

MIDDLE EASTERN CUISINE

The term Middle Eastern cuisine refers to the various cuisines of the Middle East. Despite their similarities, there are considerable differences in climate and culture, so that the term is not particularly useful. Commonly used ingredients include pitas, honey, sesame seeds, sumac, chickpeas, mint and parsley.

The Middle Eastern cuisines include:

Arab cuisine	Armenian cuisine	Cuisine of Azerbaijan	Assyrian cuisine
Cypriot cuisine	Egyptian cuisine	Israeli cuisine	Iraqi cuisine
Iranian (Persian) cuisine	Lebanese cuisine	Palestinian cuisine	Somali cuisine
Syrian cuisine	Turkish cuisine	Yemeni cuisine	

ARAB CUISINE

Arab cuisine is defined as the various regional cuisines spanning the Arab World from Iraq to Morocco to Somalia to Yemen, and incorporating Levantine, Egyptian and others. It has also been influenced to a degree by the cuisines of Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, India, the Berbers and other cultures of the peoples of the region before the cultural Arabization brought by genealogical Arabians during the Arabian Muslim conquests.

HISTORY

Originally, the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula relied heavily on a diet of dates, wheat, barley, rice and meat, with little variety, with a heavy emphasis on yogurt products, such as labneh (yoghurt without butterfat). As the indigenous Semitic people of the peninsula wandered, so did their tastes and favored ingredients.

There is a strong emphasis on the following items in Arabian cuisine:

1. Meat: lamb and chicken are the most used, beef and camel are also used to a lesser degree, other poultry is used in some regions, and, in coastal areas, fish. Pork is not commonly eaten--for Muslim Arabs, it is both a cultural taboo as well as being prohibited under Islamic law; many Christian Arabs also avoid pork as they have never acquired a taste for it.
2. Dairy products: dairy products are widely used, the most of which is yogurt and white cheese. However, butter and cream are also used extensively.
3. Herbs and spices: mint and thyme (often in a mix called za'atar) are widely and almost universally used; spices are used much less than the Indian cuisine but the amount and types generally varies from region to region. Some of the included herbs and spices are sesame, saffron, turmeric, garlic, cumin, cinnamon, and sumac. Spice mixtures include baharat.
4. Beverages: hot beverages are used more than cold, coffee being on the top of the list, although tea is also served in many Arab countries.
5. Grains: rice is the staple and is used for most dishes with wheat as the main source for bread as well as burghol and Semolina, which are also used extensively.
6. Legumes: Lentils are widely used as well as fava beans and chick peas (garbanzo beans).
7. Vegetables and fruits: this cuisine also favors vegetables such as cucumbers, aubergine (eggplant), zucchini, okra and onions, and fruits (primarily citrus), are often used as seasonings for entrees. Olives are a large part of the cuisine as well in addition to dates, figs and pomegranate.
8. Nuts: pine nuts, almonds and pistachios are often included.
9. Greens: Parsley and mint are popular as seasonings in many dishes, while spinach and Corchorus (called "molokhia" in Arabic) are used in cooked dishes.
10. Dressings and sauces: The most popular dressings include various combinations of olive oil, lemon juice, parsley, and/or garlic, and tahini (sesame paste). Labaneh, thinned yogurt, is often seasoned with mint and onion or garlic, and served as a sauce with various dishes.

Notably, many of the same spices used in Arabian cuisine are also those emphasized in Indian cuisine. This is a result of heavy trading between the two regions, and of the current state of affairs in the wealthy oil states, in which many South Asian workers are living abroad in the Persian Gulf states.

STRUCTURE OF MEALS

There are two basic structures for meals in the Arab world, a regular structure and a structure specific for the month of Ramadan.

Breakfast

Cafés often offer Croissants for breakfast. Breakfast is often a quick meal consisting of bread and dairy products with tea and sometimes with jam. The most used is labneh and cream (kishta, made of cow milk; or qaimar, made of domestic buffalo milk). Labneh is served with olives, dried mint and drizzled with olive oil. Pastries such as manaqesh, sfiha, fatayer and kahi are sometimes eaten for breakfast. Flat bread with olive oil and za'tar is also popular.

Traditionally, however, breakfast used to be a much heavier meal especially for the working class such as lentil soup (shorbat 'adas), or heavy sweets such as knafa. Foul, which is fava beans cooked with chick peas garbanzo beans, garlic, lemon and olive oil is a popular working class breakfast as well.

Lunch

Lunch is considered the main meal of the day, traditionally eaten after the noon prayer. It is the meal where the family groups together and, when entertaining, it is the meal of choice to invite guests.

Rarely do meals have different courses, however, salads and maza are served as side dishes to the main meal. It usually consists of a portion of meat, poultry or fish, a portion of rice, lintel, bread or burgle and a portion of cooked vegetables in addition to the fresh ones with the maza and salad. Usually the vegetables and meat are cooked together in sauce (often tomato, although others are also popular) to make maraq, which served on rice. Most households would add bread whether other grains were available or not.

Drinks are not necessarily served with the food; however, there is a very wide variety of drinks such as shineena (or laban), Karakaden, Naque'e Al Zabib, Irq soos, Tamr Hindi as well as fruit juices. During the 20th century, Coca-cola and similar drinks have also become popular.

Dinner

Dinner was traditionally the lightest meal although in modern times and due to changing lifestyles dinner became more important.

Dinner may vary in its types and depending on whether guests are expected or not can it be from just some fruit (mainly watermelon, melon and grapes) with bread and cheese to a full meal similar to that of lunch. Pastries are also eaten for dinner, or charcoal grilled food such as kebab and shawarma. Other simpler meals can be just dipping za'tar or duqqa or dibs with bread and olive oil. After the meal, usually on special occasions, dessert is served. The most common dessert of Arab Cuisine is rice pudding. It is made from rice cream, rose water, sugar, and salt.

Ramadan Meals

In addition to the two meals mentioned hereafter, during Ramadan sweets are consumed much more than usual. Sweets and fresh fruits are served between these two meals. Although most sweets are made all year round such as knafeh, baklava and basboosa, some are made especially for Ramadan such as Qataeif.

