) and *post-mortem* inventories of the administrative class, housing patterns, possession of clothing and jewelry.<sup>3</sup> Studies on food and beverage consumption indicate parallel findings to those on material culture. In this context, an initial shift in consumption patterns began in seventeenth-century İstanbul, with the popularity of coffee and tobacco consumption, which continued in the following centuries.<sup>4</sup> Along with extravagant and conspicuous consumption of the eighteenth century, characterized by the Tulip Craze (*Lale Devri*) İstanbul's social and cultural fabric "opened up" in Shirin Hamedeh's words. Urban middle classes became more visible in the public sphere such as recreational picnic areas; social and professional mobility affected consumption patterns that emphasized a 'sensory pleasure' in the enjoyment of architectural beauty.<sup>5</sup> The changing tastes of this period are seen by Hamadeh as the precursors of Ottoman modernity.<sup>6</sup>

Cemal Kafadar, in a recent article elaborates on the meaning of the transformation of social life and tastes in early-modern İstanbul, focusing on the popularity of coffeehouses; urbanization and the rise of a bourgeoisie; an increase in the use of the night in a range of activities including socialization; and the appearance of new forms of entertainment arts of performative nature.<sup>7</sup> Urbanization in this period indicated by Kafadar is characterized by the "emergence of the new city folk" which included various layers of classes and underclasses, including *lumpenesnaf*<sup>8</sup> and the riff-raff, terms coined

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3 Suraiya Faroqhi. *Stories of Ottoman Men and Women, Establishing Status, Establishing Control*, (İstanbul: Eren Yay., 2002).

4 Donald Quataert Ed. *Consumption and the History of the Ottoman Empire 1550-1922, An Introduction*, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000), 10-11.

5 Shirine Hamadeh. *The City's Pleasures. İstanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2008), 4; 14.

6 Ibid, 8.

7 Cemal Kafadar, "How Dark is the History of the Night, How Black the Story of Coffee, How Bitter the Tale of Love: The Changing Measure of Leisure and Pleasure in Early Modern İstanbul," *Medieval and Early Modern Performance in the Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Arzu Öztürkmen and Evelyn Birge Vitz, LMEMS 20 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 244.

8 Kafadar (2014), 245.

by the author to refer to the artisans and tradesmen, who at this point had established organic links with, and often comprised the janissaries. While the focus of Kafadar, and a number of other scholars who work on early-modern history is coffee and its unprecedented prominence, I find some parallels with this story, in the less phenomenal -yet significant from an urban history point of view- consumption of *boza* and its appeal to the riff-raff. It must be noted that *boza* has various characteristics that distinguish it from coffee, and render it on the one hand more similar to wine, and on the other hand, almost a health remedy for special needs.<sup>9</sup>

How popular *boza* was during the Middle Ages in Anatolia or the Balkans is uncertain. It clearly could not have been stocked up by peasant households of the largely agricultural population of medieval Anatolia, for long-term use unlike pickled vegetables, spiced and cured meat or dried fruit. It would have to be consumed fresh. Of course it could be home made, but there is no evidence on its consumption. There is reference to *fuqa*, a mildly fermented drink made from barley or dried grapes, which is counted among the three favorite worldly pleasures of Rumi along with the *sama*, the whirling dervish ceremony, and taking a bath in the *hammam*.<sup>10</sup> Although any word that recalls *boza* is completely absent from an exhaustive study of food culture in fourteenth-century Anatolia, that is Nicolas Trépanier's *Foodways and Daily Life*, the author suggests that *fuqa* might have been the forerunner of *boza* in the Anatolian context. As no direct account about food exists from that period, it is difficult to be conclusive about the question of *boza*. For instance the same exhaustive collection of sources also completely lacks references to hot drinks, which is not sufficient to conclude that hot drinks were not consumed, as put forward by Trépanier<sup>11</sup>. Thus, there is little one can say about the exact time and context in which the fermented drink of *boza* made of millet, barley, or chickpeas became popular in the Ottoman society. Its high-calorie content is known to have given *boza* a nutrition quality especially making it desirable during Ramadan evenings.

Several works on Ottoman cuisine underline the place of *boza* in the

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9 On the origin of the word *boza* see: Berthold Laufer, "On the Possible Oriental Origin of Our Word Booze," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 49 (1929), 58.

10 Nicolas Trépanier, *Foodways and Daily Life in Medieval Anatolia: A New Social History*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 91.

11 Trépanier (2014), 91-92.

broader context of food studies. Arif Bilgin's *Osmanlı Saray Mutfağı* (*Ottoman Palace Cuisine*) is an extensive work on the provisioning, accounting and financial aspects regarding the imperial kitchen (*Matbah-ı Amire*), focusing on the period between 1453 and 1650.<sup>12</sup> In this work based on archival sources, Bilgin gives the amounts of rice used in *boza* production in the *Helvahâne* of the imperial kitchen as 7.5 tons and 3.9 tons in the years 1631 and 1638, respectively.<sup>13</sup> In another work, the same author documents the connection of the fiscal sources generated by the *boza* business, to the office of the Palace Agent for Purchases (*Hassa Harç Emîni*).<sup>14</sup> The collection of articles in a volume entitled *Türk Mutfağı* (*Turkish Cuisine*) edited by Arif Bilgin and Özge Samancı, include references to kitchen utensils as well as origins of popular dishes and drinks, including *boza*.<sup>15</sup> The most comprehensive collection of articles directly relating to *boza* is the compilation edited by Ahmet Nezihî Turan, *Acısıyla Tatlısıyla Boza* (*Sweet and Sour Boza*), which begins with an overview provided by the editor.<sup>16</sup> Some articles included in this volume offer possibilities for further research into the subject, for example, Ümit Koç suggests a comparison of consumption levels of *boza* and wine and the amounts of taxes paid by *boza* and wine houses in order to better locate the place of *bozahanes* within the Ottoman urban economy.<sup>17</sup> The articles by Asım Yediyıldız and Hasan Basri Öcalan included in this volume focus on Bursa's *boza* houses.<sup>18</sup> In a different volume that looks at food history, Suraiya Faroqhi refers to *boza* in relation to Evliya Çelebi's compari-

