



**Linnæus University**

Sweden

Master Thesis in Digital Humanities

# Pontic Recipes: Preserving Cultural Heritage and History



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**University:** Linnaeus University

**Term:** 23VT

**Subject:** Digital Humanities

**Level:** Master of Arts

**Course Code:** 4DH41E





## Abstract

The cultural elements that define the identity of an ethnic group, are really important for its preservation through the ages. Language, traditions, costumes, dances, as parts of the cultural heritage, have a crucial role in it. Pontic Greeks, belong to a minority group that came to Greece after 1923. They struggled to stand on their feet again, and preserve their unique cultural characteristics.

Cuisine, as an important aspect of our everyday life, is easily conveyed from one to another. In this thesis, we examine the Pontic cuisine, as an element of the intangible cultural heritage and due to its importance regarding the preservation of the Pontic identity.

The most original recipes of Pontic cuisine, were gathered in their primarily form, through an interview with a local expert. Then they were digitized and transcribed in Omeka database. Further data were attributed in the Dublin Core metadata scheme in that database. Finally, the main discussion was focused on how preserving culinary traditions can help to preserve history and cultural identity altogether.

## Key words

Pontic Greeks, ethnic group, refugees, cuisine, food, cultural heritage, digitization

## Acknowledgments

I want to express my gratitude to my supervisor for his guidance, help and support throughout this thesis. His encouragement and directions have been valuable for me.

My family's unwavering support and understanding throughout this academic journey are something I can't forget to mention. Their support and confidence in my abilities have inspired me constantly.

Finally, I want to thank the authors whose work served as the study's inspiration and the research community for their contributions. The breadth and depth of this research have been greatly enhanced by their insightful contributions and scholarly contributions.



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# 1 Introduction

“Pontic Recipes” collections consists of 6 traditional recipes of the Pontic cuisine. They are recipes that my grandmother was also making (some of them), and subsequently I learned making as well. Moreover, it has also recipes that reflect the culture of Pontic Greeks, in terms of ingredients that they were using (that now are difficult to find) or aspects of life connected to the preparation of these foods.

The idea of choosing these items, derives from the need to care for the future generations and preserve that piece of intangible cultural heritage, before it is lost. The refugees that came both from Pontos and Asia Minor in general, in my city, and in Greece in general, played a vital role in the reconstruction of the society. They were people that were living in welfare, and lost everything. Despite that, they fought back to stand up again, build their lives, and not forget their homes. Up to this day, local unions of Pontics, are gathering to dance, dress up with the local traditional costumes, and learn to play their music instruments. They are in a constant effort to keep the memory alive.

A digital collection does not only help the preservation which in physical terms would be difficult if not impossible, but also helps the dissemination to the new generation that has more ties to their mobile devices than ever, thus providing broader access and availability expand to non-scholar learners (Otubelu & Ume, 2015).

The technological advancements made it possible nowadays, to leave from the museum collections and move into digital collections, where items are organized along with their metadata and not simply digitized, thus leading to the preservation of the items and of their history as well (NISO, 2007).

In this thesis, a connection of the theoretical discussion of the heritage digitization projects and the practical use of a case study of a culinary database will be explored, having in mind the following points:

- 1) Between the theory and the practical implementation of such a database, there is the common goal of preserving cultural heritage items. Projects like this, aim to the digitization and archiving of artifacts, documents and knowledge for the future generations. More specifically here, the preservation of the original form of recipes
- 2) The digital tools that the theory provides, will be implemented in the creation of the database
- 3) A fundamental goal of the digital preservation is to make culture more accessible to wider audiences. The culinary database, demonstrates a practical application that creates a digital repository.
- 4) Cuisine and culinary traditions focus on the preservation of cultural diversity, as food is an expression of both culture and identity.



## 2 Background

### 2.1 History of Pontos and its people

Pontos, as Greeks were calling it, is the Northeast region of Turkey, the coastal side of Black Sea. In Greek, it was called “Εύξεινος Πόντος” (translated that would be “hospitable sea”) and in short, only the word “Πόντος” – Pontos, was kept, to describe the region where the tribe of Pontic Greeks were staying. The Fall of Constantinople on 29<sup>th</sup> of May 1453, was the beginning of the end of the Greek sovereignty in Asia Minor and the birth of the Ottoman Empire. Only a small portion of the Greeks’ population continued to live in areas like Pontos because they were subjected to harsh living conditions, constant Islamization, and Turkish retaliation.

Between the end of WW1 (1914) and the Asia Minor Catastrophe (1922), there were three phases that Turks tried to eradicate all Pontic Greeks living in the northern part of Turkey (Baum, 2007). The first phase was marked from the beginning of the WW1 until the occupation of Trapezounta from the Russian army (1914-1916), the second one was at the end of WW1 (1916-1918) and the last one was completed with the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne of the population exchange between Greece and Turkey from 1918 to 1923. This led to what today is widely accepted with the term Pontic Genocide. The Greek Orthodox population in Asia Minor, and the Muslims living in Greece, were forced to leave their houses. As refugees, Pontics moved into the former USSR in order to escape prosecution from the Turks while others came to Greece (Gibney, 2005).

In reaction to these changes, they developed a very complex “iconography” (Gottmann, 1952) that allowed them to pass down their identity from one generation to the next. They were able to perpetuate their ethnic identity through the creation of a transnational network (Pontic Unions), within which they frequently erected mobile and metaphorical frontiers using this iconography and the memorials it adorned. This made it easier for them to stave against assimilation by the host society, whether they were Greek or foreign (Bruneau. 2013).

In the Pontic Unions, where they were gathering, to speak and tell their stories to the new generation, to talk their Greek-dialect language, wear their traditional uniforms and dance and cook. Cooking was essential in their everyday life and mixing with other people in Greece, and they managed to greatly influence the modern Greek cuisine, by bringing ingredients and spices and methods of cooking that had their roots in the Byzantine Empire (Kiple, 2007).