Futuur

Futuur (also called iftar), or fast-breaking, is the meal taken at dusk when the fast is over. The meal consists of three courses: first, an odd number of dates based on Islamic tradition. Then soup would be served, the most popular is lentil soup, but a wide variety of soups such as chicken, freeka (a soup made from a form of whole wheat and chicken broth), potato, maash and others. The third course would be the main dish, usually eaten after an interval where Maghreb prayer is conducted.

The main dish is mostly similar to what is usual for lunch, except that cold drinks are also served.

Suhur

Is the meal eaten just before dawn when fasting must begin.

ARMENIAN CUISINE

Armenian cuisine includes the foods and cooking techniques of the Armenian people and the Armenian diaspora. The cuisine reflects the history and geography where Armenians have lived as well as incorporating outside influences. The cuisine also reflects the traditional crops and animals raised in areas populated by Armenians.

Regional influences include the Mediterranean, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and to a certain extent also influences from the Balkans. Armenian cuisine and traditions in turn have influenced the culinary traditions of nearby countries and cities such as Aleppo. The preparation of meat, fish, and vegetable dishes in an Armenian kitchen requires stuffing, frothing, and pureeing. Lamb, eggplant, yoghurt, and bread (lavash) are basic features of Armenian cuisine. Armenians use cracked wheat (burghul) in preference to the maize and rice popular among its Caucasian neighbors (Georgia and Azerbaijan).

Armenian foods include small appetizers called meze, grain and herb salads, phyllo pastries called boeregs, grilled meats and skewers, a large variety of soups, stews, flat breads such as lavash, and a thin crust pizza variant called lahmajoun.

Appetizers

Meals in Armenia often start with meze, a spread of appetizers served for "the table". Lavash, extremely thin leavened wrap bread made from wheat flour, is the usual accompaniment for meze.

- Hummus – a chickpea based spread.
- Chechil (*tel banir*) – braided and pickled string cheese, similar to Georgian sulguni.
- Mutabal – grilled eggplant chopped or mashed with spices and tahini to form a coarse paste, similar to the baba ghanoush of other cuisines.
- Lahmajoun – a thin-crust pizza with a topping of ground meat.
- Boraki – Armenian fried pelmeni, cylinder-shaped with a filling of fried minced meat; served garnished with yoghurt and chopped garlic.

Salads

- Eetch -- bulgur salad, similar to the Middle Eastern tabouleh.
- Tabouleh -- wheat and mint salad, found in the Armenian diaspora.
- Fattoush -- pita bread salad, found in the Armenian diaspora.

Boeregs

Boeregs are savory pies made with phyllo pastry and stuffed with cheese (*banirov boereg*, from Armenian: *banir* for cheese) or spinach (similar to spanakopita in Greek cuisine). They are a popular snack and fast food, often served as appetizer. The *Sou boereg* (*su boeregi*, or *water burek*, in Turkish cuisine) is a lasagna-style dish with sheets of phyllo pastry briefly boiled in a large pan before being spread with fillings.^[5] *Misov boereg* is a bread roll (not phyllo pastry) stuffed with ground meat (similar to Russian pirozhki).

Grilled meats

Grilling (barbecue) is very popular in Armenia, and grilled meats are often the main course in restaurants and at family gatherings. Grilled meat is also eaten as fast food.

- *Khorovats* (or *khovovadz*) – Armenian word for barbecued or grilled meats (the generic kebab in English), the most representative dish of Armenian cuisine enjoyed in restaurants, family gatherings, and as fast food. A typical *khovovats* is chunks of meat grilled on a skewer (shashlik), although steaks or chops grilled without skewers may be also included. In Armenia itself, *khovovats* is often made with the bone still in the meat (as lamb or pork chops). Western Armenians outside Armenia generally cook the meat with bones taken out and call it by the Turkish name shish kebab. On the other hand, the word *kebab* in Armenia refers to uncased sausage-shaped patties from ground meat grilled on a skewer (called *losh kebab* or *lule kebab* by diasporan Armenians and Turks). In Armenia today, the most popular meat for *khovovats* (including *losh kebab*) is pork due to Soviet-era economic heritage. Armenians outside Armenia usually prefer lamb or beef depending on their background, and chicken is also popular.

- *Gharsi khovovats* – slivers of grilled meat rolled up in lavash, similar to the Middle Eastern shawarma and the Turkish doner kebab; this "shashlik Ghars style" takes its name from the city of Kars (Armenian: *Ghars*) in

eastern Turkey, close to the Armenian border.

Soups

Armenian soups include *spas*, made from yogurt, hulled wheat and herbs (usually cilantro), and *aveluk*, made from lentils, walnuts, and wild mountain sorrel (which gives the soup its name). *Kiufta* soup is made with large balls of strained boiled meat (*kiufta*) and greens.

Another soup, *khash*, is considered an Armenian institution. Songs and poems have been written about this one dish, which is made from ham hocks and herbs made into a clear broth. Tradition holds that *khash* can only be cooked by men, who spend the entire night cooking, and can be eaten only in the early morning in the dead of winter, where it served with heaps of fresh garlic and dried lavash.

T'ghit is a very special and old traditional food, made from *t'tu lavash* (fruit leather, thin roll-up sheets of sour plum puree), which are cut into small pieces and boiled in water. Fried onions are added and the mixture is cooked into a purée. Pieces of lavash bread are placed on top of the mixture, and it is eaten hot with fresh lavash used to scoop up the mixture by hand.

Karshm is a local soup made in the town of Vaik in the Shirak province. This is a walnut based soup with red and green beans, chick peas and spices, served garnished with red pepper and fresh garlic. Soups of Russian heritage include borscht, a beet root soup with meat and vegetables (served hot in Armenia, with fresh sour cream) and okroshka, a yogurt or kefir based soup with chopped cucumber, green onion, and garlic.

