



# A heritage from ancient times to today: olive oil (SUZEYTI)

İbrahim Çekiç<sup>1</sup> · Yener Oğan<sup>2</sup>

Received: 14 May 2025 / Accepted: 11 August 2025 / Published online: 21 August 2025  
© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2025

## Abstract

Hatay is a city located in the south of Turkey, on the border with Syria, and is considered a cradle of civilizations from antiquity to the present day. The city possesses strategic significance in terms of its geographical, military, and economic position, serving as an important center for Christians, Muslims, and Jews alike. Throughout history, Hatay has exhibited cultural diversity and richness, and in 2017, it was included in UNESCO's Creative Cities of Gastronomy network. Suzeyti olive oil is a distinctive and increasingly endangered traditional product of the Hatay cuisine. Its production process involves natural and labor-intensive steps, including crushing the olives with stone mills, mixing the resulting paste with water and allowing it to rest, followed by the manual collection of the oil that rises to the surface. The absence of modern technological interventions ensures the preservation of the product's unique aroma profile and nutritional value. In this context, the aim of the study is to identify the production processes of Suzeyti oil, recognized as a traditional olive oil in the region, and to examine its place within culinary culture as well as its religious and cultural significances. The data for the study were collected through semi-structured interviews with a total of 18 cultural transmitters who are knowledgeable about the production stages of Suzeyti olive oil. The obtained data were evaluated ethnographically and subjected to content analysis. The findings reveal the role of Suzeyti olive oil, produced through traditional methods, in the regional cuisine and its contributions to the gastronomic identity of the area. This traditional olive oil is not only utilized as a common ingredient in dishes in Hatay but also emerges as a significant element that profoundly influences the culinary culture. Furthermore, the results indicate that olive oil has transformed into a metaphor of religious and cultural significance in Hatay throughout historical processes. However, it has been determined that the production of this traditional olive oil is at risk of being forgotten. Therefore, this study is significant as it emphasizes the necessity of preserving the gastronomic and cultural value of Suzeyti olive oil and contributes to the sustainability of this cultural heritage.

**Keywords** Cultural heritage · Gastronomy · Hatay · Olive · Suzeyti

## Introduction

Olive oil is obtained through the processing of olive fruit, and while the traditional cold-pressing method has been historically employed, modern extraction techniques “such as two and three phase continuous systems based on

centrifugation” are now widely used. It holds significant importance in both culinary and health domains. Throughout historical processes, olive oil has been valued by numerous civilizations, serving not only to enhance the flavor of dishes but also being utilized for therapeutic purposes in various rituals (Salazar et al. 2017). The use of olive oil in kitchens dates back to ancient times in the Mediterranean and Mesopotamian regions (Alzaa et al. 2021). The cultivation of the olive tree and the processing of olive oil began in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia around the 3rd millennium BCE, gradually spreading to the Roman and Greek civilizations over time. In Egypt, olive oil was used not only in cooking but also in the preparation of mummies and the production of perfumes (Imo et al. 2020). During the Roman period, olive oil held great significance for both nutrition and health, and it was traded as a luxury product within

---

Responsible Editor: Walid Elfalleh.

✉ Yener Oğan  
oganyener@gmail.com  
İbrahim Çekiç  
ibrahim.cekic@gibtu.edu.tr

<sup>1</sup> Gaziantep Islam Science and Technology University, Gaziantep, Turkey

<sup>2</sup> Kirsehir Ahi Evran University, Kirsehir, Turkey

the trade networks of the Roman Empire (Martin 2016). In Turkish cuisine, olive oil has also occupied an important place since the era of the Ottoman Empire. Initially regarded as an expensive commodity, olive oil was first utilized in palace kitchens and gradually made its way into the kitchens of the general populace. Turkey is one of the leading countries in olive oil consumption, and olive oil production is widely practiced in various regions of the country (Özata and Cömert 2016).

Today, the quality parameters of olive oil are determined by the International Olive Council (IOC), headquartered in Madrid, Spain. These olive oil quality parameters are listed in the International Olive Council Trade Regulations and European Union legislation. Important analyses performed on olives and olive oil are examined as quality and purity criteria in accordance with legislation. The characteristics of a high-quality olive oil are defined as "the olive oil production process, the acceptance and selection of olives, the provision of water to be used, the storage of olives, the cleaning and washing of olives, the crushing and grinding of olives, the kneading of olive paste, the separation of olive oil, and the storage of olive oil." Care taken at all these stages ensures its healthy flavor. Some studies have shown that there can be changes in the fatty acid content of olive oil depending on climatic conditions (Tomé-Rodríguez et al. 2023), significant differences in wax content during olive ripening (Giuffrè, 2014), and the effect of different harvest dates on sterol compounds (Giuffrè et al. 2012).

Located in the south of Turkey, Hatay is notable for its rich gastronomic heritage and unique production techniques. Historically, Hatay is considered a cradle of civilizations from ancient times to the present. In modern terms, Hatay was established at the end of the fourth century BCE by Seleucus I Nicator, one of the generals of Alexander the Great (Yıldırım and Temizkan 2017). The city possesses strategic significance in terms of its geographical, military, and economic position, serving as an important center for Christians, Muslims, and Jews alike. Currently, the largest demographic group is the Turks, followed by other communities such as Arabs, Circassians, Uzbeks, and Armenians. Within these ethnic groups, there are notable social and cultural integrations. In this regard, the city reflects a unique beauty through its cultural heritage (Şan 2019; Kurtar and Yılmaz 2022). Throughout history, Hatay has hosted various social differences, and this rich diversity has facilitated the settlement of different communities that speak the same language and share similar cultures, as well as various religious groups in the region. The strategic location of the city, situated at the intersection of different trade and transportation routes, has significantly contributed to Hatay's social and cultural richness.

Olive oil holds a significant place in the traditional Mediterranean diet. In Hatay cuisine, the use of olive oil has

transcended its role as a mere food item, evolving into a cultural and religious symbol over time. Olive oil is utilized in numerous social and religious rituals in Hatay, particularly in hospitality and during special occasions. The people of Hatay incorporate olive oil not only in their dishes but also in their homes, as a demonstration of their hospitality (Kurtar and Yılmaz 2022). Hatay is an important province in Turkey for both the production and consumption of olive oil (Ağır et al. 2018). Çimen et al. (2016) noted in their research that the traditional production of olive oil has been preserved in Hatay and that it is widely used in local dishes. The region is known for a traditional variety of olive oil called Suzeyti (Ertaş and Gezmen Karadağ, 2013). This olive oil has become an integral part of the region's cultural identity, embodying metaphorical meanings such as peace, love, brotherhood, sharing, maturity, immortality-life, and cooperation. Furthermore, the production of Suzeyti symbolizes the culinary skills and cultural affiliations of the people of Hatay.