## 3 Literature review

### 3.1 Digitization in Humanities

Digitization is not only the process of transferring analogue items into a digital format, but also it is the use of digital tools and methods to study human culture and history. Scholars can benefit from creating, analyzing and visually constructing data from a range of sources like photos, sounds, videos etc. Creating digital archives and databases that are easier to browse in collaboration with other researchers, the use of tools to process natural language in a large corpus, mapping and spatial analysis of events in time, 3D creation of artifacts and simulations to study them further and to ensure preservation, are some of the weapons in Digitization's arsenal (Rehbein, 2022)

Over the last years, humanities' discipline has benefited from digitization, as it is an important asset in preserving and disseminate cultural heritage. It provides greater access to cultural materials like text, images, artwork etc. and in addition, it enables researchers to study them in new ways and with interdisciplinary collaboration (Terras, 2012). New technologies, provided new means of digitization which lowered the cost, minimized the time required, and ensured that the preservation period will be far longer. Despite the benefits, there have also been concerns that point out that digitization is not a panacea. Copyright issues, inadequate funds and support in the institutions, technical glitches and the constant fear that even the process of digitizing might harm fragile items, are some of the reasons of concern (Hughes, 2004). Even in digitizing items, a critical approach can be implemented. The choice of which items are worthy to digitize must be examined under the criterion of being most beneficial to undertake this procedure, and so there has to be a detailed and careful selection of them (Hughes, 2004).

Digital technologies are experimenting with collections almost 40 years now. Starting from creating catalogues and databases to small - and large - scale imaging projects, digital technologies have been utilized in the last years in libraries and museums. The emergence of world wide web, pushed this even further, with improved performance and smaller cost. New policies provided better funding, and infrastructure to support the digitization within institutions. (Terras, 2012).

Digitization enabled the broader collaboration between scholars and institutions, as it gave easier access to materials from any part of the world. Digital Humanities is the discipline that made the most use of it, as it combines the use of digital methods and tools in the humanities scholarship (Terras, 2012).

Digital preservation initially pointed out that there has to be a serious awareness to avoid data loss in time. Digital collections enable the scholars of the future to be able to study items of the past again and again. Eventually, this digital preservation is not about the loss of data or the facilitation of access to them. It is more about people and opportunities, the transfer of cultural knowledge to the next generations (Kilbride, 2016).





## 3.2 Digital Cultural Heritage

When referring to printed materials, the preservation is easy. Paper material can be stored in its original form, or a duplicate can be created easily. In the digital world this would mean to store the data in a medium like CD-ROM or USB stick. Of course, we should take into consideration, that technological advancements are running wild the last year, so we must ensure that either the medium or the format of the digital artefact will be recognisable and easy to access in the future as well, to avoid misinterpretation because of the changes of the electronic systems (Cloonan et. al., 2001).

The aim of preservation of cultural heritage items in digital form, must be defined as well. Data presented frozen in time, might not be enough for future scholars if they lack historical context (e.g., in terms of metadata). Providing the context can lead to better understanding of the artefact, can help future users to experience it as we do now.

Upon examining the digitization of cultural heritage objects (Khan et al., 2018), we acknowledge the following benefits from the process:

- It facilitates the preservation of original heritage items in optimal circumstances and reduces the risk of damage or loss.
- It provides a digital alternative available for use by the general public, especially for those who are facing obstacles in accessing the physical items due to geographical, financial or physical barriers.
- It enhances the visibility and awareness of cultural heritage and its diversity, as well as its educational and cultural value.
- Through interactive and participatory platforms and tools, it promotes citizen engagement, social inclusion and cohesion, as well as intercultural dialogue.
- By generating new jobs, it encourages spillovers into other industries, like tourism, education, the creative industry, and research.

Despite the advantages, there are a few difficulties as well.

If we want to guarantee the quality of the resources, we have to take into consideration and implement the proper actions to ensure their interoperability and accessibility in different platforms, the sustainability of digital resources through proper financing, strong infrastructure but also proper standards, regulations, and legal frameworks.

Equally important is to answer as well all the moral, social and cultural questions about the ownership of the resources and what kind of representation we want to give to the public and how it will be communicated and understood.

Another difficulty that has to be addressed, is to ensure that there will be a collaboration and coordination among diverse stakeholders like cultural institutions, governments, the commercial sector, civil society, and academia.



### 3.3 Legislation in the EU

In the Treaty of Lisbon, Article 2, the respect for minority rights is established, by the following declaration:

The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, nondiscrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.

Article 3, in the Treaty continues by specifically mentioning that:

It shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced.

In addition, the Charter for Fundamental Rights of the EU, states that any discrimination of minorities is prohibited and that the Union is obliged to respect the diversity. As it seems, minorities and indigenous people, are awarded the recognition and protection of their cultural heritage, and they have been ensured a non-discrimination treatment in the Member States. Despite these references though, the actual protection is very limited, since the EU, does not have the power to regulate laws, neither in the field of cultural heritage nor in minority rights. Everything lies in the policies issued, if any, by the Member States. There have been proposals through the European Citizen's Initiative, calling for a change, to provide basis for a legislation move, but it has been halted several times (Karatzia, 2017).