- *Arganak* – chicken soup with small meatballs, garnished before serving with beaten egg yolks, lemon juice, and parsley.
- *Bozbash* – a mutton or lamb soup that exists in several regional varieties with the addition of different vegetables and fruits.
- Harissa – porridge of coarsely ground wheat with pieces of boned chicken.
- *Katnov* – a milk-based rice soup with cinnamon and sugar.
- *Putuk* – mutton cut into pieces, dried peas, potatoes, leeks, and tomato puree, cooked and served in individual crocks.
- *Vospapour* – lentil soup with dried fruits and ground walnuts.

Fish

- Ishkhan – Sevan trout (endangered species), served steamed, grilled on a skewer, or stuffed and baked in the oven.
- Sig – a whitefish from Lake Sevan, native to northern Russian lakes (endangered species in Armenia).
- Kogak – an indigenous Lake Sevan fish of the carp family, also called Sevan khramulya (overfished).

Main courses

- Fasulya (*fassoulia*) – a stew made with green beans, lamb and tomato broth or other ingredients.
- Ghapama – pumpkin stew .
- Kchuch – a casserole of mixed vegetables with pieces of meat or fish on top, baked and served in a clay pot.
- Moussaka – baked dish consisting of spiced ground meat (usually lamb) between layers of eggplant slices.

Meat products

- Basturma – a highly seasoned, air-dried raw beef, similar to pastrami.
- Yershig – a spicy beef sausage (called sujuk in Turkey).
- Kiufta – meaning meatball comes in many types, such as Hayastan kiufta, Kharpert kiufta (Porov kiufta), Ishli kiufta, etc.

Dairy products

- Labneh – Strained dense yogurt made from sheep, cow, or goat milk; often served in mezze with olive oil and spices.
- Matsoun – yogurt.
- Tahn (*ayran*) – a sour milk drink prepared by diluting yogurt with cold water.

- *Ttvaser* – sour cream in Armenian; also known by the Russian-derived word *smetan*.

Breads

- Lavash – the staple bread of Armenian cuisine.
- Matnakash – soft and puffy leavened bread, made of wheat flour and shaped into oval or round loaves; the characteristic golden or golden-brown crust is achieved by coating the surface of the loaves with sweetened tea essence before baking.
- Choereg (or choreg) – braided bread formed into rolls or loaves, also a traditional loaf for Easter.

Sweets

- *Alani* – pitted dried peaches stuffed with ground walnuts and sugar.
- *Kadaif (ghataif)* – shredded dough with cream, cheese, or chopped walnut filling, soaked with sugar syrup.

Ritual foods

- Nshkhar -- bread used for Holy Communion.
- Mas -- literally means "piece" a piece of leftover bread from the making of Nshkhar, given to worshippers after church service.
- Matagh -- sacrificial meat. can be of any animal such as goat, lamb, or even bird.

AZERBAIJANI CUISINE

Azerbaijani cuisine, throughout the centuries, has been influenced by the foods of different cultures due to political and economic processes in Azerbaijan. Still, today's Azerbaijani cuisine has distinctive and unique features. Many foods that are indigenous to the country can now be seen in the cuisines of other cultures. For the Azerbaijanis, food is an important part of the country's culture and is deeply rooted in the history, traditions and values of the nation.

Out of 11 climate zones known in the world, Azerbaijan has nine. This contributes to the fertility of the land, which in its turn results in the richness of the country's cuisine. The Caspian Sea is home to many edible species of fish, including the sturgeon, Caspian salmon (a subspecies of trout, now critically endangered), Caspian white fish (*kutum*), sardines, grey mullet, and others. Black caviar from the Caspian Sea is one of Azerbaijan's best known delicacies well sought after in other parts of the world, including former Soviet countries.

Azerbaijani cuisine has over 30 kinds of soups, including those prepared from plain yogurt. There is a wide variety of kebabs and shashliks, including lamb, beef, chicken, and fish (*baliq*) kebabs. Sturgeon, a common fish, is normally skewered and grilled as a shashlik, being served with a tart pomegranate sauce called *narsharab*. The traditional condiments are salt, black pepper, sumac, and especially saffron, which is grown domestically on the Absheron Peninsula. A national dish of Azerbaijani cuisine is saffron-rice plov served with various herbs and greens, a combination totally different from Uzbek plovs. Azerbaijan has more than 40 different plov recipes. Dried fruits and walnuts are used in many dishes.

Azerbaijani cuisine is famous for an abundance of vegetables and greens used seasonally in the dishes. Fresh herbs, including mint, cilantro (coriander), dill, basil, parsley, tarragon, leeks, chives, thyme, marjoram, green onion, and watercress, are very popular and often accompany main dishes on the table.

Black tea is the national beverage, and it is drunk at the beginning of each meal before food is eaten. It is also a hospitality beverage that always welcomes guests, often accompanied by fruit preserves.

Soups

- Piti – the national soup of Azerbaijan made from pieces of mutton on the bone cooked with vegetables in a broth; prepared and served in individual crocks;
- Dovga – a yoghurt (*matsoni*) based soup with sorrel, spinach, rice, dried peas, and small meatballs made from ground mutton; served hot or cold depending on the season;
- Bolva – made with sour milk.

Main Dishes

A typical Azeri meal begins with a plate of aromatic green leaves called goy, and is accompanied by plenty of chorek (bread), salat (a tomato and cucumber salad), and perhaps qatik (yoghurt) and pendir (cheese). The traditional condiments are duz (salt), istiot (pepper) and sumah (a sweet, dark red spice with a flowery flavour). Main dishes may include a selection of the following:

Baliq - fish, which usually means sturgeon, normally skewered and grilled as a kebab, and served with a tart sour-plum sauce.

Dolma - the traditional recipe calls for minced lamb mixed with rice and flavoured with mint, fennel and cinnamon, and wrapped in vine leaves (yarpaq dolmasi) or cabbage leaves (kalam dolmasi), but most restaurants offering dolma tend to serve up stuffed tomato, sweet pepper and aubergine.

Dusbara - small dumplings stuffed with minced lamb and herbs, served in broth.

Lavangi - delicious casserole of chicken stuffed with walnuts and herbs. It's supposedly a speciality of the Talish region of South Azerbaijan, but is very difficult to find in restaurants.

Lyulya kabab - a mixture of minced lamb, herbs and spices squeezed around a skewer and barbecued, often served with lavas win sheets of unleavened bread).

