The Food of the Khanaqahs in the Culture of Tasawwuf

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Abstract:
During the early period of tasawwuf the Sufis placed great emphasis on zuhd (asceticism) and eating little. However, as a result of the institutionalisation of Sufism and the expansion of the Sufi lodges (khanaqahs, tekkes), they were later compelled to identify certain rules that needed to be followed in the lodges. The table manners of Sufism also needed to be determined.

The etiquette (âdâb) of eating in Sufi culture was expanded even more in the Anatolian (Turkish) lodges of the Ottoman period and was transformed into ceremonies in which certain special meals were prepared and eaten accompanied by prayer and dhikr (remembering of God) on certain days and nights. The Sufis loaded certain symbolic meanings and religious-Sufi motifs onto the ingredients and methods of cooking. As a result they were able to turn the act of eating, a worldly act, into an act of joyful worship.

This article addresses in short, the historical progress of the etiquette of eating in tasawwuf and then provides information about the special meals that were prepared at certain times in the sufi lodges of Anatolia during the Ottoman period. These have been examined under four categories, namely soups, sweets, sherbets, and other foods.

Early Sufis frequently emphasized the topics of hunger and eating little, in order to curb the desires of the nafs (ego). The Sufis of Damascus in particular gave special importance to this topic. However, in time, as tasawwuf became institutionalized and the lodges began to expand, it became necessary to feed