Hatay is an important cultural city that has hosted more than thirteen civilizations throughout history. In 2017, it was included in UNESCO's Creative Cities of Gastronomy network (Pektaş and Demirtaş, 2021). The main reason for this is that the aromatic characteristics and scent of Suzeyti are embedded in the collective cultural memory of the people not merely as a food product, but also as an emotional link to the past and a reflection of traditional identity. The traditional production and use of Suzeyti olive oil have become one of the iconic elements of Hatay cuisine over time. The production process of Suzeyti has been shaped by ancient techniques passed down through generations, although this traditional production has recently begun to fade into obscurity. The production of Suzeyti relies on the careful collection of oil that rises to the surface from cracked olives. Compared to oils produced using modern techniques, Suzeyti is more aromatic and is used not only in traditional dishes but also consumed with za'atar (thyme) at breakfast (Çekiç, 2023). However, it is observed that the production of Suzeyti is still conducted at a limited scale in the Altınözü and Yayladağı districts of Hatay. When examining studies related to olives, various topics are covered in the literature, including olive oil dishes (Özkaya et al. 2018), gastronomic experiences (Pulido-Fernández et al. 2022; Ratão et al. 2024), olive tourism (Oplanić et al. 2020), bibliometric analysis of olive oil (Pato 2024), physical properties and traditional production of olive oil (Janakat and Bani-Issa 2024), quality of olive oil (Sevim et al. 2022), organic olive oil production and education (Scollo et al. 2018), the health relationship with olives (Vogel et al. 2014), and the relationship between olives and the environment (Gökdoğan and Erdoğan 2021). However, no direct studies related to Suzeyti have been identified. This highlights a significant gap in the literature. The absence of academic research on the role and

significance of Suzeyti within the context of Hatay cuisine suggests that the gastronomic value of this local product has not been sufficiently documented. Yet, documenting and analyzing traditional culinary elements is essential for both the preservation of cultural heritage and the sustainability of local gastronomy. In this regard, a comprehensive examination of the traditional uses, historical background, and cultural meanings associated with Suzeyti in Hatay cuisine is necessary. Such a study would not only explore the technical characteristics of this particular type of olive oil, but also uncover the social practices and cultural narratives that have developed around it. Additionally, questions regarding the current use of Suzeyti and whether it has been replaced by modern production techniques can offer insight into the relationship between traditional knowledge and contemporary systems of production. Therefore, research on the production stages, usage forms, and social perceptions of Suzeyti is of great importance for preserving this gastronomic heritage and ensuring its transmission to future generations. It is anticipated that this study will contribute to the representation of local products in the gastronomy literature and lay the groundwork for future research on similar traditional food items.

## Conceptual framework

### Historical and mythological background

The olive plant has its origins rooted in Greek mythology. While there are differing opinions regarding the homeland of the olive, it is known to have been cultivated in Anatolia for thousands of years. Particularly in the Mediterranean Basin, olives have been grown for millennia and have become a significant source of economic income for many countries (Efe et al. 2013). In the Roman Empire, olives served as an important trade commodity and are among the oldest plants cultivated for their oil (Caporaso and Boskou 2021).

### Botanical characteristics of the olive tree

Olive oil is a fat derived from the *Olea europaea* species, which has been used in human nutrition throughout history due to its beneficial health properties (Tsimidou et al. 2003). The olive tree, which thrives in Mediterranean climates, is commonly cultivated in mid-latitude countries such as Spain, Turkey, Greece, and Italy. The height of olive trees

varies between 2 and 8 m. Their leaves are narrow, long, and gray-green in color, while the fruits can be round and may appear in green or black hues. The collection and processing of olives, particularly for olive oil production, represent a traditional process that dates back thousands of years. Olive oil is particularly rich in healthy fatty acids, antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals (Muço et al. 2015). Therefore, it is regarded as an important food item for health, especially within the context of the Mediterranean diet.

Olive oil is not only frequently preferred in the cosmetic and pharmaceutical industries but is also most commonly used in gastronomy for the preparation of dishes and in salads. Among cooking oils, the use of olive oil is one of the most emphasized elements from a gastronomic perspective. This is because olive oil is a fat that can be consumed naturally, without any chemical processing, as it is extracted by pressing the olive along with its pit, and it holds significant nutritional value (Keser et al. 2018). The science of gastronomy encompasses the detailed understanding, application, and development of all characteristics of food and beverages, starting from their historical evolution and adapting them to contemporary conditions (Deveci et al. 2013).

### Traditional production of suzeyti olive oil

Suzeyti is a type of olive oil obtained from olives produced from heirloom seeds using ancient methods. One of the important characteristics of this olive oil is that it is offered for consumption without filtration (Çekiç, 2023). Traditionally, in various regions of Hatay province, Suzeyti is commonly used, especially in breakfasts, salads, and appetizers. Additionally, like other varieties of olive oil, Suzeyti possesses digestive system-supporting properties and is beneficial for heart health. The traditional production process of Suzeyti consists of the stages of harvesting, sorting, washing, crushing, resting, soaking, hand-pressing, separation, and filtering (Fig. 1).