Plov - a classic dish of rice, mutton, onion and prunes, flavoured with saffron and cinnamon.

Qutab - a sort of pancake turnover stuffed with minced lamb, cheese or spinach.

Tika kabab - chunks of lamb marinated in a mixture of onion, vinegar and pomegranate juice, impaled on a large skewer and grilled on the barbecue. More commonly called shashlyk, from the Russian word shashka (sword).

Kourma – pieces of mutton or lamb on the bone (blade chops) stewed with onions, tomatoes, and saffron.

Plovs of Azerbaijan

Plov is one of the most widespread dishes in Azerbaijan, with more than 40 different recipes. Plovs have different names depending on the main protein ingredient accompanying rice:

- Kourma plov (with mutton)
- Sobza kourma plov (with mutton and greens)
- Toyug plov (with chicken)
- Shirin plov (with dried fruits)
- Syudli plov (made with rice cooked in milk)
- Juja plov (with fried chicken pieces and dried fruits)
- Sheshryanch plov ("six-color plov", with eggs cooked "sunny side up" on a bed of fried green and white onions)

Azerbaijani plov consists of three distinct components, served simultaneously but on separate platters: rice (warm, never hot), *gara* – fried meat, dried fruits, eggs, or fish prepared as an accompaniment to rice, and aromatic herbs. Rice is not mixed with the other components even when eating plov.

Desserts

Azerbaijanis, like their cousins in Turkey, have a sweet tooth. Typical Azeri desserts are sticky, syrup-saturated pastries such as pakhlava and halva. The latter, a layer of chopped nuts sandwiched between mats of thread-like fried dough, is a speciality of Sheki in North-West Azerbaijan. Other traditional pastries include shakarbura (crescent-shaped and filled with nuts), peshmak (tube-shaped candy made out of rice, flour and sugar) and girmapadam (pastry filled with chopped nuts).

However, sweets like this are generally bought from a pastanesi (pastry shop) and eaten at home or on special occasions such as weddings and wakes. The usual conclusion to a restaurant meal is a plate of fresh fruit, plums, cherries, apricots, grapes, or whatever is in season.

Sherbets

An Azerbaijani sherbet (Azerbaijani: *ərbət*) is a sweet cold drink made of fruit juice mixed or boiled with sugar, often perfumed with rose water. Sherbets (not to be confused with sorbet ices) are of Iranian origin and they may differ greatly in consistency, from very thick and jam-like (as in Tajik cuisine) to very light and liquid, as in Azerbaijan. Sherbets are typically prepared in the following natural flavors:

- Lemon
- Pomegranate
- Strawberry
- Cherry

ASSYRIAN CUISINE

Assyrian cuisine is similar to other Middle Eastern cuisines. It is also similar to ARABIC, Kurdish, Armenian, Greek, Israeli, Persian, TURKISH and Levantine cuisine. It may also be referred to as Chaldean cuisine or Syriac cuisine. It is rich in grains, meat, tomato, and potato. Rice is usually served with every meal accompanied by a stew which is typically poured over the rice. Tea is typically consumed at all times of the day with or without meals alone or as a social drink. Cheese, crackers, biscuits, baklava, or other snacks are often served alongside the tea as appetizers. Dietary restrictions may apply during special holidays in which certain types of foods may not be consumed; often meaning animal-derived. However, unlike their Muslim or Jewish neighbors of the countries they originated from, they may consume pork or alcohol though pork is not a staple in the diet and is shunned by many. There are hold-overs from the Old Testament in which people slaughter animals a certain way and where some animals are considered unclean such as the aforementioned swine. The story of Jesus casting the demonic Legions into pigs that went over the cliff is a popular reason for some Assyrians not to eat pork. Alcohol on the other hand is rather popular specifically in the form of Arak.

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There is a widely circulated story on the Web stating that the Assyrians invented baklava in the 8th century BC, but current scholarly work indicates that it is of central Asian Turkic origin.

***Ftarta* or *Thomta* (breakfast)**

Common breakfast usually contains eggs (scrambled, sunny side up, hard boiled); usually with fried tomatoes, tahina (sesame seed paste) with either fig jam or date syrup, bastirma (dried sausage), geimar (kaymak), halawa, etc. Hareesa is also eaten as a breakfast by some because it is perceived as a heavy and nutritious meal. Eggs are usually scrambled and contain parsley cooked in it with lots of black pepper and salt. Often the *bastirma* is cooked in with the eggs as may other ingredients be added in as well. Tea is usually drunk in the morning along with the breakfast. *Halawa* is often wrapped in pita bread and dipped in *tahina* for a nutritious breakfast snack or like how eggs are consumed it may be eaten in bite-size scoops of pita.

***Maza* (appetizer)**

Assyrian *Maza* is similar to related cuisines' Mezze which may include Humous ou Tahina, Baba Ghanouj, Tapoula, Fattoush, vegetables and dip, Burek, etc. Fava beans, known as *baqilleh*, and chick peas, known as *lablabi* or *khirtamaneh*, are very common in soups, salads, and find their way into many foods. Fried almonds and raisins are also used but not as appetizers but rather as garnishes for main dishes. Another popular *maza* is *tourshi* which means pickles. Many different types of vegetables are pickled such as cucumbers, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, beats, and peppers. As mentioned in the main paragraph, tea is a staple in the diet even more so than coffee. Almost always the *maza* is accompanied with tea or Turkish coffee.

***Khadaya w Ashaya* (lunch and dinner)**

Khadaya w Ashaya (lunch and dinner) is also referred to as *Kawithra w Kharamsha*. Lunch typically consists of basmati rice which is prepared with fried miniature noodles called *sha'riya* or in place of rice burghul may be used which may also be prepared with the same type of noodles. It is usually accompanied with a stew; called *shorba* or *maraga*, salad; called *zalata*, or yogurt; called *masta*. There are many variations in the salads and yogurt sauces. *Khalwa* is a common yogurt sauce and is similar to tzatziki. It contains yogurt, cucumbers, garlic, herbs, and spices. Also there is *daweh* which is a drink consisting of yogurt, water, and salt. It is known as *shaneenah* in Arabic or doogh in Persian. Lebanese varieties usually contain mint. *Daweh* is most commonly served as a complimentary drink with many meals.

