

Fresh Fruit Provision to Mountain Bathhouses in Yalova

Deniz Özeren

Author:

Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Near Eastern Studies, University of Vienna

deniz.oezeren@univie.ac.at

ORCID: [0000-0002-9230-775X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9230-775X)

Keywords:

Food Consumption, Fresh Fruit, Bathhouse, Yalova, 19th Century

Cite this article:

Özeren, Deniz. “Fresh Fruit Provision to Mountain Bathhouses in Yalova”
Keshif: E-Journal for Ottoman-Turkish Micro Editions 3/2 (Special Issue 2025): 52-59.
Available under <https://doi.org/10.25365/kshf-25-02-07>.

Article DOI [10.25365/kshf-25-02-07](https://doi.org/10.25365/kshf-25-02-07)

Published online July 07, 2025

© 2025 Deniz Özeren, published by *Keshif: E-Journal for Ottoman-Turkish Micro Editions*.

This is an Open Access article licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0. International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Context

This document, found in the Ottoman State Archives under the classification of the Ministry of Finance (*Māliyye Nezāreti*) and catalogued as BOA. ML.EEM. 619/50, records the cost of fresh fruit for the month of August 1323 (August 1907). It details a transaction in which a greengrocer based in Istanbul supplied produce to the Yalova mountain bathhouses. The document includes the names of the fruits, their quantities, individual prices, and the dates of sale. All entries belonged to a single greengrocer, who operated a shop in Istanbul. The total cost of the fruits supplied to the bathhouse administration amounted to 207 *guruş*, and payment was made in silver *mecīdiyyes* which was a form of Ottoman coin that was introduced in 1844¹.

The significance of this document is threefold. First, it provides a list of produce that were available in Istanbul greengrocers in summer of 1907. There are few documents that show the products sold by Ottoman artisans, especially in the case of perishable goods. Thus, it is valuable to see a selection which was presumably consumed by ordinary people. Second, the document also provides price information. Any primary source that offers contemporary market prices for goods is beneficial to have a better understanding of the dynamics of the Ottoman market.

Third, the logistics of the provision are noteworthy. The route is especially significant since the products were coming from Istanbul, which is though close to Yalova, is not in the immediate vicinity. The perishable nature of these products necessitated a closer route for transportation, yet it was not the case here. Moreover, the amount of goods sold each day is considerably small. Thus, it is even more surprising to see this small amount coming from a farther destination. Therefore, it can be speculated that either the greengrocer had a depot near the bathhouse or he provided the fruit all at once and the fruit was sold within the bathhouse daily. The second option seems much more plausible since another similar document shows a different greengrocer from *Büyükada* also sold fruits and vegetables to the same bathhouse in a similar manner.²

¹ TDV *İslam Ansiklopedisi Online*, s.v. "Mecidiye," <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/mecidiye>

² BOA. ML.EEM. 695/11.

Thus, these fruits were probably sold to the visitors of the bathhouse by the administration of the establishment. The types of produce, on the other hand, seem relatively insignificant in terms of seasonal availability. It is very much predictable to see this selection in summer time since all of the produce are summer fruits.

In addition to serving as spaces of purification, Ottoman bathhouses functioned as important venues for ritual and social interaction. Women in particular—whose public lives were more restricted than those of men—used the *hamām* as a space to gather, converse, share meals, and celebrate significant life events. As central hubs of socialization and festivity, bathhouses placed food at the heart of communal experience. Eating was not merely incidental but an indispensable aspect of Ottoman bathhouse culture—deeply woven into its rituals and social practices. Classic dishes such as *börek*, pickles, and stuffed vine leaves were commonly brought along to be shared among attendees.³ However, the document analyzed here also suggests that some food was commercially available within the bathhouse. A list of fruits sold at the Yalova mountain bathhouses, likely provided by the bathhouse administration, indicates that provisions were made to accommodate the culinary needs of bathers on-site.

The prices recorded in this document offer limited insight on their own, particularly in the absence of comparable data. However, Şevket Pamuk's extensive research on 500 years of price data from Istanbul markets provides valuable context, particularly regarding the purchasing power of the population in the Ottoman capital. For the early 20th century, Pamuk presents wage data for both skilled and unskilled laborers. In 1906, for example, a skilled construction worker earned approximately 2,000 *ağçes* per day.⁴ The prices listed in the current document are recorded in *guruş*, and using the conversion rate of 1 *guruş* = 120 *ağçes*, we find that the price of one melon was 180 *ağçes*, while one *kıyye* (approximately 1.28 kg) of grapes or pears cost 480 *ağçes*, and peaches were priced at 420 *ağçes* per *kıyye*. Compared to a worker's wage, these prices suggest

³ Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 257.