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12 Arif Bilgin, *Osmanlı Saray Mutfağı*, (İstanbul: Kitabevi Yay., 2004).

13 Bilgin, 2004, 63.

14 Arif Bilgin, *Osmanlı Taşrasında Bir Maliye Kurumu Bursa Hassa Harç Emîniği*, (İstanbul: Kitabevi Yay., 2006), 112-13.

15 Altan Çetin, "Karahanlı-Selçuklu-Memlûk Çizgisinde Türk Mutfağı," in Arif Bilgin and Özge Samancı (Eds.) *Türk Mutfağı*, (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2008), 31.

16 Ahmet Nezihî Turan, "Boza'yı Kurcalamak," *Acısıyla Tatlısıyla Boza*, Ahmet Nezihî Turan (Ed.), (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yay., 2007), 15-29.

17 Ümit Koç, "Klasik Dönem Osmanlı Ülkesinde Boza," in *Acısıyla Tatlısıyla Boza*, Ahmet Nezihî Turan (Ed.), (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yay., 2007), 72.

18 M. Asım Yediyıldız, "Osmanlı Bozahaneleri: Bursa Örneği (1500-1600), *Acısıyla Tatlısıyla Boza*, Ahmet Nezihî Turan (Ed.), (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yay., 2007), 105-109; and Hasan Basri Öcalan, "Bursa'da Boza ve Tarihi Bozahaneler," *Acısıyla Tatlısıyla Boza*, Ahmet Nezihî Turan (Ed.), (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yay., 2007), 110-120.

son of its counterpart found in Cairo<sup>19</sup>; and Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu mentions small porcelain cups used in sherbet and boza consumption.<sup>20</sup>

Having noticed the significance of *boza* as a business enterprise in light of the above-mentioned studies and during my research on late fifteenth-century Bursa court records, I have elsewhere published my findings on the Bursa *boza* houses.<sup>21</sup> I have observed that the number of cases on *bozahane* affairs and *boza* makers in Bursa clearly exceeded those on other artisans. Court records of the fifteenth century, by nature, do not tell us much about food consumption per se, or conflicts that could have surfaced in that context. A typical example for the kind of information fifteenth-century Bursa court records reveal about *bozahanes* is the following record dated March 20, 1491, found in Bursa court registers:

“...The manager of the tax sources of the *bozahanes* (in Bursa), Seydī Ahmed b. Resūl said the following at the kāḏī court: I took from İlyās b. ‘Abdullāh, the holder of *kanber bozahane*, completely and without remainder, the *bozahane* down-payment and the taxes charged toward contractual expenses from the first day of the *rebiyyülevvel* until the end of *rebiyyülāhir* in the year 896 Hijrī. The aforementioned *bozahane* holder confirmed. The witnesses: Mustafa b. Mehmed; Mevlānā Eyüb; and the scribe of these letters; and Mevlānā Sinān El-Din.”<sup>22</sup>

The same pattern prevails in fifteenth-century court records of Üsküdar, which as one of the three main suburbs of Istanbul, was known

19 Suraiya Faroqhi, “Lezzetli Yiyecekler ve Onları Elde Etme Yolu,” *Yemekte Tarih Var, Yemek Kültürü ve Tarihçiliği*, Ayşegül Avcı, Seda Erkoç, Elvin Otman (Eds.), (İstanbul; Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2012), 87.

20 Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu, “Fincanınızda Ne Var?: Osmanlı Döneminde Günlük Yaşam, Sosyal Değişimler ve Fincan Tipleri,” *Yemekte Tarih Var, Yemek Kültürü ve Tarihçiliği*, Ayşegül Avcı, Seda Erkoç, Elvin Otman (Eds.), (İstanbul; Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2012), 97.

21 İktil Selçuk. “State Meets Society: A Study of *Bozahane* Affairs in Bursa” *Princeton Papers. Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. XVI (2011), 23-48.

22 “Brūsa bozahānelerinde emīn olan Seydī Ahmed b. Resūl şer‘iyyat mahfelinde ihrār idüb eyitdi ki kanber bozahānesin dutan İlyās b. ‘Abdullāh elinden zikr olan bozahānenin yevm ‘ül-kıstı ve resm-i kitābeti bī kūsūr sene sitte ve us ‘in ve semānemi ‘e rebiyyülevvel gürresinden sene-yi mezküre rebiyyül āhiri gāyetine varınca baña vāşıl oldı dedi ol dahī tasdik etdi. ŞH: Mustafa b. Mehmed; Mevlānā Eyüb; ve kātibül-hurūf; ve Mevlānā Sinān El-Dīn” 9 Cumāde’l-evvel, H. 896, BCR A-8, #670.

to have hosted *bozahanes*, however, the nature of the court records of the early period do not allow us access to the background stories, and the social aspects of *boza* consumption. A case from Üsküdar Court Registers dated 1521, reveals that Mahmud b. Abdullah rented a *bozahane* from the waqf of Mehmed Paşa in Üsküdar, for 12 months, in return for 840 *akças*.<sup>23</sup> As seen in both of the aforementioned cases, any mention of *bozahanes* from this period tell us more about their management and fiscal aspects rather than the consumption of *boza*.