The most common stews are potato which is referred to by the name of the main spice Curry; called *kari*, common bean; called *fasulya*, green beans; called *chipti*, fried okra; called *bumya*, and a crushed lentil soup; called *tlokkeh*. There is also a rice and cabbage meal called *tirkhena* in which the rice and cabbage are cooked together

with bits of steak meat.

Most stews consist of tomato paste, water, small pieces of steak or chicken, spices, and vegetables such as spinach for example which is called *spenakh*. The stews and dishes in general are usually referred to by the main ingredient in the dish.

During the Holidays there are special dishes. There are biryani, *pacha*, *kubba*, *maqluba*, *dolma*, *quzi* and many other dishes. There is a special type of *kubba* called *kiddeldokeh* which is prepared in yogurt. It along with *kubba hamouth*, *kubba d-khoumsa*, and *kubba d-sawma* are specific to the Assyrian community and very rare in other communities. There are many varieties of *Kubba*, *Dolma*, and *Biryani* specific to the cook that prepares them. *Kufta* is a meal prepared similarly to *kubba hamouth* meaning that it is cooked in a semi-sour tomato sauce, though it is more similar to a meatball than a *kubba*; which consists of lean meat and ground rice or burghul on the outside, and meat and onions on the inside. Many foods maybe prepared for *sawma* which means Lenten. During important holidays such as *Ba'ootha* no meat or dairy may be consumed. A fairly popular Lenten meal is *Girtho* which is rice cooked in yogurt. It is eaten with date syrup poured on top. However, it may not be consumed during *Ba'ootha* due to the restriction on all animal sources of food.

Because Assyrians are minorities in all places they inhabit, their local cuisine may vary and also contain elements of the popular cuisine in their locale. The majority of Iraqi cuisine is incorporated into Iraqi Assyrian cuisine and the same is the case for Assyrians of Iran, Syria, or Turkey. Falafel with *amba* for example is very popular amongst Assyrians and are especially common during lent and other holidays requiring dietary restrictions that call for abstinence from animal-derived products and foods. Bishops of the Assyrian Church of the East are not only restricted from eating meat their whole lives but their mothers during their pregnancy are not allowed meat.

Desserts, Snacks, and Beverages

There are several different types of dessert which include *Baklava*, *Kuleicheh*, different types of cakes and cookies, *Kadeh*, and others. *Kadeh* are usually prepared alongside *Kuleicheh* and also *Takhiryatha* which are not dessert and often referred to as "Chaldean Pizza" because they resemble pizza; containing meat and tomatoes on top of bread but lacking cheese unlike pizza. A *Kada* looks like a thick yellowish flat bread though it contains plenty of butter, eggs, and sugar which renders it a very sweet pastry. Due to the influence from the post-Ottoman occupation of Iraq and Syria by the British and French many customs were picked up from the colonial administrators. Tea and Biscuits are often eaten as snacks or even as a breakfast. Turkish coffee which is a hold-over from Ottoman times is often used the same way though with a twist of fortune telling called *finjan* which is a form of tasseography. When the coffee is consumed the fortune teller will look at the bottom of the cup and read you your future. Arak is one of the most popular alcoholic beverages. It tastes like black liquorice and is clear until mixed with water, which then becomes milky-white.

CYPRIT CUISINE

Cypriot cuisine is the cuisine encountered on the island of Cyprus, located in the eastern Mediterranean. Cypriot cuisine is shaped by the island's Mediterranean climate, geography, and history. Reflecting the two dominant populations, Cypriot cuisine has evolved as a fusion of Greek and Turkish cuisines, with local twists on well-known dishes. Further influences are evident from the neighboring Levant countries, with similarity to Lebanese cuisine. There are remnants too of French, Italian, and Anglo-Saxon influences stemming from the island's occupation by the French Lusignans, the Venetians, and the British. Modern western cuisine (especially fast food) has an increasing influence on the day-to-day diet on the island.

Food preparation

Frequently used ingredients are vegetables such as courgettes, green peppers, okra, green beans, artichokes, carrots, tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce and grape leaves, and pulses such as beans (for *fasoulia*), broad beans, peas, black-eyed beans, chick-peas and lentils. Pears, apples, grapes, oranges, mandarines, nectarines, mespila, blackberries, cherry, strawberries, figs, watermelon, melon, avocado, citrus, lemon, pistachio, almond, chestnut, walnut, hazelnut are some of the commonest of the fruits and nuts.

The best-known spices and herbs include pepper, parsley, roka, celery, thyme, and oregano. Traditionally, *artisha* (cumin) and *kolliandros* (coriander) seeds make up the main cooking aromas of the island. Mint is a very important herb in Cyprus. It grows voraciously, and locals use it for everything, particularly in dishes containing ground meat. For example, the Cypriot version of *pastitsio* (locally known as *macaronia touournou*) contains very little tomato and generous amounts of mint. The same is true of *keftes* or *keftedes* (meat balls, *köfte* in Turkish cuisine), which are sometimes laced with mint to provide a contrast with the meat.

Cypriots grill over charcoal. They grill halloumi cheese, olives, mushrooms, loukaniko (pork sausages),

and of course kebabs. These are souvlaki (shish kebab), sheftalia, or gyros (doner kebab in Turkish cuisine). Kebabs are made from various cuts of lamb, pork, or occasionally chicken, and very rarely beef. They are typically served stuffed into a pita pocket or wrapped in a thin flatbread, along with a salad of cabbage, parsley, and raw mild onions, tomatoes and sliced cucumber. Greek Cypriot souvlaki is usually made of pork, whilst the Turkish Cypriots use lamb in their shish kebabs. Similar in appearance, the flavour is quite different, especially as the Turkish Cypriots sometimes use a spicy marinade. Gyros is grilled meat slices instead of chunks, and the taste is made different by the salad or dressings added.