Suzeyti is obtained from a type of olive known locally as *halhali*. The *halhali* olive tree is cultivated through the grafting of wild olives. This heirloom olive, which is not particularly large in size, is distinguished from other olive varieties by its high oil content and aromatic flavor. The production of Suzeyti consists of five fundamental stages. The first stage is harvesting. A characteristic feature of this initial stage is the late timing of the harvest. Late harvesting is preferred to ensure that the *halhali* olives are oilier. Following the harvest, the olives undergo sorting and washing. During



Fig. 1 Production Stages of Suzeyti. \*created by authors

this process, the olives are separated from their leaves and cleaned of dust and mud that may have adhered to them. The cleaned olives are then transferred to a trough for crushing, where they are crushed using stones weighing approximately one ton, commonly referred to as *dalep* or *dolap* (Traditional stone mill characteristic of the Hatay region). The crushing process lasts approximately one to one and a half hours. After crushing, the olives are placed in barrels for a resting period. The resting process lasts approximately 4 h. The crushed olives are then transferred to large pools containing water at a temperature of 18–20 degrees Celsius, where they are hand-pressed to extract the oil. Following this, the separation stage occurs. At this stage, the olive oil that rises to the surface of the water is separated by hand (using bowls or containers) and placed into barrels. Additionally, the remaining oil from the olives left in the pool is also collected and added to the barrels. The olive oil, which is allowed to rest in the barrels for a certain period, is then filtered through sieves before being made available for use. The duration of the filtering process varies depending on the amount of olives. The production process of Suzeyti goes beyond being merely a technical practice; it carries a symbolic meaning that reflects the cultural memory and gastronomic heritage of the Hatay region. The intense aromatic flavor obtained through late harvesting, the preservation of traditional methods such as the stone mill, and the collective participation in the production process make this olive oil unique in terms of taste and also turn it into an identity value for the local community. The fundamental steps in the production of Suzeyti are as follows (Fig. 2).

Figure 2 illustrates the fundamental steps involved in the production processes of Suzeyti. The first step involves the crushing process of the olives that are prepared for production. This process includes the transfer of the olives to the mill (A/B), followed by their crushing using animal power (horse) (C/D/E), and the resting of the olives in a pool (F). Subsequently, the oil extracted from the crushed olives is transferred to a water-filled pool (G), and the oil that remains on the surface of the water is collected using buckets (H/I). This process is conducted entirely using traditional methods, without the aid of technological elements. During the crushing process, the stone mill is operated using animal power. In areas where horses are not available, donkeys are also utilized for this operation.

## Methodology

This research aims to identify the production processes of Suzeyti oil, known as traditional olive oil in Hatay cuisine, and to examine its place within culinary culture as well as its religious and cultural significances. To achieve this, the study is designed using the ethnographic research technique, which is one of the qualitative research methods that offers

an exploratory perspective. In ethnographic research, the behaviors, experiences, and cultural elements of people who share a common culture can be interpreted (Özdemir 2011). Additionally, ethnographic studies provide significant advantages such as gaining an appropriate perspective, acquiring in-depth knowledge, presenting understandable data, and facilitating collaboration with others (Sangasubana 2011). In this context, the research aims to identify the cultural characteristics, gastronomic uses, and consumption habits of Suzeyti oil by participating in its production process.

Traditionally, the production of Suzeyti is carried out at a limited scale in the Altınözü and Yayladağ districts of Hatay. The traditional methods used in this region for producing Suzeyti and its characteristic as a cultural heritage have been decisive in forming the research field. Therefore, the study utilized a cluster sampling technique. In this sampling model, subsets are identified from groups with similar characteristics to obtain effective and accurate data (Kılıç 2013). In this context, interviews were conducted with 18 cultural transmitters who produce Suzeyti using traditional methods and possess in-depth knowledge of Hatay cuisine, reaching data saturation. The interviews were conducted in Hatay province between September 17 and October 10, 2024, during the olive harvest period, and the data were obtained through semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview technique is frequently preferred in qualitative research as a flexible method that allows participants to convey their individual experiences and in-depth knowledge (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2003).

The interview form used consists of three sections. The open-ended questions included in the form were developed based on the studies conducted by Oğan and Çelik (2023) and Kabacık and colleagues in the field of culinary culture and gastronomic products. The first section contains questions aimed at identifying the demographic characteristics of the participants (age, gender, educational background, profession). The second section consists of research questions developed to determine the production processes of Suzeyti, the traditional methods, and the cultural significance of these processes. The third and final section focuses on open-ended questions aimed at examining the place of Suzeyti in Hatay cuisine, its gastronomic value, and its areas of use in daily life. The questions were designed to be clear and understandable, allowing participants to share their personal knowledge and experiences regarding the topic. The open-ended questions that form the basis of the research and the research themes are as follows (Table 1).

In the context of the research, all participants were included in the study entirely voluntarily. Prior to the interviews, the purpose of the research, the process, and how they could contribute were explained to the participants in detail. Participants signed a “Participant Consent Form,” indicating that they agreed to participate in the study of their own