From this perspective, the figures on *bozahane* rents in late fifteenth-century Bursa indicate that the Bursa *bozahanes* were significant sources of revenue for the government. The magnitude of these figures suggests that *bozahanes* engaged not merely in the production and house-to-house distribution of the drink, but also in its retail sale. In other words, it is possible that not only the *bozahanes* mentioned by Evliya Çelebi, which we will be examining in more detail here, but also at least some of the earlier ones resembled taverns open to the public. *Bozahane* locations in Bursa demonstrate a relationship between their rents and their proximity to commercial districts. More specifically, the most lucrative *boza* houses were located in the commercial areas of town where heterogeneous clients were more likely to have frequented these premises.<sup>24</sup> Although in this previous research I suggested that *bozahanes* seem to have lost their popularity with the aforementioned seventeenth-century rise of the coffeehouses in Ottoman towns<sup>25</sup>, there is evidence that they continued to serve particular circles.

### **Evliya Çelebi on Boza Consumption in Seventeenth-Century İstanbul**

In order to take a closer look at the consumption of *boza* in seventeenth-century İstanbul, I will now turn to Evliya Çelebi's account. Marianna Yerasimos has provided an exhaustive data base of references to food, drinks, kitchen utensils and the artisans involved in their provision and production, based on Evliya Çelebi's narrative.<sup>26</sup> In this work, Yerasimos gives locations of Evliya Çelebi's references to *boza*, types of *boza*, famous *boza* houses of İstanbul,

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23 ÜCR -1, #303 (55a-1), İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Üsküdar Mahkemesi 1 Numaralı Sicil (H. 919-927 / M. 1513-1521), Eds. Bilgin Aydın, and Ekrem Tak, 212.

24 Selçuk (2011), 25-37.

25 Selçuk (2011), 44.

26 Marianna Yerasimos, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi'nde Yemek Kültürü, Yorumlar ve Sistematik Dizin*, (İstanbul: Kitabevi Yay., 2011).

artisans involved in *boza* production and their ceremonial procession.<sup>27</sup> The author also has part of a chapter reserved for the analysis of different aspects of references to *boza* by Evliya Çelebi.<sup>28</sup> The specific questions I pose while scrutinizing Evliya Çelebi's narrative include what was the nature of *boza* consumption in early modern Ottoman towns? How was *boza* stored and consumed? Was it mainly distributed by itinerant peddlers? What were the functions of *boza* houses (*bozahanes*)? Where were *boza* houses located? What do these locations tell us about the use of space in town? Who were *boza* clients in general? And particularly, who frequented *bozahanes*? I think further discussion can be developed around the questions of: How does *boza* consumption compare to that of wine and coffee in the seventeenth century?, which is a question brought forth by Ümit Koç, as mentioned before; and finally, what do we know about the volume and the significance of the *boza* business as far as the managers and tenants of *boza* houses are concerned?

The immediately recognizable inference based on Evliya Çelebi's descriptions is that in seventeenth-century İstanbul sweet and sour *boza* were distinguishable to the extent that they could almost be considered as two different consumption commodities. Their specs, their producers, their clients and the spaces they were sold at seem to tell them apart. This difference has also been underlined by Marianna Yerasimos.<sup>29</sup> More specifically, non-alcoholic sweet *boza* was more often sold out of containers in public places in great quantities. Sweet *boza* was recommended by and popular among pious people and Sufi circles especially during the Ramadan; it was also known to be good for pregnant and nursing women. Evliya Çelebi does not mention peddlers who went around residential neighborhoods selling *boza*, but counts commercial areas of town among places one could find good quality *boza*.

On the other hand, highly fermented sour *boza* appears to be regularly served to the clients in the *bozahane* setting. *Boza* houses seem to have more parallels with wine houses than any other public place. Clients of sour *boza* were janissaries, and especially dock workers, such as the porters and the rowers. All of the aforementioned can be considered among the riff-raff; ruffians, or groups on the margins of İstanbul's population. The connection

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27 Yerasimos, 2011, 324.

28 Yerasimos, 2011, 265-270.

29 Yerasimos, 2011, 266.

between the army *esnaf* and *boza* provision to the soldiers is a recurring theme in this narrative, which appears in several different contexts.

Some concrete examples from Evliya's descriptions and related anecdotes can be categorized under the main headings of the kinds of *boza* and where they are sold: the health benefits of sweet *boza*; the legend of the patron-saint of *boza* makers (*bozacı*) and serving the army; janissaries' addiction to sour *boza*; common features of *boza* houses with wine taverns as noisy places to eat and drink and other *bozahane* clients among the riff raff such as porters, rowers and con-artists.