⁴ Şevket Pamuk, *İstanbul ve Diğer Kentlerde 500 Yıllık Fiyatlar ve Ücretler, 1469–1998* (Ankara: State Institute of Statistics, Printing Division, December 2000), 74.

that such fruits—when sold at bathhouses—were likely very affordable even for many low-income individuals.

Pamuk’s data also includes market prices from the same period, offering a useful basis for comparison. In 1907, for instance, 1 *kıyye* of hazelnuts cost 14 *guruş* (1,680 *akçes*), while 1 *kıyye* of chickpeas was priced at 65.5 *pāre* (approximately 1.6 *guruş* or 196.5 *akçes*).⁵ It is important to note, however, that these figures reflect wholesale prices, which were generally lower than retail prices. Given this context, the fruit prices recorded in the bathhouse document do not appear excessively high. In fact, their similarity to the price of chickpeas—one of the least expensive market items—fruit was not prohibitively expensive in general.

Transcription

		<i>fī</i>				
<i>tārīḥ</i>		<i>kıyye</i>	<i>aded</i>	<i>guruş santim</i>	<i>guruş santim</i>	
1 Ağustos 1323	<i>kāvūn</i>	-	6	1	50	9
1 Ağustos 1323	<i>üzüm</i>	4	-	4		16
2 Ağustos 1323	<i>armūd</i>	4	-	4		16
2 Ağustos 1323	<i>şeftālī</i>	4	-	3	50	14
3 Ağustos 1323	<i>kāvūn</i>	-	6	2	50	15
4 Ağustos 1323	<i>üzüm</i>	6	-	3	50	21
4 Ağustos 1323	<i>şeftālī</i>	3	-	3	50	10 50
6 Ağustos 1323	“ <i>[şeftālī]</i> ”	4	-	3	50	14
7 Ağustos 1323	<i>üzüm</i>	5	-	3	50	17 50
8 Ağustos 1323	<i>şeftālī</i>	4	-	3	50	14

⁵ Pamuk, *İstanbul ve Diğer Kentlerde 500 Yıllık Fiyatlar ve Ücretler*, 172–73.

8 Ağustos 1323	üzüm	4	-	3	50	14	
13 Ağustos 1323	" [üzüm]	5	-	3	50	17	50
16 Ağustos 1323	armūd	3	-	3	50	10	50
31 Ağustos 1323	incir	6	-	3		18	
							207

Yalnız iki yüz yedi ğuruşdur

Yalova tağ hammâmlarına ağustos 1323 zarfında virdiim meyve esmâni olan ber-vech-i bālâ iki yüz yedi ğuruşu sîm mecîdî yigirmi ğuruş cihetiyle mezkûr hammâmlar idâresine tamâmen ahz itdim 31 Ağustos 1323 [13 Eylül 1907]

Köprünüñ İstanbul cihetinde manav

[imza]⁶

Translation

Date		kıyye ⁷	piece	price		
				ğuruş ⁸	santim ⁹	ğuruş santim
1 August 1323	melons	-	6	1	50	9
1 August 1323	grapes	4	-	4		16
2 August 1323	pears	4	-	4		16
2 August 1323	peaches	4	-	3	50	14
3 August 1323	melons	-	6	2	50	15
4 August 1323	grapes	6	-	3	50	21
4 August 1323	peaches	3	-	3	50	10 50
6 August 1323	" [peaches]	4	-	3	50	14

⁶ The name of the greengrocer is written in Greek alphabet. It is not legible.

⁷ Equals to approximately 1200 grams.

⁸ Ottoman currency.

⁹ One hundredth of a ğuruş.

7 August 1323	grapes	5	-	3	50	17	50
8 August 1323	peaches	4	-	3	50	14	
8 August 1323	grapes	4	-	3	50	14	
13 August 1323	“ [grapes]	5	-	3	50	17	50
16 August 1323	pears	3	-	3	50	10	50
31 August 1323	figs	6	-	3		18	
							207

Only two hundred and seven *guruş*

I received the above-mentioned two hundred and seven *guruş*, which is the price of the fruit I gave to the Yalova mountain bathhouse in August 1323, as silver *mecidiyye* twenty *guruş* from the said bathhouse administration in full.

31 August 1323 [13 September 1907]

The greengrocer on the Istanbul side of the bridge

[signature]

Bibliography

Primary Source

Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı, Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), Maliye Nezareti Emlak-i Emiriyye Müdüriyeti (ML.EEM.), 619/50; 695/11.

Secondary Sources

Boyar, Ebru, and Kate Fleet. *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

DIA, *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, "Mecidiye."

<https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/mecidiye>

Pamuk, Şevket. *İstanbul ve Diğer Kentlerde 500 Yıllık Fiyatlar ve Ücretler, 1469-1998*. Ankara: State Institute of Statistics, Printing Division, December 2000.