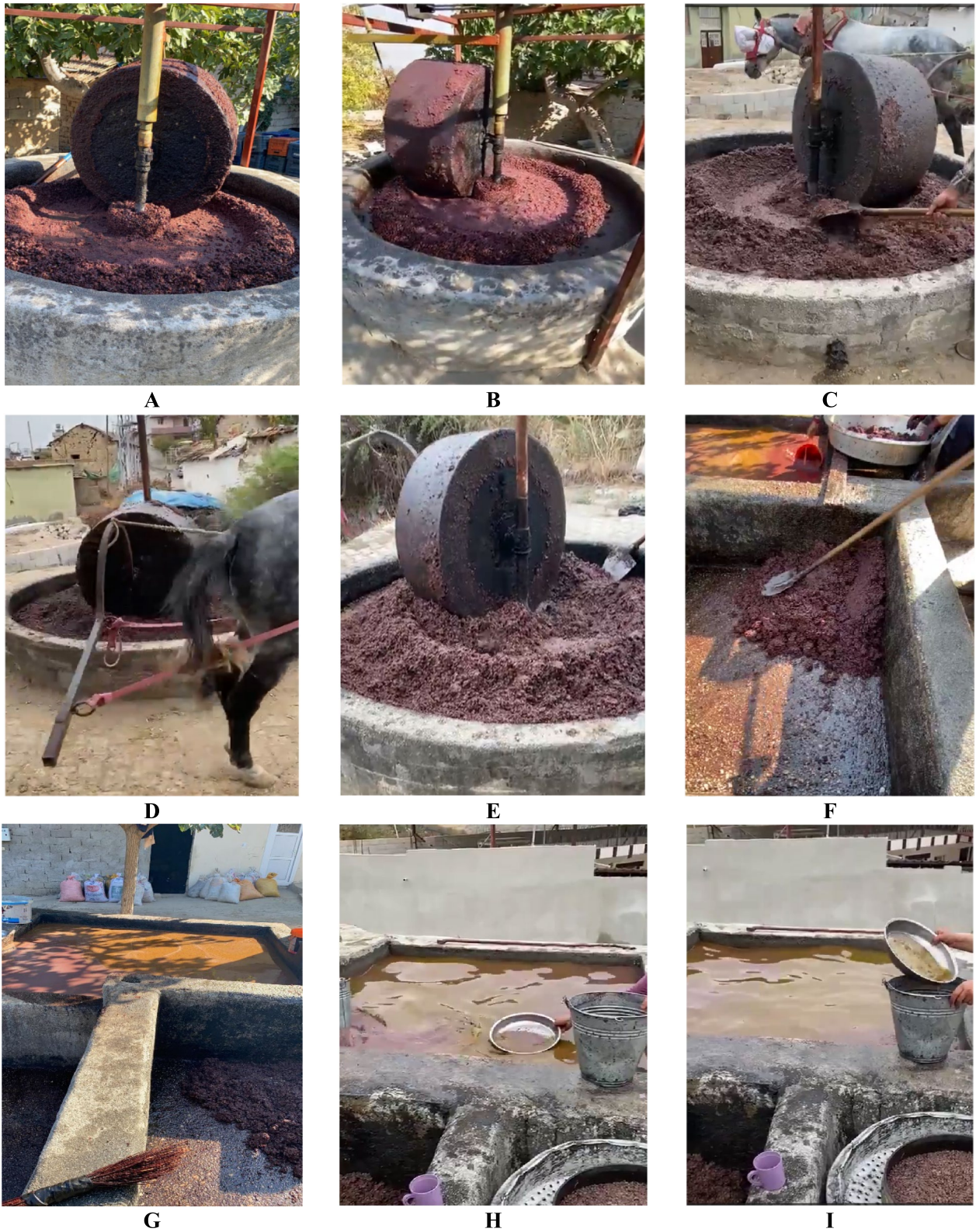


Fig. 2 The Production Process of Suzeyti Olive Oil. \*created by authors

**Table 1** Interview form and themes

Themes	Questions
1	What does olive oil represent for you?
2	What are the areas of usage for olive oil?
3	What are the differences between extra virgin olive oil and other types of olive oils?
4	What are the social perceptions and practices surrounding the production process of extra virgin olive oil?
5	What are your thoughts on the sustainability of traditional extra virgin olive oil production?

free will and that the information obtained would be used solely for scientific purposes. This form stated that the participants would remain anonymous, that the confidentiality of the information they provided would be protected, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. During the interviews, no leading or coercive statements were made. The qualitative data obtained from the interviews were systematically analyzed using descriptive and content analysis methods. The analysis process was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, each participant was coded as “P1, P2, ... P18,” and the data were digitized to form meaningful data sets. In the second stage, responses to the open-ended questions in the interview form were categorized under themes, which included both predefined themes and data-driven subthemes. The coding process was carried out through open, axial, and selective coding phases. Analyses conducted independently by two researchers were compared to ensure a high level of agreement between themes. The findings were presented in tabular form, and interpretations were supported directly by participant quotations. Throughout the entire analysis process, ethical principles were rigorously observed, and participants’ statements were conveyed without detaching them from their original context. Consequently, a comprehensive evaluation was made regarding the traditional production processes of Suzeyti as well as its unique place and social significance within Hatay cuisine.

## Findings

### Findings on the demographic characteristics

Table 2 presents an analysis of the demographic information of the participants, revealing that the study predominantly consists of older generations who are well-versed in the traditional production process of Suzeyti. When examining the age distribution, it is noteworthy that a significant portion of the participants falls within the 60–79 age range, accounting for a total of 72.21%. Particularly, the high percentage of participants in the 70–79 age group (38.88%) provides an important finding regarding traditional production knowledge and cultural transmission. This age group plays a key role in preserving and transferring practical knowledge of olive oil production from the past. When examining gender distribution, the majority of participants are male (66.66%). This indicates that men play a more active role in traditional agricultural production and labor, reflecting how gender roles manifest in local olive oil production practices. Female representation, on the other hand, is relatively low. This is primarily due to men being more involved in the physically demanding stages of the process and taking the lead in public-facing production activities. However, this does not exclude the role of women in the process. On the contrary, women contribute significantly, particularly in tasks such as sorting and washing the olives, separating table olives, and preserving the oil, stages that often take place within the domestic sphere and require delicate labor. Nonetheless, women's labor often remains invisible, undocumented, or regarded as secondary, which contributes to their

**Table 2** Demographic characteristics of the participants

		n	%			n	%
Age range	40–49	1	5.55	Occupation	Housewife	6	33.33
	50–59	4	22.22		Farmer	7	38.88
	60–69	6	33.33		Officer	2	11.11
	70–79	7	38.88		Artisan	3	16.66
Gender	Female	6	33.33	Education Level	Primary School	11	61.11
	Male	12	66.66		Middle School	3	16.66
Total (N)		18	100	High School	4	22.22	

underrepresentation. An examination of occupational distribution reveals that most participants are farmers and housewives, indicating that traditional olive oil production largely falls within agricultural production and domestic tasks. The majority of farmers (38.88%) demonstrate that agricultural activities and the production process hold a central place in olive oil production. In terms of educational level, it is observed that a significant portion of the participants is primary school graduates (61.11%). This suggests that although the educational level is low, traditional knowledge and skills are transmitted through experience, indicating that educational attainment is not a limiting factor in the transfer of this knowledge. In conclusion, the demographic data indicate that traditional Suzeyti production is predominantly a process learned and transmitted through experience by older generations, with men and farmers being the principal actors in this process.

### Findings on the research themes

The statistical distribution of participants' responses to the question: "What does olive oil represent for you?" is presented in the first theme of the research (Fig. 3).