### ***Sweet boza***

Under the topics of the difference between sweet and sour *boza*, the physical effects on the consumers, benefits and the problem of the alcohol content Evliya mentions the existence of several varieties of sweet *boza* consumed in other places, such as the rice *sübya* of Egypt, or the *maksıma* kind of Crimea. In İstanbul, sweet-*boza* makers are reported by the traveler to have 40 shops and 105 workers. They make a kind of white, milky *boza* from Tekirdağ millet. It resembles a cup of sweet drink infused with rosewater. It is so dense that the masters often place it in embroidered cloth to test it, and not even a drop leaks down the holes of the embroidery. Sweet *boza* is white, topped with a dense layer (*kaymak*), and whoever drinks it will find life. Even if one drinks 10 mugs (çömçe) of it, they still do not get drunk. It is easy on the stomach because it contains molasses from Kuşadası; cinnamon, cloves, ginger and coconut are sprinkled on it.<sup>30</sup>

Who consumes sweet *boza*? Usually, pious ones such as the members of the learned hierarchy and Sufi mystics enjoy it. More specifically, Evliya Çelebi mentions the '*ulema*', and the pure ones (*salıha*) and şeyhs (*pirs*, *elders*) among sweet-*boza* consumers. If pregnant women drink *boza*, their babies are physically sturdy, after giving birth, it increases the volume of the mother's milk. Much like the malt drinks sold in drugstores today.

Sweet *boza* is placed in large containers called boxes (*kutu*) in which a man can fit, and thousands of copper mugs of it daily are served (sold) out of these containers. For this reason, sweet *boza* is also called *kutu bozası*.

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30 Evliya Çelebi *Seyahatnamesi*, (hitherto EÇS) *Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi Bağdat 304 numaralı Yazmanın Transkripsiyonu-Dizini*. Robert Dankoff, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Yücel Dağlı (Eds.) Vol. I: İstanbul. (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yay., 2006). (213a), 354.

Some famous sweet-boza makers and their locations are: in the market of Ayasofya and at the entrance of the At Meydanı, Akil-bend market, at the bay of Kadirga, at Okçılar, in Aksaray, inside Unkapanı, Usta Ahmet Bozası in front of the Azablar Hammam, and in the Küçük Bazar in front of the Koca Muhammed Paşa Hammam.<sup>31</sup>

### **Sour boza**

On the second category, that is, alcoholic sour *boza*, Evliya emphasizes that: “Drinking *boza* in general is not forbidden, however, getting drunk by it is forbidden, and legal opinions formulate this issue as such.”<sup>32</sup> But this issue was not quite simple, as *bozacıs* also mixed wine in their servings upon request even if their *boza* was sweet. One obvious benefit of being a *boza* drunk according to Evliya, is that a dog never bites anyone who drinks lots of *boza* since that person acquires the disgusting illness of dropsy he will end up unable to walk without a cane. And no dog approaches him as he always holds the cane in his hand.<sup>33</sup>

Where was alcoholic *boza* sold in Istanbul? Was it consumed more at home or at *boza* houses? Evliya Çelebi describes sour *boza* makers who set up their tents upon carts; embellished their shops colorfully; and prepared and distributed *boza* to the people generously (çömçe çömçe). According to Evliya Çelebi, ‘hundreds’ of *boza* drunks drank it while yelling out exclamations of joy.<sup>34</sup>

Among the riff-raff, or *lumpenesnaf* as the most important sour *boza* clients, the porters of Unkapanı spent their tips on sour *boza* and drank so much that they had to be carried home by other porters.<sup>35</sup> Of all central locations, Unkapanı stands out as the most important place for sour *boza* consumption. Evliya mentions the existence of 13 *bozahanes* in Unkapanı. 40-50 servers/workers, and 500 to 600 *boza* drunks are found in each one. Some porters sit in the *bozahane* from morning till sunset and drink excessive amounts (*caba*) of it all day. On the door of the Sinan *bozahanesi*, there is a huge container hanging with a chain. A porter once drank from morning

31 EÇS V: I. (213a), “Esnaf-ı Bozacıyan-ı Mezmûmân,” 354.

32 EÇS V: I. (212b), “Esnaf-ı Bozacıyan-ı Mezmûmân,” 353.

33 EÇS V: I. (212b), “Esnaf-ı Bozacıyan-ı Mezmûmân,” 353.

34 EÇS V: I. (212b), “Esnaf-ı Bozacıyan-ı Mezmûmân,” 353.

35 EÇS V: I. (213a), “Esnaf-ı Bozacıyan-ı Mezmûmân,” 354.

till evening, a whole container of *boza*, in which three men could fit.<sup>36</sup>

### ***Boza Masters in the Service of the Army, and Their Patron-Saint***

Evliya Çelebi relates a legend about the patron-saint of *boza* makers. Although it was first Salsal Tatar who mixed and made (*te'lif iden*) *boza*, *boza* masters claim that their patron saint is Sarı Saltuk, from the line of prophets. However, the real patron saint, Evliya says, is the proselytizing *mujahid* warrior, Saltuk Muhammed Bukhari sent by Ahmed Yesevi to Macedonia, who converted Libka Tatars in Lehistan (Poland) to Islam; and introduced 600,000 Heşdek Tatars to Islam in the land of Moscow. Why Evliya Çelebi comes up with this story in conjunction with the patron-saint of the *boza* makers, is probably because the story relates to Tatars, and *tatar bozası* had considerable renown, despite the fact that Tatars did not consume *boza*, but only produced it.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, this proselytizing *gazi* warrior quality links it to *boza* consumption in the army. In fact, Evliya says: “The legend of the *boza* makers are boorish, or clownish, however, *boza* makers are a very necessary lot in the army of Islam. *Boza* provides the Muslim *gazis* bodily strength and gets rid of hunger (def’-i ju’eder)”<sup>38</sup> *Boza* masters are generally Tatars and gypsies, but since by necessity, *boza* is required by the army, the willing drunks within Istanbul volunteer to become the helpers of the head master of *boza* makers *bozacıbaşı* (of the army *esnaf*) so they can enjoy *boza* freely.<sup>39</sup> On a similar note, upon mentioning the saddlers’ craft (*esnaf-ı palan düzen ya’ni semerciyan*), Evliya Çelebi says: There are no more important artisans of the army than the saddlers, horse shoeing smiths (farriers), cooks, barbers and *boza* makers.<sup>40</sup>