Until today, the only step towards protection of cultural heritage of minorities come from the EU Parliament's (2017) directive to the Member states to:

pay particular attention to monuments, buildings, cemeteries and everyday implements which are of great importance to the cultural heritage of minority peoples, and to engage in enhanced cooperation by including them in any decision-making process that affects their cultural heritage

Therefore, the same rules that call for respect in each States's cultural diversity, prohibit the EU to take drastic action measures towards the protection. The only help to minorities, has been through indirect ways, with the Articles referring to the provision of freedom of thought, religion, education etc. (Xanthaki, 2019)

In Greece, the recognition of the Pontic ethnic groups was never a debatable subject, since they were considered Greeks in heart. Although, the political recognition of the Genocide of Pontic Greeks took about 70 years, until the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 1994, when the Hellenic Parliament voted unanimously and declared May 19, the day



Mustafa Kemal landed in Samsouda, as “Remembrance Day for the Genocide of Greeks in the Asia Minor Sea”. After that, countries all over the world started to recognize the Genocide one by one.



## 4 Terminology

### 4.1 Culture and Cultural Heritage

Culture has appeared in languages from ancient times while people were having difficulties in their effort to define it. From a linguistic point of view, it comes from “cultivation”, mostly used in agriculture as the process to develop something (i.e., culture of wheat), and also in biology as “culture of cells” (Jahoda, 2012). The basic idea of culture has been noted in texts in the Bible, the Homer’s epic tales, in Hippocrates and Herodotus, even in Han dynasty scholars (Kroeber & Kluckhohn’s, 1952). The ancient Roman orator Cicero, in *Tusculanae Disputationes*, attempts to use the word to describe the cultivation of the soul/mind as “cultura animi” (Ciceron & Bouhier, 1812). This sets the base for modern definitions of the word, as the acquisition of knowledge and refinement of one person’s qualities (Arnold, 1873). Kroeber & Kluckhohn’s (1952) defined culture and civilization as:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action. (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952, p. 181)

Hofstede (1984) working on that, stated that cultural elements are the distinctions between individuals belonging to different human groups. The list of researchers trying to give a specific definition to culture, goes on, but still the actual definition seems complex. Notwithstanding its complexity, either meaning an internal process or even a whole way to live your life, Raymond Williams (1977) early on, points out its importance on the connotation of arts and humanities primarily as well as its importance in defining social and human sciences too. Nevertheless, the common characteristics that most of them agree (Matsumoto, 2009 & Keith, 2011) are that, culture surely has to do with:

- Information such as beliefs, habits, and ideas derived from people’s intercourse that can have an effect on their behavior
- A group of persons sharing similar background and experience

Cultural heritage is the legacy of tangible items, built environments, and cultural practices that have been passed down from one generation to the next and are regarded significant enough to be preserved and passed on to succeeding generations. Both tangible and intangible components are present.

The term “intangible cultural heritage” describes the customs, expressions, know-how, aptitudes, and practices that are passed down within a certain group from one generation to the next. This comprises, oral traditions, performing arts, social customs, rituals, holiday celebrations, customary craftsmanship, and knowledge of nature and the cosmos. Intangible cultural legacy, as opposed to tangible cultural



heritage, which consists of actual artifacts and structures, is immaterial and frequently conveyed through interpersonal contact and interaction. It is a crucial component of the cultural identity and variety of a community and is deeply ingrained in social and cultural situations.

The efforts to preserve and advance cultural legacy, especially intangible cultural heritage, have been spearheaded by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, established by UNESCO in 2003, aims to safeguard and promote intangible cultural heritage globally.

## 4.2 Food as ICH

Food is a significant component of intangible cultural heritage, or “traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants,” according to UNESCO. Food as ICH stands for the cultural and social processes connected to foodways, such as the rituals, practices, knowledge, and memories that are ingrained in the preparation, consumption, or sharing of food, in addition to the food’s physical characteristics (Lee, 2023). The diversity and creativity of various communities’ cultures, as well as their ability to adapt and innovate to shifting environments and circumstances, can all be seen in food as ICH.

Examples of ICH related to food that UNESCO has identified include (Vadi, 2016):

- The French gastronomic meal: A social tradition that honors significant occasions in life by presenting an organized menu and performing rituals that follow specific dishes, beverages, and other foods.
- The fermented vegetable dish known as kimjang, which is made and consumed in Korea, is a staple of the country’s cuisine. Family members, neighbors, and friends can all participate in kimjang, work together to help out one another.
- The Mediterranean diet: A collection of abilities, knowledge, customs, and knowledge pertaining to food preparation, processing, cultivation, harvesting and consumption in the Mediterranean basin. The Mediterranean diet encourages social interaction and cross-cultural dialogue and is based on respect for the environment and biodiversity.

The list from UNESCO is very long, which is an indication of the importance that culinary traditions and celebrations have in all the people. The preparation of bread in Armenia, beekeeping in Slovenia, Harissa spice preparation and skills for Tunisian women, the traditional foodways of Kenya, Nsima, the Culinary Tradition of Malawi, the beer culture in Belgium, the Washoke traditional dietary cultures of Japanese, the traditional Mexican cuisine, are a few more examples that we meet in UNESCO’s list.



## 4.3 Pontic – Greeks

Pontics or Pontic Greeks, are an ethnic group, that lived in the region of Pontos in NE Turkey. They lived there from 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, and they are considered descendants of Greeks that moved over the Aegean Sea, to the Black Sea region (Morris, 2019). They share a lot with the modern Greeks, like the language and the religion, although language was shaped as a different variation through the years and the constant Islamization converted a part of the population as Muslims. After they were expelled from their homes, they worked hard towards the preservation of their cultural identity (Thomopoulos, 2012).

Generally, the members of an ethnic group are designating themselves through their community, and their identity which has specific time and place, and political independence. As Billig (1995) points out, people that share an ethnic identity have common way of thinking, a common reference framework of emotional, social and legal status within their country.