Pourgouri (bulgur, cracked wheat) is the traditional carbohydrate other than bread. It is steamed with tomato and onion; a few strands of vermicelli pasta are often added to provide a texture contrast. Along with *pourgouri*, natural yoghurt is a staple. Wheat and yoghurt come together in the traditional peasants' breakfast of *trahanas*, a primitive form of pasta, in which the cracked wheat is steamed, mixed with sour milk, dried, and stored. Small amounts reheated in water or broth provide a very nourishing and tasty meal, especially with added cubes of well-aged halloumi.

For Greek Cypriots, there are many fasting days imposed by the Greek Orthodox Church, and though not everyone adheres, many do. On these days, effectively all animal products must not be consumed. Pulses are eaten instead, sometimes cooked in tomato sauce (*yiahni*) but more usually simply prepared and dressed with olive oil and lemon. On some days, even olive oil is not allowed. These meals often consist of raw onion, raw garlic, and dried red chilies munched along with these austere dishes to add a variety of taste, though this practice is dying out.

Maybe because pulses are consumed on fasting days, there are very few dishes that combine meat and dry pulses, such as one might find in Italy or Spain. *Moutjentra* (mujaddara or mejadra in other Middle Eastern cuisines) is a dish that combines lentils with rice and fried onions. This dish is to be found in many cultures all the way to the Indian subcontinent.

Meals

Seafood

Popular seafood dishes include calamari, octopus, cuttlefish, red mullet (*parpouni* or *barbouni*), sea bass (*lavraki*), and gilt-head bream (*tsipoura*). Octopus, due to its robust nature, is made into a *stiffado* (stew) with red wine, carrots, tomatoes, and onions. Calamari is either cut into rings and fried in batter or is stuffed whole with rice, cumin, cloves, sometimes adding mint to the stuffing, and then baked or grilled. Cuttlefish (*soupies*) may be cooked like calamari or like octopus in red wine with onions. It is sometimes prepared with spinach, but without adding garden peas, which are a popular accompaniment for cuttlefish in Greece and Italy. Calamari, octopus, and cuttlefish commonly feature in *mezedes*, a spread of small dishes served as an appetizer or a meal.

The most traditional fish is salt cod, which up until very recently was baked in the outdoor beehive ovens with potatoes and tomatoes in season. Gilt-head bream is popular because it is relatively inexpensive and like sea bass extensively farmed. Until recently, salted herrings bought whole out of wooden barrels were a staple food. They are still enjoyed, but not as much now, as fresh fish and meat are regular alternatives.

Vegetables

Cyprus potatoes are delicious; they are long and waxy, though not overly so. Locals love them baked in the oven, preferably the outdoor beehive (*fourni*). Many Cypriots add salt, cumin, oregano, and some finely sliced onion. When they barbecue, some Cypriots put potatoes into foil and sit them in the charcoal to make them like jacket potatoes - served with butter and/or as a side dish to salad and meat.

Salad vegetables are eaten at every meal, sometimes whole. More often, they are prepared chopped, sliced, and dressed with lemon and good olive oil. In the summer, the usual salad is of celery leaves and stalks, parsley, coriander leaves, tomatoes, and cucumber. Summer purslane is very popular as are wild dandelion leaves.

In the early spring, artichokes are in season. Cypriots do not eat the leaves but the stalk and hearts. A common preparation is braised with garden peas, with a little onion and perhaps a chopped tomato. Meat is sometimes added.

Meat

Meat-based dishes include *lountza* (smoked pork loin), souvlaki, souvla, sheftalia, and loukaniko (pork sausages).

Being only a very recently urbanized country, Cypriots traditionally ate fresh meat once a week, on Sundays. This was usually a boiled chicken, served with a starch (maybe pasta, maybe *pourgouri*) cooked in the liquor. This would stretch the meat to go round the family. Other fresh meat dishes were only enjoyed very occasionally, sometimes en masse as a feast such as a wedding. Now, as people are better off and meat is available, traditional meat dishes are enjoyed frequently.

Tavvas is a lamb casserole, rather like a North African tagine, spiced with a good deal of cumin. Afelia, when well

prepared, is a delicious saute of pork, red wine, and coriander seeds. Psito is large chunks of meat and potatoes cooked in the oven. Plenty of fat is used in its preparation; traditionally, this would have been rendered pig fat, but now sunflower oil is used. Olive oil is used as a dressing for salads, vegetables, and pulses and is not used to cook meat dishes.

Preserved pork meat is very popular, and before refrigeration, it was the main source of red meat available to Greek Cypriots. Turkish Cypriots being Muslims traditionally do not eat pork. During the initial brining of meat to be cured, Cypriots also add red wine; therefore, there is a characteristic flavour to most of the charcuterie from the island.

Greek Cypriots consider snails a delicacy but this is not as popular with Turkish Cypriots. Snails are in season in late autumn, when the first good rains arrive after the hot summer. After being purged, they are either prepared as a pilaf with rice, or cooked in cinamon, onions and tomatoes as a stifado.

Mezedes

Also called *meze* or *mezethes*, this is a large selection of dishes with small helpings of varied foods, brought to the table as a progression of tastes and textures. The meal begins with black and green olives, tahini, *skordalia* (potato and garlic dip), *taramosalata* (fish roe dip), and *tzatziki*, all served with chunks of fresh bread and a bowl of mixed salad. Some of the more unusual meze dishes include octopus in red wine, snails in tomato sauce, brains with pickled capers, *kappari* (capers), and *moungra* (pickled cauliflower). Bunches of greens, some raw, some dressed with lemon juice and salt, are a basic feature of the meze table. The meal continues with fish, grilled halloumi cheese, *lountza* (smoked pork tenderloin), *keftedes* (minced meatballs), *sheftalia* (pork rissoles), and *loukaniko* (pork sausages). Hot grilled meats – kebabs, lamb chops, chicken – may be served toward the end. The dessert is usually fresh fruit or *glyka* – traditional sugar-preserved fruits and nuts.

Cheese

Halloumi – the national cheese of Cyprus, halloumi is a semi-hard white-brined cheese with a rectangular shape and elastic texture, made from a mixture of goat and sheep milk; sliced and consumed fresh, grilled, or fried; aged halloumi may be grated over pasta dishes.