In a different context, Evliya Çelebi introduces an anecdote that supports the Janissaries’ addiction to *boza*: While janissaries were extremely rebellious, Şah Ahıçka castle in Erzurum was besieged by Iran. During this event, it was not possible to bring one single janissary out of the *meyhanes*,

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36 EÇS V: I. (213b), “Esnaf-ı Bozacıyan-ı Mezmûmân,” 354.

37 Marianna Yerasimos, based on Evliya Çelebi underlines this assumption by the traveler. Yerasimos, 2011, 269.

38 EÇS V: I. (212b), “Esnaf-ı Bozacıyan-ı Mezmûmân,” 353.

39 EÇS V: I. (212b), “Esnaf-ı Bozacıyan-ı Mezmûmân,” 353.

40 “...Ordu-yı İslâm'da semerciler ve na'lbandler ve aşbâzlar ve berberler ve bozacılar kadar makbûl ehl-i hî ref yokdur...” EÇS V: I. (194b), “Esnaf-ı palândûzân ya’ni semerciyân,” 323.

Armenians' houses or from *bozahanes* in defense of the castle. So the castle of Ahiçka, once conquered by Sultan Selim Han, fell to the Kızılbaş.<sup>41</sup>

*Boza* makers who were part of those who served the army are also mentioned in conjunction with Sultan Murad IV's order on the procession of artisans who provided the army. Evliya Çelebi begins this account by a description of Sultan Murad IV, as a cruel and merciless ruler who prohibited coffeeshouses, wine houses, *boza* houses, and even tobacco consumption; massacring a couple of hundreds of men with such excuses every day.<sup>42</sup> In this context, Sultan Murad orders that in ceremonial processions: "*Bozahane esnaf* must march after all the master artisans; and the wine house holders, who are despised by everyone, must not join the army. However, *bozacıs* must be paid and must be providers in the army (*alay*). But on days of ceremonial procession, these folks cannot play (march along to) the official army band (*mehterhane*) of eight measures They must proceed with two measures of music. I must be informed of the numbers of *bozahanes* and *meyhanes* and the number of despicable wine-sellers."<sup>43</sup> Here we see an acknowledgment of *bozacıs* as a necessity for the army, but they are still somewhat discriminated in the procession along with the wine sellers, probably because they have too much in common.

An anecdote delivered by Evliya Çelebi that shows the janissary connection to *boza* consumption is that about Gülabi Ağa, who used to serve as the watchman of Sultan Süleyman and died at the age of 151 (!) as a very old and pious man.<sup>44</sup> This Gülabi Ağa relates that once an epidemic appeared in Istanbul. People filled up Hagia Sophia as Sultan Süleyman's milk brother Şeyh Bektaşî Yahya Efendi delivered the sermon as everyone prayed to get rid of the disease. All of a sudden, Gülabi Ağa, who happened to be there, began to have bowel movements and had to go to the toilet. As his bowels

41 "...Bir yeniçeri meyhanelerden ve Ermeni evlerinden ve boz(a)hāneden çıkarmak mümkün olmayup aḫırü'l-emr Kızılbaş ü Evbaş, ecdād-ı izāmın Sulṭān Selīm Hān'ın fethi olan hısn-ı ḫasīn kal'a-ı Ahiçka'yı alup mülk etdi..." EÇS V: I (65b). "Sultan Murad Han", 110.

42 "...Bu pādīşāhın etdiği ḫünḫarlığı bir pādīşāh etmemişdir. Kahveḫāneleri ve meyḫāne ve bozahāneleri ve tütünü daḫi yasak edüp niçe yüz bin ādemi ol bahāne ile her gün yüzer, ikişer yüzer ādemi katl ederdi..." EÇS V: I. (63b). "Sultan Murad Han", 107.