Upon examining the data presented in Fig. 3, it is indicated that participants described olive oil using 16 different metaphors, which can be categorized under specific themes. The analysis of the data reveals that themes such as blessing, cooperation, and health are prominent. For instance, the theme of blessing was expressed by a total of 16 participants (11.51%), suggesting that olive oil is associated with prosperity and abundance in life. The theme of cooperation was also noted by the same proportion, 11.51%, indicating that olive oil is linked to solidarity and mutual assistance within the community. The theme of health was mentioned by 15 participants (10.79%), reflecting a strong perception that olive oil is associated with a healthy lifestyle. On the

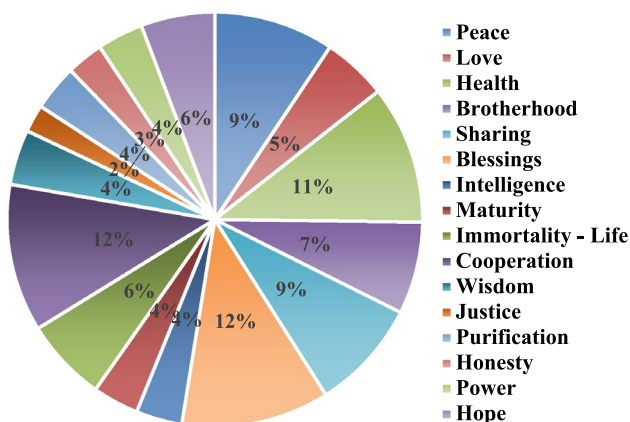


Fig. 3 Thematic distribution of the metaphors created for olive oil

other hand, more abstract and emotional themes such as peace (9.35%), love (5.03%), and hope (3.59%) were also frequently articulated by participants. This suggests that olive oil is not only a practical tool but also carries profound meanings in social and cultural contexts. More personal and individual themes, such as wisdom and maturity, were represented at lower percentages, indicating that the meanings attributed to olive oil by participants are primarily focused on social and health-related aspects. Some of the responses provided by participants to the posed question are listed below.

**Love:** "Olive oil is made with love. When harvesting and processing the olives into oil, love flows from within, that is why its flavor is different (P3)."

**Brotherhood:** "When making this oil, we usually come together. It is like brotherhood; everyone works in unison (P3)."

**Sharing:** "In our culture, olive oil is shared with neighbors. The more you produce, the more you need to share; then its significance grows (P3)."

**Blessings:** "Even a little olive oil brings blessing. The more you add, the more prosperity comes to the table (P3)."

**Immortality—Life:** "The olive tree is long-lived. It is a symbol of life. Each olive harvest is like being reborn (P18)."

**Cooperation:** "When making olive oil, everyone comes together and helps each other. One person cannot do it alone; it is done collectively (P11)."

**Purification:** "The purity of olive oil also purifies the human soul. When using that oil, it feels as if not only the body but also the heart and spirit are cleansed (P5)."

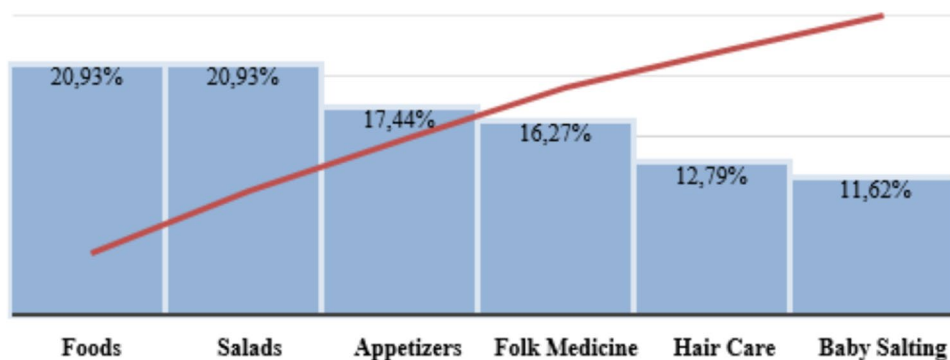
**Power:** "Olive oil carries the strength of the olive tree. The olive tree does not bend or break. It strengthens both the body and the spirit (P3)."

**Hope:** "Every year, the olive harvest brings new hope. Olive oil is also a symbol of our faith in the future (P16)."

In conclusion, the responses provided by participants reveal that olive oil is strongly connected to social solidarity, health, and cultural values, transcending its role as merely a food product. This distribution indicates that olive oil serves as an important symbol and value in both daily life and cultural practices.

The statistical distribution of participants' responses to the second theme of the research, "What are the areas of usage for olive oil?" is presented (Fig. 4).

The data presented in Fig. 4 indicate that olive oil assumes significant importance not only in the kitchen but also in traditional health and care practices in Hatay. While fundamental culinary uses, such as in dishes and salads (20.93%), account for the highest proportions, traditional practices such as folk medicine (16.27%) and baby oiling (11.62%) also stand out. Notably, the practice of "baby oiling" reflects a belief that newborns will have healthier skin

**Fig. 4** Olive oil usage areas**Table 3** Differences between *Suzeyti* and other olive oils

Factors	n	%
Production	18	24.32
Taste	18	24.32
Smell	12	16.21
Health	15	20.27
Price	11	14.86
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100</b>

and a body free of odor when rubbed with salted olive oil. This situation reveals that olive oil possesses both nutritional and ritual value within Hatay's culture. Some of the responses provided by participants to the posed question are listed below.

**Foods:** “*In Hatay cuisine, it is impossible to substitute olive oil, especially Suzeyti, with another oil. The flavor it adds to dishes makes it an indispensable element of the dining table (P3).*”

**Appetizers:** “*It is impossible to achieve the unique taste of appetizers such as hummus and za'atar without olive oil. Olive oil constitutes the essence of these appetizers (P9).*”

**Salads:** “*Without olive oil, the flavor of salads feels incomplete. Olive oil is essential both for its taste and health benefits (P18).*”

**Hair Care:** “*Olive oil is a natural product I use while washing my hair. This method, passed down from my mother, is one I also share with my children. We wash our hair with olive oil at regular intervals (P12).*”

**Folk Medicine:** “*Olive oil is one of the first natural remedies we turn to at home. We apply it to wounds, use it for stomach ailments, and treat cracked hands (P4).*”

**Baby Salting:** “*We massage newborns with salted olive oil, rubbing it into their skin. This practice stems from an old belief that it ensures healthy skin and a pleasant scent for the baby (P18).*”

The statistical distribution of participants' responses to the third theme of the research, “What are the differences between *Suzeyti* and other olive oils?” is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 presents the factors that participants identified as distinguishing *Suzeyti* olive oil from other olive oils, based on a total of 74 responses across five main factors. The most frequently cited factors were Production (24.32%) and Taste (24.32%), supporting the perception that *Suzeyti* offers a unique taste profile through its traditional production methods. The Smell factor was emphasized at 16.21%, indicating that the product's aromatic properties differentiate it from other olive oils. The Health factor, at 20.28%, suggests that *Suzeyti* is perceived as a healthier product, likely due to the preservative effects of its traditional production processes on nutritional value. While the Price factor was relatively less emphasized at 14.87%, it appears that economic differences are a distinguishing element for a specific consumer segment. These findings suggest that *Suzeyti*'s marketing strategies should focus on its production processes, taste, and health perceptions, as these factors may be influential in consumer preferences. Some of the responses given by the participants to the question are listed below.