The identity of Pontics, was designated through time, from their geographical locations. In Asia Minor, they were called Greeks. After the Genocide and their relocation, they were named Pontic Greeks. The geographical element was an attribute to their identity. The integration to a new society was not easy, so the need for strengthening their identity by preserving their history and culture was crucial (Ψωμάδη, 2006)

An expression of their ethnic identity and heritage as well as a means of preserving and passing on their customs, knowledge, and food-related memories, pontic cuisine is significant to Pontics. The migration of various ethnic groups to the Pontos, as well as the adaptation and innovation to shifting environments and circumstances, have all had an impact on Pontic cuisine. Its simplicity and variety, which incorporates elements from mountainous and coastal areas, ancient Greece, nomadic areas and influences from Russian, Turkish, Laz, Hemshin, and Armenian cuisines, are what distinguish it (Keramaris, 2022).



## 5 Methodology

### 5.1 Steps implemented

To begin with, I had to reflect on what is heritage. The definition of Merriam-Webster (2003), as “*something transmitted or acquired from a predecessor: legacy, inheritance*” is one of the most accurate definitions we can find for a tradition passed down, as cooking recipes. They are transferred from one generation to the other, trying to change as little as possible. The next step was to select which of the recipes were going to be digitized. In order to do that, I contacted to Pontic Unions of our city and came in contact with Mrs. Elli Sidiropoulou. I explained her my goals and what my interest was, and luckily enough we had the same goal, as she is very keen on preserving traditional recipes on her own way, through a YouTube channel she has, where she cooks and provides tips, because she wants to preserve that piece of culture herself. Throughout the process the most interesting and emotional part, was getting to know each other, spending time together and sharing stories of our common ancestry, and most importantly taking time and effort in order to bring these recipes to life together, and of course tasting them.

The first step, was to choose the recipes through a set of criteria. I explained to her, that because cuisine is such a vast cultural depository, I want recipes that:

- Comprise mainly from local ingredients and be as accurate and original as she can remember, to the recipe as it was prepared at that time, and not as it has been transformed today.
- Don't resemble something very common in modern Greek cuisine
- Represent or point to specific moments of their life

She proposed a lot of recipes, that I will recite furthermore, but we focused on 6 of them as more important and indicative of the Pontic cuisine to transfer to the database: Sini, Siron, Chavits, Piroski, Black leaves ntolmades and Tanomenon sorva (transl: Σινί, Σιρόν, Χαβιτζ, Πιροσκι, Ντολμάδες με μαυρολάχανο και Τανομένον σορβά). Continuing with these, our primary focus was to transcribe them in text, as most of them were performed by memory on her side. She wrote them down and gave them to me. For making things easy for this task and for evaluation purposes, I translated them in English for my collection. Furthermore, a visual image (photo) was acquired. In order to avoid different lightings or inconsistencies in photographing them, I chose to scan them and digitize them in jpg format. In addition, in the collection I provide video links from her YouTube channel, as video documentation can be a method for cultural preservation that captivates the viewer in a more interactive way (S.S.V. et. al., 2020) and ensures cultural sustainability (Valdes, 2023).

For the purpose of digitizing these items, the platform Omeka was utilized, as it provides a no-code online database that is very user friendly and can be handled without the need to have any previous technical expertise. Omeka, is using the Dublin Core schema for categorizing and cataloguing items and attribute metadata to them. Ready-to-fill blanks are provided to help the user provide as much information about the item as he/she wishes.



As important as it is for a physical library to catalogue items to easily identify them and categorize them (Chollom, 2013), it is also important in a digital library to simplify the identification of the items. I chose to remove as much of the webpage “noise”, and just create a collections tab, and the items that will be in that collection. I removed things like “Feature item” and “Feature collections” that were provided on the Omeka theme, to further keep the page clean and informative.

On each item’s page, there will be a scanned photo of the text – recipe, the YouTube link as supplementary information about its preparation, and as many of the fields that Dublin Core schema provides, in order to describe each item as good as it can be, while simultaneously provide information and be evident of the item’s importance. These metadata can be the guide through its origin and history, but in a more organized and presentable type (Pomerantz, 2015).

The recipes were scanned by the author of this thesis, and the fields in the Dublin Core schema were filled out, with information provided by the local expert through the interview. The afore mentioned schema, provides enough fields to cover almost every part of data that is needed, and no limitation occurred.

Finishing up, an automated XML file was created through the Omeka, which exports the metadata that have already been provided in the catalogue, for further use in other devices, applications or for sharing with other researchers etc.

## 5.2 Research questions

This thesis, will primarily focus on the following questions:

- Which are these recipes, according to an interview from a local expert, that represent the most important foods of the Pontic cuisine, in their everyday life?
- What is their significance, in terms of originality, to the historic era they are referred, which were the unique ingredients used (common and uncommon today), as well what was the context and aspect of life, in which they were used.
- Why is it important to digitize these items and how is it connected to the wider narrative of preserving history and identity of minorities?

## 5.3 Method

Firstly, a review of the literature will be conducted, regarding digitalization and the legislation about cultural heritage preservation, as well as an explanation to definitions such as culture and cultural heritage, the ethnic group of Pontics, as well as the background history of how these people came to Greece as refugees in the past century. This is an important task in order to help the reader get acquainted with the topic.





Secondly, through interview of a Pontic descendant that is active on the Pontic cuisine's diffusion, we gathered recipes, based on specific criteria, and digitized them in Omeka database, creating the website <http://pontic.omeka.net>

Finally, based on the literature, a discussion and an analysis will be given on how the digitization of cultural items, helps preserving cultural history and heritage, and potential future expansions, will be discussed.

## 6 Dataset

### 6.1 Description of items – Interview transcript

*(The following text, is product of interview from Mrs. Elli Sidiropoulou, a traditional Pontic lady, which tries to keep the memory of this cuisine alive. She voluntarily cooks in various organisations and occasions, as she also tries to support a YouTube channel, where she presents her recipes). A sample of the recipes described below can be found at <http://pontic.omeka.net> and at <https://www.youtube.com/@ElliTemeteron>*

#### **Siron**



Figure 1. Siron. Retrieved from <http://www.pontiaka.gr> on 9/8/2023

Food that was prepared mostly in Sundays and festivities. Served as a main dish. It uses a unique dairy product (the ‘paskitan’) which is difficult to procure these days. Alternatively, they use yoghurt. It was not an everyday dish, as it has a time-consuming preparation, so it was reserved for special occasions, like a wedding or birthdays -name day celebrations.