43 EÇS V: I. (152a) "Der sitāyiş-i İslāmbol", 251.

44 EÇS V: I (37a) "Sergüzeşt-i Gülābi Ağa", 59.

made loud sounds, he was so embarrassed that his skin puffed up all over his body. A great man of the military class offered help. He hid Gülabi Ağa under his garment. Gülabi Ağa immediately found himself by the Kağıthane River, where he got some relief. He thanked God it was Hz. Hızır who helped him. Gülabi Ağa then started following the soldier, who entered a *bozahane*, ate *kebab* and bread, drank *boza*, and neither looked at nor gave a piece of bread to Gülabi Ağa. After eating and drinking, the janissary exited the *bozahane*.<sup>45</sup> Gülabi Ağa likewise continued to follow him up to a narrow backstreet of Soğukçeşme in Hagia Sophia, and started begging him again: “Please, for the love of the Prophet, bestow happiness upon me.” In response, the janissary said: “I have not treated you well, but you have not given up. I shall take you to a Sufi master. Stay by him in silence for 40 days. First you must suffer; then we shall see what happens.”<sup>46</sup> They welcome him to the post of Cebe ‘Ali and leave him without food or water for three full days. The Ağa loses strength and begins to imagine his children and his beloved family in Unkapanı. Many scenes of destiny take place before his eyes, including miniature hunts, assassinations, those who are rescued from sinking ships, and those who die. When Gülabi Ağa questions what is going on, the Şeyh gives him a loaf of bread, one silver *akça*, one gold, a bunch of grapes, one date and one olive, and the Sufis pray for him “in the presence of the forties” (*kırklar huzurunda*). Then the janissary, and an Arab take the Ağa from his collar and he finds himself in the middle of Galata winehouses...<sup>47</sup> This noteworthy story offers many peripheral details, but the description of the *boza* house in which soldiers drink *boza* and eat meat (*kebab*), offels, and bread has much in common with a wine house (*meyhane*) setting. On parallels between *bozahanes*, *meyhanes*, and their clients in another neighborhood of Istanbul, Evliya Çelebi says: “...Prominently Jews, Greeks and Armenians are found in the Kara Piri Paşa neighborhood. By the dock are nearly 200 shops. Most of them are *meyhanes* or *bozahanes* since many ships lay anchor, and their crews are wine-house clients.”<sup>48</sup>

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45 “...Andan Ayasofya çarşısında yeniçeri bir bozahāneye girince, Gülābi Ağa bile girüb, kebab ve nān-pāre yeyüp boza nüş edüp Gülābi Ağa’ya aslā bakmayup bir nān-pāre vermez...” EÇS V: I (37a) “Sergüzeşt-i Gülābi Ağa”, 60.

46 EÇS V: I “Sergüzeşt-i Gülabi Ağa” (37b), 60.

47 EÇS V: I “Sergüzeşt-i Gülabi Ağa” (38a), 61.

48 “...ve İskelebaşı’nda iki yüz mikdārı dükkānlardır. Çoğu meyhāne ve bozahānelerdir. Zirā latif limanlı kenār-ı bahr olmağile cümle gemiler anda kışlaya bağlanup gemicileri

### **‘Eating and drinking’ in bozahanes**

Examples of the connection between eating and intoxicating drinks also appear in different sources such as a court case from seventeenth-century Istanbul underlined by Eunjeong Yi, which reveals that the *bozacıs* claimed that sautéed liver (*çiğەر kebabi*) was their exclusive specialty by long-established custom. Therefore, no one else could sell it, unlike meatballs and other similar dishes, which could be made and sold by other tradesmen such as cooks and *kebab* makers.<sup>49</sup> If the liver *kebab* was as popular an accompaniment of alcoholic drinks in the seventeenth century as it is today, the *boza* makers’ exclusive claim to the right of serving it shows that *bozahanes* were public places where people went “to eat and drink” and get drunk in seventeenth-century Istanbul. For example, Evliya Çelebi mentions Albanian kebab cooks to have 400 members, who hold ovens in each corner of every *bozahane*. They always cook offel, liver, kidneys, heart, intestines and liver-meatball kebab for the *bozahane* clients. They are ‘unclean people’ and city boys (*şehir oğlanları*) make fun of them.<sup>50</sup> On a parallel note, Evliya Çelebi narrates an anecdote about the Grand Admiral of Murad III, Kılıç ‘Ali Paşa, who stayed in this office between 1571 and 1587: It is well known among the gentles that Kılıç Ali Paşa’s native language was Italian (Evliya calls it Efreñç). When the mosque of Kılıç Ali Paşa was completed, high-rank officials gathered for the first Friday noon prayer. While religious poems (*nat-ı şerif*) were being recited, the Paşa asked ‘What is this *gu gu gu* and *hin ku ku*’ is this a wine house or a *boza* house?<sup>51</sup> The vezirs answer, this is in praise of our Prophet my Sultan, which tells us that *bozahanes* were crowded and noisy places just like wine taverns.

### **An Energy Drink for the Working Class**

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meyhâne erbâblarıdır...” EÇS V: I. “Kara Piri Paşa kasabası...” (123b), 203.

49 Eunjeong Yi, *Guild Dynamics in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul: Fluidity and Leverage* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 109.

50 “Dükkân (---), neferât 400, bunlar her bozahânedede birer köşede tennürları vardır. Dâ’imâ bozahâne erbâblarına çiğەر ve kara talak ve böbrek ve pençevis ve yürek ve şirden ve çiğەر köftesi kebabi pişirir kirli ve pashî nâ-pâk kavimdir...” EÇS V: I “Esnâf-ı çevrenân-ı Arnabüdân” (170a), 282.

51 “...Ali Paşa hemân ayağ üzre kalkup na’tûhâna hitâben ‘Nedir bu gû gû gû ve hinkü kü bu meyhâne mi, yâ cânım bozahâne mi?’ deyü feryâd eder...” EÇS V: I “Menâkıb-ı Ali Paşa” (132b), 217.

Boza generally appeals to the lower ranks of the society, the working class, as it is a great provider of energy. Unkapanı porters for instance, “eat a sheep (*toklu*) or a lamb each and drink 40 mugs of *boza* and can carry 1000 *okka* of weight. In fact, when the weight from the Aydıncık, Bandırma, and Mihaliç docks arrive, and one among these porters mounts the scale, 10 other men lift one single sac and place it upon his shoulders, and the scale’s shafts start spinning round from the excessive weight”.<sup>52</sup> They are so strong to carry those weights.