**Production:** “*... The production of traditional Suzeyti is highly labor-intensive. Numerous individuals are involved in the production process. We know that this technique has been used for thousands of years. While producing Suzeyti, we do not utilize technological elements. Olives are crushed using very heavy stones called dalep, which are rotated by horse power. There is no pressing in the process of producing Suzeyti, and it is a cold extraction method (P5).*”

**Taste:** “*... Unlike in modern olive oil factories, the olive pits are not excessively crushed when making Suzeyti. As a result, the taste of Suzeyti is bitter. You can distinctly savor its flavor on your palate (P13).*”

**Smell:** “*... Suzeyti has a uniquely mild smell. This is because it is not exposed to excessive heat during the production process. Along with the scent of olives, you can easily detect a grassy note. Its natural smell remains intact (P7).*”

**Health:** “*... Because Suzeyti is cold-pressed and unfiltered, it is richer in polyphenols, vitamin E, and antioxidants. It is produced entirely naturally. For this reason, Suzeyti is much healthier compared to other olive oils (P2).*”

**Price:** “... Since *Suzeyti* is made using traditional methods, it is not exposed to high friction or heat. Furthermore, the production process requires more manual labor as no technological tools are used. The yield of oil obtained is also lower, which increases the cost of *Suzeyti* (P11).”

The statistical distribution of participants’ responses to the fourth theme of the study, “What are the social perceptions and practices surrounding *Suzeyti* in the production process?” is presented in Table 4.

The participants’ responses were categorized under four main themes: “*Collective Work, Oral Culture, Tradition, and Hereafter.*” It was observed that participants contributed a total of 40 statements under these themes. These categories reflect not only how the *Suzeyti* production process is perceived as an economic activity but also as a social phenomenon. According to the data presented in Table 4, the most frequently emphasized factor was “*Collective Work*”; 13 participants (32.5%) highlighted the importance of collective labor practices in *Suzeyti* production. This suggests that *Suzeyti* production is seen as a social solidarity activity, requiring collective effort at the village or neighborhood level and strengthening social bonds in the process. Another notable factor was “*Oral Culture*”, with 9 participants (22.5%) emphasizing its impact. This indicates that traditional production processes, especially through oral narratives, stories, or songs, are transmitted across generations and are deeply integrated into the production process as a cultural heritage. The theme of “*Tradition*” also held significant importance, with 10 participants (25%) referring to it. This underscores the perception of *Suzeyti* production not merely as a food production activity but as a means of fostering social identity and cultural continuity. Participants noted that the production process is shaped by traditional values and that these practices hold a profound cultural significance within the community. Lastly, the theme of “*Hereafter*” was mentioned by 8 participants (20%), highlighting the religious and moral dimensions of the production process. This suggests that *Suzeyti* production carries significant meaning in terms of social and religious values, providing not only material benefits but also spiritual satisfaction.

These findings reveal how traditional production processes are shaped by social values, cultural heritage, and collective solidarity, and how these elements function as integral parts of the production process. Some responses from participants to the posed question are listed below.

**Collective Work:** “... *Here, the culture of imece is very important. Everyone works together. For example, when making olive oil, everyone comes to help. Nobody works alone. Working together makes things easier. Even in difficult times, we always support one another. This stems from our traditions, respecting elders, and the strength of being together (P18).*”

**Oral Culture:** “*We never forget what we hear from our elders. While making Suzeyti, we always use the methods of the past. We teach gradually so that the new generation also hears and learns. During the production process, folk-songs, lullabies, and traditional rhymes are sung. We produce Suzeyti in a festive atmosphere (P14).*”

**Tradition:** “*Our traditions here are important, and keeping them alive matters. We still make olive oil the same way it was done in the past. The more we respect the past, the better it is. We follow the same steps as they did in the old days. We also teach the young so that this tradition is not lost. Once a tradition is lost, it never comes back.*”

**Hereafter:** “... *The olive is sacred. It is never cut down; cutting it is a sin. Those who plant olives in this world will also prosper in the afterlife. Cutting down an olive tree is a sin and will lead to hell (P10).*”

The statistical distribution of participants’ responses to the fifth and final theme of the study, “What are your thoughts on the sustainability of traditional *Suzeyti* production?” is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 evaluates participants’ perceptions regarding the sustainability of traditional *Suzeyti* production based on four key factors: Fabrication, Production Difficulty, Apprenticeship, and Preference. A total of 42 responses were recorded, distributed across these factors. The Fabrication factor (35.71%) was the most frequently mentioned by participants, highlighting the perception that traditional production processes are less efficient at the industrial level

**Table 4** Social perceptions and practices about *Suzeyti*

Factors	n	%
Collective Work	13	32.50
Oral Culture	9	22.50
Custom	10	25.00
Hereafter	8	20.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>



**Table 5** Sustainability of Suzeyti production

Factors	n	%
Fabrication	15	35.71
Production difficulty	10	23.80
Apprenticeship	9	21.42
Preference	8	19.04
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100</b>

and thus face challenges in terms of sustainability. This suggests that these processes may be less productive compared to modern industrial methods and may not align well with environmental sustainability criteria. The Production Difficulty factor (23.80%) also held significant importance, reflecting a perception that traditional production methods are labor-intensive and costly. This could lead to efficiency losses and increased labor demands, making the production process less viable from both environmental and economic sustainability perspectives. The Apprenticeship factor (21.42%) underscores the need for expertise and experience in traditional production, which participants perceive as a potential limitation for sustainability. While apprenticeship enhances production quality, it also increases labor intensity and contributes to negative perceptions of sustainability. Lastly, the Preference factor (19.04%) indicates a belief among participants that traditional production methods are not well-aligned with sustainability. This reflects a general view that traditional production is less efficient both environmentally and economically. Some of the participants' responses to the question are provided below.