Associated tags-metadata: Main dish, pasta, special occasions, paskitan, hot plate



### Tanomenon sorva



Figure 2. Tanomenon sorva. Retrieved from <https://melisoula.gr/> on 9/8/2023

It is a soup that looks like a lot like a modern rice pudding, just not that firm. It uses another specific product called ‘korkoto’, which are grains of wheat, crushed, but not to the point of becoming like flour. Even though the ingredient is unique, it was a very basic ingredient that every home had, thus it was a quick food that could be prepared every day, as something you can eat in the afternoon to regain your strength after a tiring day. As a soup, it was a hot plate, that could be consumed in winter times mostly.

Associated tags-metadata: soup, winter, hot plate, every day, korkoto

### Havits



Figure 3. Havits. Retrieved from <https://olympiobima.gr/havits-ena-nostimo-heimoniatiko-pontiako-fagito/> on 9/8/2023

Prepared either in the morning or for late at night, as an easy comfort food. It has a dip-like texture that you can accompany your bread. After returning from the fields, working all day, it was an easy preparation to make, and eat something simple. It has a unique ingredient, a cheesecloth, that a handful of industries still produce it in Greece. It has high concentration in milk and fat.

Associated tags-metadata: Appetizer, breakfast, dinner, dip sauce, cheese cloth, hot plate, winter



### **Piroski**



Figure 4. Piroski. Retrieved from <http://www.pontiaka.gr> on 9/8/2023

It is a dough with potato filling, easily prepared and preserved, so it was cooked as a food that you could take to work with you for your lunch break. It is one of the foods that is still prepared in every house today and because it also has a resemblance with Russian piroshki, you can find it today in countries also neighboring Russia, like Finland, in some variations.

Associated tags-metadata: Dough, every day, hot plate, main dish

### **Black leaves ntolmades**



Figure 5. Black Leaves Ntolmades. Retrieved from <https://www.vita.gr/2008/01/15/diatrofi/syntages/ntolmades-meyrolaxano/> on 9/8/2023

The modern Kale Black Cabbage is the preferred ingredient for this recipe, even though in Greece we prepare this food with other leaves like vine leaves or white cabbage leaves. It is a stuffed leaf with rice and minced meat sometimes, and since its preparation is difficult, it was also kept for special occasions, like a family's dinner on Sunday. In Balkans, we can find variations of this as "ntolmas" which is always a stuffed vegetable comfort food.

Associated tags-metadata: Kale, special occasions, festivities, marriage, appetizer



## Sini



Figure 6. Sini. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=tiUnNpvuJfM> on 9/8/2023

It was the most popular and preferred sweet preparation, that everybody could make because of its simplicity in preparation and ingredients needed. When there was a festivity, a marriage, or celebrations like Christmas or Easter, each guest could prepare and bring a Sini of his own making.

Associated tags-metadata: Sweet pastry, Christmas, Easter, Marriage, festivities

I have also included some more recipes here that are not in the database but are considered very traditional Pontic cuisine.

## Otia (Ears)

This is another pastry food, much like a sweet dough bread. Simplicity and easiness of preparation is what describes it because it is a dough that you do not use yeast, so you do not have to wait for it to be fermented. Takes its name (Οτρία in ancient Greek means Ears) because of the shape that you make of the dough before you fry it in hot oil.

## Gkiozleme

Gkiozleme is a phyllo (sheet) much like the French crepes. You stretch it open to be very thin, and you prepare your filling – most of the times it was chicken and vegetables but could be minced meat also – and then you just put it in the pan without a lot of oil just to be cooked lightly on the outside.

## Pirpirimi Poreni

Everybody knows of the Greek Tzatziki. A sauce made from yoghurt-garlic-cucumber. But Pontic Greeks, were making a variation of it to be used with their food as sauce. Pirpirimi is the pontic name for the plant named Purslane. It is extremely healthy because it is full of vitamins and prevents inflammations (Uddin



et al., 2014). Using this plant, after boiling it, along with yoghurt and garlic, they were producing a kind of tzatziki that was extremely healthy to consume.

## Varenika

Considered, the Pontic version of a ravioli. Varenika, is a kind of pasta, much like Italian ravioli, that you stuff with a cheese cream filling, and you put them to boil. A difference from ravioli is that after you boil them, you make a shower of hot melted butter on top of them to enrich their flavor.

## 6.2 Details about the specific cuisine

Pontic cuisine as documented was based on simple ingredients that could be easily found and a very simple way of preparation. They were using whatever they had available from their agriculture, like cereals, wheat, barley, corn, the “furniko” flour (roasted flour mainly from wheat but also from corn), the korkoto (the husked and cracked wheat), semolina (boiled, dried and cracked wheat), pre-baked pie sheets or other pre-cooked or dehydrated pastas. The use of meat, was scarce. Cow and ox, were sacred animals for them not by religion but out of respect because they used them to agriculture as there was also limited breeding of lamb and pork (maybe because they did not want to offend their Muslim neighbors). Therefore, not a lot of animals were used for their meat, but mostly for the products they could produce. That is why we see that cheese, milk, butter and yoghurt are commonly used in their recipes.

Other ingredients that were preferred, were all kind of vegetables, that were used as stuffing also in pickled form, so they could taste them in their diet in winter when their cultivation was difficult.