*Boza* is also popular among dock workers and soldiers in other neighborhoods such as Tophane. In Tophane and Fındıklı a total of 800 shops are reported by Evliya Çelebi. Although there is no covered bazaar (*bedestan*), one can find all sorts of valuable goods there. Since there is a dock, this district is famous with grocery stores that sell fresh produce every day. Popular artisans of this neighborhood make *kirde* kebab, delicious sweet fruit compote (*hoşaf*) and for *levends*, millet *boza* and pure, white and puffed up Tophane bread.<sup>53</sup>

Presenting Kasımpaşa guilds, Evliya calls them a heathen group without a patron saint, who work under the wardens of the Imperial Shipyard. In the shipyard, among the naval boats, these ‘oppressors’ place 100-150 *guruş* inside their cases and bring poor folks, with their eyes shut and tied, to *bozahanes* and *meyhanes* and similar places of misconduct; make them drunk and assign them to the ships as rowers, towards their debt. They force them to work on naval expeditions for 6 months; they place 1000 *akças* in their hands and free them. In this case, the small network of ruffians in the shipyard seem to have used the alcoholic drinks of *boza* and wine to trick people into forced labor in the ships.<sup>54</sup>

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52 “...Bu tã’ife birer toklu veyãhüd birer kuzucuk ve kırkar bãdya boza içüp biñ okka kãmil yüke girir...”

EÇS V: I “Esnaf-ı ümenã-yı Sultãni. Evvelã Unkapanı emini” (175a), 291.

53 “Ehl-i hırefiniñ memdũh-kãrlarından nãzik kirde kebãbı ve kirdesi ve leziz hoşãbı ve levendãt içün darı bozası ve hãs u beyãz pembe misãl sünger gibi göz göz pişmiş Topãhãne somunu...” EÇS V: I “Topãhãne: Der beyãn-ı dekãkin-i esnaf-ı ehl-i hıref” (134a), 220.

54 “Bu zãlimler hemyanları içre yüzer yüz ellişer gũrũş koyup gũzü bađlı el-garĩb ke’l-ã’ mãları bozahãne ve meyãhãne ve bekãrãhãne ve mesiregãhlara gõtürüp mest edũp bu kadar mĩrĩ mãl yedin deyũ küređe korlar. Altı ay sefer edũp eline bin akça verũp kürekden ıtlãk ederler...” EÇS V: I “Esnãf-ı Kasımpaşa mukaddemleri” (155a), 256.

### *Similar evidence from other localities*

Evliya Çelebi, who visited Bursa in 1640, describes Bursa's *bozahanes* as huge enterprises that held a thousand clients at once. He claims that there were 97 *bozahanes* in Bursa at the time, and they served *boza* throughout the four seasons, cooled in ice in the summer. He also mentions that these *bozahanes* were places where lovers seduced their beloveds, but still, this environment attracted the high-class notables of town.<sup>55</sup> I have previously cited in my study on Bursa *bozahanes* of the fifteenth century, studies on court records of Bursa and Edremit of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by Hasan Basri Öcalan and Fikret Yılmaz, which have shown significant links between eating, drinking, and sour *boza* consumption.<sup>56</sup> According to a Bursa court case from 1583, a woman came to the court claiming that her husband swore an oath not to drink wine or sour *boza*, or else he would have to divorce her.<sup>57</sup> Hasan Basri Öcalan underlines seventeenth-century Bursa court records on the links between *boza* consumption with crime, parallel to the findings of Fikret Yılmaz based on Edremit court records. In 1614, a group of Muslims were discovered with a pitcher of sour *boza* in the Hamzabey neighborhood, having fun in the company of two women named Rāziye and Sāliha.<sup>58</sup> In 1630, when coffeehouses were on the rise, Bursa wine-houses and *bozahanes* were banned from selling wine and *boza* and were temporarily closed down before the Ramadan celebrations. (Although on the second day of the religious holiday, a group of ruffians broke the locks on the doors of one of the closed establishments, opened the wine casks, and started partying with the women they brought along with them disguised in men's clothes.)<sup>59</sup> Bursa *bozahanes* were occasionally closed as a result of complaints specifically about alcohol consumption in them. In such a case from 1671, the plaintiff said: "We are unable to go out (of our houses) because of the *boza* drunks, mischief-makers filled up our town." Biz boza

55 "Cümle a'yân-ı kibârı bozahâneye girmek ayb değildir." EÇS V: II "Evsâf-ı suk-ı sultani-i Bursa" (228b), 18.

56 Yılmaz, Fikret, "Boş Vaktiniz Var mı? Veya 16. Yüzyılda Şarap, Suç ve Eğlence" *Tarih ve Toplum* (2005), 46.

57 Kepecioğlu, Bursa Kütüğü, vol. I, p. 275, cited by Öcalan, "Bozahaneler," 120.

58 BCR B43, 77a, in Öcalan, "Bozahaneler," 120.

59 Kepecioğlu, Bursa Kütüğü, vol. I, 244, cited by Öcalan, "Bozahaneler," 121.

sarhoşundan dışarıya çıkamaz olduk; şehrimizi müfsitler kapladı.<sup>60</sup>

***Evliya Çelebi as a consumer of boza and other drinks and substances***

Evliya Çelebi's personal statement about his own relationship to *boza* and other drinks is rather defensive and apologetic: "This worthless one has been to so many wine houses and *boza* houses and coffeehouses filled with prostitutes, I have never had the chance to taste anything except this sweet *boza* (*kutu bozası*), and its Egyptian and Crimean varieties. Since I came out of my mother's womb, I consumed neither tobacco, nor coffee, nor tea, nor..."<sup>61</sup>