**Fabrication:** “*Factory-produced items feel like taking the easy way out to me. In our time, everything was made by hand, with patience and care. Now, everything is manufactured in factories, devoid of human labor, and lacks the same taste and quality. The true value of something lies in the effort put into making it. The advantages of factory production, such as lower costs and extracting more oil per kilogram, appeal to people. This leads to the abandonment of the traditional Suzeyti production technique (P6).*”

**Production Difficulty:** “*In our time, producing anything was hard and labor-intensive. Olives were collected, stones were crushed, everything required effort. Now, with machines, everything is easier, but the soul of the process is missing. For example, every stage of making this olive oil is an art, every step a challenge. Without that challenge, it wouldn't be so valuable. However, the difficulty and cost of producing Suzeyti are causing this traditional method to be forgotten.*”

**Apprenticeship:** “*Apprenticeship is the foundation of this craft. Every trade begins with learning as an apprentice. I, too, once started as an apprentice under a master, facing many hardships, but I learned by overcoming each one. Yet today, young people are not inclined toward challenging*

*work. There are no young people to carry on the Suzeyti tradition. This heritage is disappearing (P17).*”

**Preference:** “*Discerning and taste-conscious individuals know the value of Suzeyti. However, because it is expensive, people now prefer factory-produced olive oil. Some consumers also perceive Suzeyti as unhygienic and choose not to buy it (P5).*”

## Conclusion

This research aims to examine the production processes, gastronomic uses, and social context of traditional Suzeyti olive oil, which holds significant importance in Hatay cuisine, thereby contributing to the preservation and sustainability of cultural heritage. Suzeyti is a type of olive oil traditionally produced in Hatay. Its production is based on the careful collection of oil from cracked olives that rise to the surface (Ertaş and Karadağ, 2013). Compared to olive oils produced using modern techniques, Suzeyti exhibits more aromatic characteristics. It is commonly consumed with zahter (thyme) at breakfast and is also widely used in the preparation of traditional dishes (Çekiç 2021). The research data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 cultural transmitters who produce Suzeyti using traditional methods. The findings indicate that the production of Suzeyti is largely based on experiential knowledge and skills passed down from generation to generation, and that the production processes are shaped by social solidarity and local values. Participants associated Suzeyti with themes such as abundance, cooperation, social belonging, and health, emphasizing that this product distinguishes itself from other olive oils in terms of taste, aroma, health benefits, and economic value. However, it has been revealed that traditional production methods are increasingly at risk of being forgotten due to the widespread adoption of modern technology and industrial production methods. The displacement of local production processes by technology threatens not only the traditional nature of the product but also the cultural and social meanings it carries. In this context, the preservation of Suzeyti's production through traditional methods is vital not only for maintaining product quality but also for sustaining cultural heritage. The decline in the transmission of traditional knowledge and practices increases the risk of losing this valuable heritage. To protect Suzeyti, it is necessary to document the production processes, ensure the participation of younger generations through educational programs, and particularly involve women in this process. Developing awareness programs by evaluating the effects of modern technology on production processes will support the highlighting of this product's traditional value. Additionally, promoting Suzeyti on national and international gastronomic

platforms should be supported by geographical indication and brand development efforts.

Strengthening its identity associated with Hatay cuisine can help reach broader audiences through tourism and gastronomic festivals. Furthermore, the conservation of the biodiversity of the olive groves used in Suzeyti production and the promotion of environmentally friendly agricultural practices will ensure the sustainability of the local ecosystem. Considering Suzeyti not only as a food product but also as a cultural heritage element representing social solidarity, local identity, and rituals will highlight its social and cultural dimensions alongside its economic value. These approaches are believed to contribute to securing both the cultural and economic sustainability of Suzeyti and to helping local communities carry their cultural heritage into the future.

This research provides significant insights into Suzeyti; however, it has limitations such as a restricted number of participants and the lack of diverse data collection methods. Future studies are recommended to involve larger participant groups, incorporate different methods, and examine the economic, environmental, and international dimensions of Suzeyti.

**Funding** There is no source of funding for this study.

**Data availability** In addition, research data is provided within the manuscript or supplementary information files.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

**Consent to participate** Participants contributed to the study voluntarily and the research process was conducted in accordance with ethical principles.