Anari – a crumbly fresh whey cheese, similar to ricotta, made from goat or sheep milk; usually eaten unsalted (though salted versions are also available), sometimes with a drizzle of honey or carob syrup.

EGYPTIAN CUISINE

Egyptian cuisine consists of the local culinary traditions of Egypt. Egyptian cuisine makes heavy use of legumes and vegetables, as Egypt's rich Nile Valley and Delta produce large quantities of high-quality crops. Meat is less prominent in Egyptian cuisine than in the cuisines of North Africa or the Bilad al-Sham.

History and characteristics

Egyptian cuisine's history goes back to Ancient Egypt. Archaeological excavations have found that workers on the Great Pyramids of Giza were paid in bread, beer, and onions, apparently their customary diet as peasants in the Egyptian countryside. Dental analysis of the mummified bodies of these workers seems to indicate that the bread was chewy and coarse but hearty, rather like the bread of modern Egypt; the occasional desiccated loaves found in tombs confirm this, in addition to indicating that ancient Egyptian bread was made with flour from emmer wheat. Though beer disappeared as a mainstay of Egyptian life following the Muslim conquest of Egypt in 654 CE, onions remain the primary vegetable for flavoring and nutrition in Egyptian food. Beans were also a primary source of protein for the mass of the Egyptian populace, as they remain today.

Egyptian cuisine is notably vegetarian- and vegan-friendly, as it relies so heavily on vegetable dishes. Though food in Alexandria and the coasts of Egypt tends to use a great deal of fish and other seafood, for the most part Egyptian cuisine is based on foods that grow out of the ground. Meat has traditionally been very expensive, and a great deal of vegetarian dishes have developed to work around this absence.

Dishes

Egyptian cuisine is characterized by dishes such as Ful Medames, Kushari and Mulukhiyya, while sharing similarities with food found throughout the eastern Mediterranean like kebab and falafel.

Bread forms the backbone of Egyptian cuisine. Bread is consumed at almost all Egyptian meals; a working-class or rural Egyptian meal might consist of little more than bread and beans. The local bread is a form of hearty,

thick, glutenous pita bread called Eish Masri or Eish Baladi rather than the standard Arabic khubz. The word "Eish" comes from the verb meaning "to live" indicating the centrality of bread to Egyptian life. In modern Egypt, the government subsidizes bread in order to ensure that poor Egyptians have bread to put on the table; as of 2008, however, a major food crisis has caused ever-longer bread lines at government-subsidized bakeries where there would normally be none; the occasional fight has broken out over bread, leading to fear of bread riots.

Most Egyptians perhaps consider Kushari, rice, lentils, and macaroni, to be the national dish. Ful Medames, mashed fava beans is also popular and is used in making Ta'miyya or Falafel where chick peas are used for the dish. Ancient Egyptians are known to have used a lot of garlic and onion in their everyday dishes. Fresh mashed garlic with other herbs is used in spicy tomato salad and is also stuffed in boiled or baked aubergines (eggplant). Garlic fried with coriander is added to Mulukhiyya. Fried onions are added to a popular green soup made from finely chopped leaves. Kushari, rice, macaroni, a dish consisting of brown lentils, chickpeas and a spicy tomato sauce.

courgettes and tomatoes to make Mahshi, aubergines, Egyptians are famous for stuffing spicy rice in vegetables like green pepper, chops and minced meat on skewers, grilled on charcoal. Other popular dishes include Kebab and Kofta usually of lamb meat. Mahshi Koronb, Mahshi Warraq Enab or cabbage leaves, Mahshi is generally rolled in grapevine leaves.

Shawarma It is not as popular in Egypt as in the Middle East. usually rolled in pita bread with Tahina sauce, a popular sandwich of shredded meat or chicken in Persian Gulf and the Levant; indeed, many Egyptians regard Shawarma as a Levantine import as opposed to an actual Egyptian dish.

Dukkah is a dry mixture of chopped nuts, seeds and Middle Eastern spices and flavors.

Although Ramadan is a month of fasting in Egypt, it is usually when Egyptians pay a lot of attention to food in variety and richness, since breaking the fast is a family affair, often with entire extended families meeting at the table just after sunset. There are several special desserts almost exclusive to Ramadan such as Kanafeh and Atayef. eMercifu (the Gracious) edat Al Rahman which translates literally as Table of God, called Ma, usually in a tent in the street, by many Egyptians will make a special table for the poor or passers, in this month.

The Christians of Egypt, mainly Copts, observe fasting periods according to the Liturgical Calendar that practically extend to more than two-thirds of the year, although only a few very observant Copts fast as much as is recommended. The diet for fasting Copts is essentially vegan. During this fasting, Copts will usually eat vegetables and legumes fried in oil as they avoid meat, chicken, and dairy products including butter.

ISRAELI CUISINE

Israeli cuisine is a very diverse cuisine consisting of local dishes as well as foods brought to Israel by immigrants from around the world. Large elements of Arab cuisine such as falafel, shakshouka, couscous, Israeli salad (adapted from the Palestinian staple salad) and hummus have become synonymous with Israeli cuisine. The question of whether there is a distinctive Israeli cuisine has thus been a source of debate.

One of the few foods considered to be a unique culinary contribution is ptitim, which is sometimes referred to by chefs as "Israeli couscous." Ptitim were invented in the early days of the state when rice was scarce. Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, asked the Osem company to devise a wheat-based substitute.

Defining Israel's cuisine

As with many nations built to a major extent of immigrants from around the world, there is a large debate over whether a distinct Israeli cuisine actually exists at all. Many believe it does not, on account of modern Israel being a new state that lacks a long tradition of cooking. Because many of the dishes currently considered Israeli originate from Arab cuisine and the cuisines of the other countries from which Jews immigrated to Israel, Israeli cuisine to some is just a fusion of styles from around the world, with no apparent unique aspect.

In contrast, many others assert that Israel does have its own cuisine. They argue that many cuisines influence each other and "borrow" dishes from others. This can be seen across the Asian cuisines for example, whilst what some countries consider to be their national foods actually originate in other countries. For example the hamburger, sausages, pizza and French fries of the United States have their origins in Germany, Italy and Belgium. Many dishes in Israel cannot be found in other countries, however, most notably when there are mixtures or combinations of elements of the Middle Eastern and European cuisines, such as goulash and couscous.