Pontic people, were close to religion as Orthodox Christians, and the religious festivities were a place and time to gather and celebrate. In their everyday life, maybe they didn't have the time to prepare complicated dishes, so they were saved for the celebrations and the meetings with the whole family. Therefore, we can see specific foods to be prepared for baptism, marriage, Christmas or Easter celebrations, or even when a family member dies.



## 6.3 Metadata

Although accurate, the definition of metadata is typically “data about data,” which is not very precise. Any information (in digital or physical form) necessary to guarantee that the digital material being preserved is and remains accessible, understandable, and usable over time should be regarded as the required metadata in heritage institutions (Choy et. al., 2016)

Three types of metadata are associated with digital heritage items:

- Structural metadata, which refer to the technological capacity to access the content
- Descriptive metadata, which contain the bibliographical references, or the contextual information from the creator.
- Administrative metadata, which is the documentation of the object in the collection.

Digital metadata usually contain the following five basic attributes:

- 1) Globally unique identification,
- 2) Location metadata, so it can be found without fear of losing the item if the system is update or migrated
- 3) Description metadata, providing context and content information
- 4) Readability metadata about the format and encoding of digital objects
- 5) Rights metadata, which take into consideration the applicable laws referring to the creator and the rights of use.

In our collection, regarding the Descriptions term in each item, a translation of the recipe from Greek to English was provided, in order to not exclude users who do not understand Greek, to read the item and benefit from it. The scan of the recipe remains in Greek for originality purposes and the user can press on that image to open it in full-scale for better viewing.

In addition, metadata in the form of keywords describing the food, were added, in order to help scholars to categorize them according to specific criteria such as: main ingredient used, occasions that was prepared, if it was a breakfast/dinner/lunch plate, hot or cold, etc.

For the rest of the metadata, the Dublin Core schema was utilized, as it can offer simple and easy to understand data tables, it is widely used in many languages, but also can be extended if the need for further metadata on an item is needed (Using Dublin Core, 2023).

The use of XML file, was pointed out in the course, as useful to represent in a universal way, the different schema of metadata formats. Structured metadata can be presented in a text format and be used by different devices and applications to store, transfer and present data. Of course, there is a downside to it, as it needs more technical expertise to utilize it correctly though.





## 6.4 Sample guide in browsing my digital collection

The sample database of the digitised recipes was created, using the Omeka platform, and the Dublin Core metadata scheme that this platform implements. The recipes were handwritten, so they were transformed into jpg format, and the description and metadata were filled out as described earlier. You can browse the database using the following steps:

### Step 1

You visit the database in the URL <http://pontic.omeka.net>



### Step 2

There you are presented with the following options. You can either manually browse the collection and/or the items that have been uploaded (bottom left), or utilize the search box located in the top right corner. There you can type any of the associated metadata/tags that have been mentioned above ([Description of items – Interview transcript](#)) and the results will be the recipe/s that are associated with them.







### Step 3

For example, by typing “special occasions”, you can get back as a result, those recipes that contain in their metadata this tag.

The screenshot shows a search interface with a search bar at the top right containing the text "special occasions". Below the search bar is a banner image with the text "PONTIC RECIPES" overlaid. Underneath the banner is a navigation bar with "Browse Items" and "Browse Collections". The main content area displays "SEARCH (2 TOTAL)" and a query summary: "Query: special occasions", "Query type: Keyword", and "Record types: Item, file, collection". Below this is a table with two columns: "Record Type" and "Title".

Record Type	Title
Item	Siron
Item	Ntolmades with black cabbage



## 7 Discussion

### 7.1 Culture of minorities

Only recently has the legal community started to consider the significance of indigenous and minority cultures (Xanthaki, 2019). Members of minorities are recognized as having the right to culture, including the protection of cultural heritage, under international human rights law. The cultural legacy of minorities inside the EU is a crucial component in preserving and enhancing their identity. International minorities are not adequately protected, as has been made clear by the recent focus of the international community on the preservation of cultural heritage.

The cultural heritage history of minorities is frequently taken by the State and promoted as a component of the nation's cultural legacy, as well as devaluing and being stepped upon by other, frequently economic, interests. In Estonia, those who believe in the Old Belief religion, have pointed out that their cultural heritage has been twisted for economic reasons (tourism) by the government and it has been stripped off of its value (Aidarov, 2016). The Jewish minority Poland has been across a new law that forbids someone to refer to the Polish nation's part on the systematic extinction of the Jews in WWII (Bethke, 2018). Saami people in Finland are still asking for the recognition and control of their artefacts and designs (Xanthaki, 2019).

Despite the EU's declaration that it should uphold the rights of members of minorities and indigenous peoples, its legal system falls woefully short of safeguarding these individuals' rights to their cultural heritage. Such safeguarding is yet circumstantial and falls short of developing international human rights norms for cultural resources. It's interesting to note that while minorities' intangible cultural heritage has only lately been acknowledged on a global scale, it is more protected at the EU level than other types of cultural assets. In contrast, minorities' material cultural legacy is completely at the hands of the EU State.

### 7.2 Why cuisine?

Customs, traditions, language, religious beliefs, and cultural values are ways that ethnic identity is passed down from one generation to the next. Cuisine, might be one of the most important aspects of culture that can be transmitted easily, and is part of everyday life, thus making it easy to preserve too. A cultural expression of identity, traditional food is passed down from one generation to the next. Wherever they go, immigrants bring their native cuisine with them, and preparing it in new locations is a means for them to maintain their culture and their ethnic group's identity.