## References

- Ağır M, Boran C, Özden F, Artukoğlu MM (2018) Determination of factors affecting olive oil purchasing preferences of consumers in Hatay city center. *Ege Üniversitesi Ziraat Fakültesi Dergisi* 55(4):441–451
- Alzaa AF, Guillaume C, Ravetti L (2021) Cooking with extra virgin olive oil. In: Akram M (ed) *Olive oil-new perspectives and applications*. IntechOpen Online Book Series, London
- Caporaso N, Boskou D (2021) Olive (*Olea europaea*). In: Tanwar B, Goyal A (eds) *Oilseeds: health attributes and food applications*. Springer, pp 211–252
- Çekiç İ (2023) A comparative research on the breakfast themed gastronomic product diversity of Hatay province. *J Tourism Gastronomy Stud* 9(5):276–286. <https://doi.org/10.21325/jotags.2021.955>
- Çimen H, Kılıç A, Baykal D (2016) Interest for the gastronomic tourism and awareness of Hatay kitchen: example of university students. *Karadeniz Uluslararası Bilimsel Dergisi* 30(30):103–114. <https://doi.org/10.17498/kdeniz.16490>
- Deveci B, Türkmen S, Avcıkurt C (2013) Relation of rural an gastronomy tourism an example of Bigadiç. *Int J Social Econ Sci* 3(2):29–34
- Efe R, Soykan A, Cürebal İ, Sönmez S (2013) Dünyada, Türkiye’de Edremit Körfezi Çevresinde Zeytin ve Zeytinyağı. Akmat, Bursa
- Ertay Y, Gezmen Karadağ M (2013) Turkish cuisine in healthy nutrition. *Gümüşhane Üniversitesi Sağlık Bilimleri Dergisi* 2(1):117–136
- Giuffrè AM (2014) Wax ester variation in olive oils produced in Calabria (Southern Italy) during olive ripening. *J Am Oil Chem Soc* 91(8):1355–1366
- Giuffrè AM, Louadj L, Poiana M, Macario A (2012) Composition en stérols des huiles extraites d’olives de cultivars de la province de Reggio Calabria (Sud d’Italie). *Riv Ital Sostanze Grasse* 89:177–183
- Gökdoğan O, Erdoğan O (2021) Determining the energy use efficiency and greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) in olive farming. *Euro J Sci Technol* 23:717–724
- Imo C, Arowora KA, Abu MS, Angbas FA (2020) Comparative effects of palm kernel oil, olive oil, crude oil and honey on liver function of male albino rat. *Euro J Pharmaceutical Med Res* 5:26–31
- Janakat S, Bani-Issa S (2024) Physical and chemical properties of boiled oil: a traditional method of extracting oil from boiled olive fruits. *Open Agric J* 18(1):e18743315309329. <https://doi.org/10.2174/0118743315309329240403061920>
- Kabacık M, Kement Ü, Aksu SC, Oğan Y, Yüksel F (2024) An ethnographic study on the traces of Georgian culture in the cuisine of Ordu (Türkiye). *Int J Gastron Food Sci* 37:101001. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2024.101001>
- Keser B, Tunalıoğlu R, Avunduk CD (2018) Olive oil of sensory journey in gastronomy. *Güncel Turizm Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2(Ek.1):469–481
- Kılıç S (2013) Sampling methods. *J Mood Disorders* 3(1):44–46. <https://doi.org/10.5455/jmood.20130325011730>
- Kurtar MF, Yılmaz İ (2022) Examination of the change of traditional Hatay cuisine and modern Hatay cuisine. *J Gastronomy, Hospitality Travel* 5(3):932–944
- Martin M (2016) *Liquid gold: the olive oil trade between baetica and Rome* (Undergraduate Thesis). University of Mississippi
- Muço M, Kopali A, Muço LX (2015) Physical and chemical characteristics of olive oils from autochthonous Albanian olive varieties. *J Hygienic Eng Design* 12:60–65
- Oğan Y, Çelik M (2023) A gastronomic product in Turkish culinary culture: a research on Yozgat Çanak cheese. *Int J Gastron Food Sci* 31:100650. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2022.100650>
- Oplanić M, Čop T, Čehić A (2020) Olive tourism: understanding visitors’ motivations. *Acta Turistica* 32(2):141–167. <https://doi.org/10.22598/at/2020.32.2.141>
- Özata E, Cömert M (2016) Olive oil and healthy life. *Zeytin Bilimi* 6(2):105–110
- Özdemir M (2011) Qualitative data analysis: a study on methodology problem in social sciences. *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 11(1):323–343
- Özkaya FD, Özkaya MT, Tunalıoğlu R, Bayar R, Tunalıoğlu E (2018) Olive and olive oil food routes in Anatolia. *J Tourism Gastronomy Stud* 6(Special Issue 3):263–274
- Pato ML (2024) A decade of olive oil tourism: a bibliometric survey. *Sustainability* 16(4):1665. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16041665>
- Pektaş K, Demirtaş N (2021) Turizm Çeşitliliği & UNESCO Yaratıcı Gastronomi Şehri Hatay’da Gastronomi ve Turizm. *Paradigma Akademi, Çanakkale*
- Pulido-Fernández JI, Casado-Montilla J, Carrillo-Hidalgo I, de la Cruz Pulido-Fernández M (2022) Evaluating olive oil tourism experiences based on the segmentation of demand. *Int J Gastron Food Sci* 27:100461. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2021.100461>
- Ratão I, Nunes P, Silva V, Viegas C, Serra M, Quintas C (2024) Mediterranean diet gastronomic experiences using olive oil and goat cheese. *Int J Gastron Food Sci* 37:101013. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2024.101013>

- Salazar DM, López-cortés I, Salazar-garcía DC (2017) Olive Oil: composition and health benefits in: oliveoil. In: Fritjof T, Henning B (eds) Olive oilsensory characteristics, composition and importance inhuman health. Nova Science Publishers, New York
- Şan F (2019) Religious-ethnic diversity in Hatay and the language reflection of this diversity. *Motif Akademi Halkbilimi Dergisi* 12(27):704–715. <https://doi.org/10.12981/mahder.610245>
- Sangasubana N (2011) How to conduct ethnographic research. *The Qualitative Report* 16(2):567–573. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2011.1071>
- Scollo F, Diplas G, İncesulu D, Balaskas-Diamantis K, Barut MG, Kanaris N, Perremuto L, Giorgakis G, Aksoy U (2018) ECO-LIVE: training for the production of organic olive oil, ERAS-MUS+ call 2015, KA2-Cooperation and Innovation for Good Practices ([www.action-elearn.eu/ecolive](http://www.action-elearn.eu/ecolive))
- Sevim D, Köseoğlu O, Şumnulu U, Kadiroğlu P et al (2022) Improvement of olive oil quality with innovative olive cleaning system. *Akademik Gıda* 20(3):220–231. <https://doi.org/10.24323/akademik-gida.1186763>
- Tomé-Rodríguez S, Barba-Palomeque F, Ledesma-Escobar CA, Miho H, Díez CM, Priego-Capote F (2023) Influence of genetic and interannual factors on the fatty acids profile of virgin olive oil. *FoodChem* 422:136175. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodchem.2023.136175>
- Tsimidou M, Blekas G, Boskou D (2003) Olive oil. *Encyclopedia of Food Science, Food Technology and Nutrition*, 4252–4260
- Vogel P, Kasper MI, Garavaglia J, Zani VT, de Souza D, Morelo Dal Bosco S (2014) Polyphenols benefits of olive leaf (*Olea europaea* L) to human health. *Nutr Hosp* 31(3):1427–1433. <https://doi.org/10.3305/nh.2015.31.3.8400>
- Yıldırım A, Şimşek H (2003) Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri. Seçkin Yayıncılık, Ankara
- Yıldırım N, Temizkan M (2017) An analysis on the Syrian wars in the Seleucid period. *Mustafa Kemal Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 14(39):117–131
- Springer Nature or its licensor (e.g. a society or other partner) holds exclusive rights to this article under a publishing agreement with the author(s) or other rightsholder(s); author self-archiving of the accepted manuscript version of this article is solely governed by the terms of such publishing agreement and applicable law.