**Table 1 Substances and drinks Evliya Çelebi mentions<sup>62</sup>**

|               |                 |                  |                     |
|---------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Tütün         | islama şarābı   | turt             | şarābiyye           |
| kahve         | māvūza şarābı   | yazma            | benklik             |
| çay           | bedevīne şarābı | kımız            | kara pehlevān       |
| bādyān        | müselles şarābı | basılıca         | hubb-i 'uşşākī      |
| kışır         | misket şarābı   | tūstafansa       | hubb-i rahīkī       |
| sa'leb        | fişfiş şarābı   | elma suyu        | hubb-i safāyī       |
| mahleb        | nārdenk şarabı  | bal suyu         | hubb-i cevdār       |
| yıyur         | büzün şarābı,   | mübtecel suyu    | hubb-i şifā         |
| med           | hemel şarābı,   | arpa suyu        | hubb-i şāhīm        |
| şarāb         | raķı            | darçın suyu      | hubb-i ferah        |
| şarāb-ı nāb   | külfeşen        | kibrit suyu      | ma'cūn-ı kākūlīc    |
| vişnāb        | hōrlaķa         | köydürme suyu    | ma'cūn-ı cihān bahş |
| nār şarābı    | fırnāvna südine | afyon            | ma'cūn-ı dilşād     |
| hūrma şarābı  | poloniyye       | berş             | ma'cūn-ı kıaysūn    |
| dud şarābı    | hārdāliyye      | nūşdāru          | ma'cūn-ı meşrūne    |
| ķarpüz şarabı | ramazāniyye     | cevāriş          | ma'cūn-ı felāsefe   |
| ķōķnār şarābı | imāmiyye        | mukīm            | ma'cūn-ı pīrecān    |
| āvūşla şarābı | boza            | Bayrampaşa hubbī | ma'cūn-ı dilkūşā    |
| ipsime şarābı | talķan          |                  |                     |

60 BCR B37, 34b, cited by Öcalan, "Bozahaneler," 120.

61 EÇS V: I "Esnāf-ı Bozacıyān-ı Mezmūmān" (213a), 354.

62 EÇS V: I "Esnāf-ı Bozacıyān-ı Mezmūmān" (213a), 354.

Table 1 contains all sorts of drinks and pastes, including nineteen kinds of wine. At this point, Evliya Çelebi creates a rhetoric about his innocence, and non-involvement in the consumption of mood-changing substances. In fact, the very long list he delivers includes both mood-altering substances, drinks such as wine and rakı, as well as permissible sweet pastes. Evliya Çelebi underlines the fact that he has stayed away from all of them, except a sweet paste, which is his only indulgence: “Except I am addicted to the paste of the beauty’s mouth (*dilber lebi*). In order to reach satisfaction from the mouth of the pure-silver cup, from time to time, without the knowledge of anyone, this worthless one consumes the paste of *dilber dudağı*. My late father was also troubled with this addiction.”<sup>63</sup> The contents of this paste are unknown, therefore it is uncertain whether or not it fell under the permissible category. In case that it was a permissible sweet paste, Evliya Çelebi must have given this example as proof of his complete abstinence from mood-changing substances. If the paste of *dilber dudağı* did contain some kind of mood-enhancer, then this statement is truly a confession by Evliya Çelebi. Evliya continues with a conspicuous explanation of how and why he is so knowledgeable about all the substances in his aforementioned list: “However, I am a poor stupid soul and I have stocked and (and served) the above-mentioned drinks and substances in my residence for the love of my guests. Therefore, I am familiar with the mood-enhancing substances and what happens to those who consume them. Otherwise, I am in no way, I swear, aware of any of them. I have only had the sweet *boza* kinds of *kutu bozası*, *pirinç sübyası* and Crimean *maksama*, during the days of Ramadan to gain strength, trying to follow the orders of the prayer leaders and Sufi masters. I have never had alcoholic beverages.”<sup>64</sup>

### Conclusion

From Evliya Çelebi’s account, it is understood that in seventeenth-century Istanbul, sweet and sour *boza* were almost perceived as two different consumption commodities. Sweet *boza* resembled a ‘health food’ for Istanbul’s population. It was a drink for the pious, the pregnant, and the elders. It was sold by retailers located in popular spots. There is no mention of peddlers as *boza* sellers in the travelogue of Evliya Çelebi, which nevertheless does not necessarily indicate their absence. Other sources, such as court records

63 EÇS V: I “Esnâf-ı Bozacıyân-ı Mezmûmân” (213a), 354.

64 EÇS V: I “Esnâf-ı Bozacıyân-ı Mezmûmân” (213a), 354.

and other travelogues can give a better idea about the itinerant sales of *boza* in Istanbul. Sour *boza*, on the other hand, was a 'questionable' substance mostly consumed by the riff-raff. It was popular among poorer artisans and soldiers; it was consumed in *boza* houses in commercial areas and by docks. Sour *boza* to a great extent related to entertainment and crime. Its provision to the army was state-sponsored and in the seventeenth century, this project was allowed, but closely checked by Sultan Murad IV. *Boza* houses of seventeenth-century Istanbul had striking resemblances to wine houses, which is confirmed by similar evidence from Bursa and Edremit uncovered by recent studies.

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