Cuisine has evolved in several ways over time. Food may cross cultural boundaries more frequently and easily than any other custom. The usage of chopsticks is one example of a related culinary practice that is occasionally associated with food. Other times, food combines with already-existing culinary traditions to create new complementary cuisines, such as Tex-Mex, which originated from the blending of



Mexican and US Southwest food traditions. Like culture itself, food is exchanged within and across tribes, evolving to fit various situations and environments, and the Pontic cuisine was subject to these changes due to the circumstances its people suffered. Simple materials, straightforward preparation techniques, and quick cooking are the hallmarks of Greek Pontic traditional food. This cuisine's variety results from a historical convergence of geographical, social, and cultural factors (Keramaris, 2022).

The culinary traditions are significant pieces of cultural heritage. The Intangible cultural heritage of mankind, as defined by UNESCO, includes culinary traditions, which are examples of living cultures that are passed down from one generation to the next and showcase the diversity and creativity of people (Oliveira et al., 2020).

Their significance lies in that, different communities and region's histories, geographies, and identities are reflected in them. They demonstrate how humans have interacted with other civilizations, utilised resources nearby, and adapted to their natural surroundings. Most of the times they are a representation of the ideals, traditions, and customs of many cultures and demonstrate how people use food and drink to commemorate, celebrate, and communicate. It is a form of intercultural communication and promote social cohesiveness. They facilitate gatherings where individuals exchange food, tales, and experiences (Partarakis et al., 2021).

Preservation of cultural history and heritage (Almerico, 2014; Klein, 2014), through food and culinary traditions in general is crucial for their:

- Cultural identity: Our cultural heritage significantly shapes who we are as individuals and as members of a group. It moulds our traditions, morals, and view of the world. Pontic Greeks benefit from having their cultural legacy preserved by feeling a sense of pride in their heritage and a sense of belonging.
- Historical significance: Cultural legacy provides a window into a society's past. It highlights the triumphs, tribulations, and contributions of various civilizations and cultures. The Pontic Greeks benefit from honouring their tradition and learning from their past when their cultural heritage is preserved.
- Educational value: Learners of all ages may find a wealth of information and inspiration there. It encourages inquiry, scepticism, and cross-cultural communication. Pontic Greeks benefit from sharing their knowledge and experiences with others and from preserving their cultural legacy since it enhances their own learning.
- Social cohesion: Cultural diversity can promote respect amongst various communities and improve social ties. It may make communication, teamwork, and establishing peace easier. Pontic Greeks may create bridges with other civilizations and contribute to a more peaceful world by preserving their cultural legacy.



### 7.3 Why digitizing recipes and cookbooks?

Food culture and traditions have enormous power to strengthen and develop the identities of the individual, family, and community, therefore digitizing recipes and culinary traditions and practices is crucial for maintaining cultural identity.

Additionally, digitizing recipes helps to shield them from calamities that can harm or destroy physical copies of the recipes, whether they are caused by natural or man-made disasters. Moreover, digitizing recipes increases audience engagement with the stories and images that underlie them as well as makes it simpler to access and distribute the recipes to a larger audience.

In order to help in that direction, Carnegie Mellon's University AMT Lab, utilizes even more new forms of technology to digitize recipes and various cultural heritage items (Boo, 2022). Digitizing recipes in applications like Fareloom, scanning them in 3D with CultLab3D, or even store them in digital repositories in the Library of Congress are some of the possibilities of new technology.

Besides the academic scope of digitization, even Microsoft develops tools that address the average user, that wants to digitally store his/her family history, and also providing help on how to not lose the authenticity of the item. Taking photos, importing them in a digital folder, adding comments and metadata, include stories associated with the recipes in various formats (video, sound) and giving the ability to share them, are some of the procedure steps of the digitization.

These are important steps in order to cover the extended shortage of cookbooks, especially for the Pontic cuisine as referred by Keramaris (2022). If we compare it with other national cuisines, on the internet, we will find out that the information is very few and scattered. There is not a systematic catalogue of recipes that could help in the preservation of the cuisine and all of the aspects that food carries with it. Wikipedia articles exist that refer to an overview of Pontic cuisine as also some YouTube videos and a small number of articles that mention just the most "famous" dishes of Pontics.

Creating a digital repository, and by providing a much metadata as we can, can lead to further heritage research opportunities, for scholars that can browse through the data, and filter the ones they need, either in terms of ingredients, of occasions they were utilized or kitchen utensils used etc. Annotating and disseminate their findings can expand also the database.

Furthermore, the creation of digital repositories of cultural items opens up new roads for protecting and maintaining cultural heritage. Cuisine and recipes particularly are an intellectual property that might not belong to a specific person, but it is property of the people and its history. The significance and influence of intellectual property in the economic exploitation of cultural assets is substantial. Cultural legacy should be conserved and promoted nationally and globally for economic, cultural, and social reasons through digitization (Borissova, 2018).



## 8 Conclusion

The dance, dialect, music, rituals, traditions, and food of modern Greeks of Pontic ancestry have all largely been preserved, mainly by the Pontic Unions that were founded in various areas where they built their establishments. This is significant since they had lost all contact with their home country and had no geographic place to relate to, other than each other's memories. The Pontics' shared style of integrating and relating to the greater Greek society on an economic, cultural, and political level also contributes to their sense of collective identity. Especially for elderly individuals, meals and stories that bring back memories accompany frequent family meetings, solidifying food as a symbol of ethnic identity.

Food and cuisine, are part of Pontic Hellenic's ethno-regional identity. It started in Pontos and spread to Greece (the new center of settlement). For Pontic Greeks, meals strengthen both their personal identity as well as a sense of group identity, cohesion, and solidarity. Cookbooks are effective tools because the Pontic Greek foodways are so crucial to their identity and serve as the foundation for intellectual and folkloric studies. Cookbooks may also give readers access to regional culture and shed light on how regional and national cultures interact. (Chrysou-Karatza, 2008)

Expelled from their land, food helped them to feel back at home. The Pontic Greeks share this sentiment as they stand up for the variety of their cuisine in every way, regardless of the recent trend toward healthier choices, which calls for the use of vegetable fats rather than butter, or the adoption of other eating habits due to globalization, multiculturalism, or dietary integration, particularly in urban settings. Despite growing in popularity in modern Greece, this regional cuisine is still generally ignored in the official discourse, and its unique qualities are not particularly well known. Very few cookbooks have Pontic Greek recipes, but even amongst the Pontic Union, food is overruled in favor of traditional dances and costumes. Music and dance are surely important, but food can be more intrusive in the everyday life of Pontics.

Overall, food matters, as Caldwell (2021) and Belasco (2014) both state. The anthropology of food is an emerging research topic in the critical debates in food studies. Food is important, considering how basic it is in our everyday life, in industry and export business, in pleasure and entertainment, but also in the academic disciplines of history, geography and even health studies. As the old saying goes, "we are what we eat". Food reveals our identity, where we come from and what is our connection to our history and culture. It runs throughout history, because other endeavors like the combustion engine or nuclear energy might have a small history, but food was there from the beginning of time. Henry Hobhouse (1999), points out that even the exploration and search for the new land that led to the discovery of America, had nothing to do with religion, or the rise of capitalism, but with the search for pepper. Along came the corn, potatoes, tomatoes and chocolate that brought a revolution to the economy, politics and social structure of the world ever after. Bell (1997) points out the significance of family food as a symbol of family



itself that holds first place in diaspora communities and in addition, food is what strengthens the family identity.

Therefore, here rises an importance not only to urge more people to study food but also to preserve and promote food and culinary traditions in general as an important aspect of the cultural identity of the Pontic ethnic group, which nowadays, due to the lack of systematic cookbooks (paperback or digital) is conducted exclusively through oral tradition.

Digitizing recipes and cookbooks is becoming more popular with the development of various social platforms nowadays and can help towards the goals we set in this thesis, as digital cookbooks offer:

- Portability, making it simple to keep your favourite recipes close at hand on your phone or tablet. People who frequently travel or who don't have a lot of storage space in their home will find this to be particularly convenient.
- Electronic cookbooks, are more searchable than printed ones in terms of searchability. Recipes by element, cuisine, or cooking technique are simple to find. This makes it simple to locate the ideal formula for whatever you feel like cooking.
- Electronic cookbooks, are more interactive than printed ones. Many online cookbooks also let you check and review recipes, and you can frequently add your own notes and comments to them. This makes it simple to alter your book and distribute your preferred recipes.

The sample of the database, that was created for the purpose of this thesis has these positive elements. By following the guide [Sample guide in browsing my digital collection](#), you can browse the digitized items, by using the metadata as your criteria. This enhances the searchability and makes it simpler to use, whether you have a scholar interest or you just want to find and try a new recipe at your home kitchen. You can also group the recipes in categories that way, for example, find recipes of foods that were typically served on celebratory “special occasions”, or which ones were served as “hot plate” or “cold plate” etc.

Pontic cuisine is not so well known, and maybe it addresses a smaller group of people. That is not making it less important or interesting but it brings to the surface some problems as well. (Ramazanova et. al., 2022 – Pandey & Kumar, 2020)

- Cost is one of them, as it might be more expensive to facilitate a digital cookbook, when the demand is small, so it will not be a profitable investment.
- Lack of experts, especially when we are talking for a group minority that has lost connection with their homeland, so the cultural history is diminishing every year.
- Linguistic difficulties, as it will be targeted to specific people who can understand the language, and therefore, again, it will be of small interest and demand to others.



## 9 Limitations and extrapolations

This small collection, surely is just a prototype, created for the needs of this thesis. Using more professional equipment, there can be a higher quality capture of both the handwritten recipes as well as the videos presenting the preparation. The metadata can be enriched, with the criteria that researchers would like to implement, so browsing could be easier, especially if/when the corpus is bigger than our sample.

There are universities' departments and private culinary schools for chefs, that could benefit from it, and enhance their curricula by teaching about this traditional cuisine and its historical significance. History and/or Anthropology departments could implement courses that study thoroughly and with a systemic discipline, their culinary habits. Pontics were a tribe of people, that lived in the Byzantine Empire until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in a remote area in the mountains, as outcasts because of their Greek heritage and their religion (orthodox Christians in a Muslim territory), but managed to survive and preserve their identity.

I dare to dream that it could be expanded, in such a way, as to capture as much of the recipes, ways of preparing food, history of the ingredients and folk stories behind the sacred culinary practices, to be a future database in bigger proportions. Collaboration with universities, which can provide the scholarly research form, but also the utilization of people who come from families of Pontic refugees, through interviews from their Pontic Unions' representatives would be ideal. It is something, that could help the community stay alive in the collective memory. Crowdsourcing is an option to consider, when creating databases, where you intend to accumulate people's knowledge and stories. The database could be open to other local Pontic experts, to submit their own recipes as they remember them and create something that could be like a wiki.

Despite the limitations, in the last years, there has been a movement in universities to study more about the Pontic Greeks. The Aristotle's University of Thessaloniki in Greece, founded in May 2017, the Endowed Chair of Pontic Studies, where through undergraduate courses is contributing to the acquaintance of students with the Hellenism of Pontus. Of course, the agenda does not cover just the teaching and research work, but targets as well the development of relationships and cooperations with other institution and universities dealing with relevant issues. Perhaps, more systematic research could be done on studying food of the Pontic Greeks and its connection to history and culture.



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## Appendix 1

Collection Criteria	
<b>Recipes that have importance in cultural heritage</b>	Recipes that had specific significance and were served in certain occasions of cultural aspects of life (marriage, etc.)
<b>Cooking recipe</b>	Recipes that have ingredients that are now rarely found
<b>Preparation of recipes</b>	Recipes with a unique way of preparation/baking
<b>Quality</b>	Recipes with quality ingredients