Whether or not Israel has its own distinct cuisine, the two main currents in the food which could be seen as Israeli Cuisine are the foods originating from the Israeli-Mizrahi culture (Jews originating from the Middle East, who today form the Israeli majority) and the traditional Israeli cuisine brought by Jewish immigrants from Europe and the West.

Israeli-Mizrahi Cuisine

Israeli-Mizrahi cuisine (the cuisine of Jews from Arab countries, who form the majority of Jews in Israel today) features grilled meats, puff pastries (sweet and savory), rice dishes, stuffed vegetables, pita breads and salads. There are many similarities to Arab cuisine.

- **Salads** - A wide variety of salads, or meze, is often set out on the table before the main course. Hummus adopted from Arab cuisine, tahini (known in Israel as *t'hina*), matbucha red pepper salad, Moroccan carrot salad, Israeli salad which is a finely diced tomato and cucumber salad and adopted from Arab cuisine, coleslaw and various eggplant salads are common. A liver-flavored eggplant salad invented during the Austerity period is still a popular dish.
- **Spicy dips** - Skhug brought to Israel by Yemenite Jews, Harissa brought by Tunisian and North African Jews, and Pilpelchuma brought by Libyan Jews, are different hot sauces made from chili peppers and garlic.
- **Amba** - Indian and Iraqi Jews introduced amba, a pickled mango sauce that is spooned over shwarma and felafel.
- **Labneh** - adopted from Arab cuisine, A soft white cheese with a slightly sour taste derived from the Arab kitchen.
- **Pita** - adopted from Arab cuisine, pita is a soft, round bread that can be halved and stuffed with felafel, salads or various meats. Bits of pita can be torn off and used to scoop up creamy spreads like hummus or eggplant salad. Schnitzel or steak in pita are said to be an Israeli invention. Lafa (an Arabic word, means roll) is a flat pita that is rolled up with a felafel or shwarma filling.
- **Shakshouka** - A spicy egg and tomato dish.
- **Soups** - Bean soup and lentil soup are Mizrahi favorites.
- **Pastries** - Bourekas brought to Israel by Jews from Turkey and the Balkans are very popular. Malawach and the Jachnun were introduced by the Yemenite Jews.
- **Sandwiches** - Sabich is an Iraqi pita sandwich stuffed with eggplant, hard boiled eggs and techina. Fricassee is a fried roll stuffed with tuna, cooked potatoes and matbucha brought from Tunisia.
- **Grilled meat** - Kebab and shashlik are popular, as is the Jerusalem mixed grill.
- **Shwarma** - Originally from Turkey. Traditionally it was made from lamb.
- **Fish** - Fried, grilled and baked fish is often served whole, with the head intact. Hraime, fish baked in hot pepper sauce, is served in many Mizrahi households in honor of Shabbat.
- **Hummus, chips and salad** - The most common accompaniments to food served in a pita. The addition of french fries seems to be exclusive to Israel.
- **Mujadara** - A popular rice and lentil dish adopted from Arab cuisine, (known in Israel as "mejadra")
- **Desserts** - Baklava is a sweet Turkish pastry often served as dessert, along with small cups of Turkish coffee, in Middle Eastern restaurants.
- **Halva** - This Turkish sweet, made from techina and sugar, is popular in Israel and used to make original desserts like halva parfait.
- **Black Coffee** - Sometimes served with Cardamom.

Ethnic foods

Many ethnic dishes have been incorporated in Israeli cuisine.

• *East European* dishes include chicken soup, schnitzel and chopped liver, Gefilte fish and Kugel. "Jerusalem Kugel" made with caramelized sugar and spiced with black pepper is a speciality of Ashkenazi Jews in Jerusalem. The first Israeli patisseries were opened by Ashkenazi Jews, who popularized cakes and pastries popular in central Europe, such as Sabrina and strudel. Holiday pastries in Israel are the Sufganiya, eaten on Hanukkah and the Hamantash, eaten on Purim.

• *North African* dishes popular in Israel include couscous, mafrum, shakshouka, Matbucha, Moroccan carrot salad and Chraime.

• *Balkan* foods incorporated in Israeli cuisine are bourekas, yoghurt and taramosalata.

• *Yemenite* foods include jachnun, malawach, skhug, saluf and kubane.

• *Iraqi* dishes popular in Israel include amba, various types of kubbeh, Sambusac, sabich and pickled vegetables.

Chamin

Chamin is a traditional Sabbath dish prepared by Jews all over the world in countless variations. The basic ingredients are meat and beans or rice simmered overnight on a hotplate or placed in a slow oven before lighting the candles on Friday night.

• **Cholent** - East European Shabbat stew usually containing chunks of meat, potatoes, onions, barley and beans.

- Schina - Chamin of the Morocco Jews.
- Tebit - Chamin of chicken and rice of the Iraqi Jews.

Israeli cuisine on Passover

The laws of the holiday of Passover add further dietary restrictions. Restaurants in Israel have come up with creative alternatives using potato starch and other non-standard ingredients to create pasta, hamburger buns, pizza, and other fast foods in kosher-for-Passover versions.

Israeli snack foods

Two main Israeli invented snack foods are "Bamba" and "Bissli". Bamba is a soft peanut-flavored snack food and Bisli is crunchy and comes in various flavors, including BBQ, pizza, falafel and onion.

"Krembo" (is a chocolate-coated marshmallow treat) that is also very popular in Israel. It is sold only in the winter, and is very popular as an alternative to ice-cream. It comes wrapped in colorful aluminum foil, and consists of a round biscuit base covered with a dollop of marshmallow cream coated in chocolate.

IRAQI CUISINE

Iraqi cuisine has changed and evolved since the time of the Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians. The cuisine has been influenced by those ancient civilizations, which also had influence Greek and Persian cuisines. With the coming of Islam and the spread of Arab culture, which influenced the region, the food was enhanced to combine old and new sets of tastes.

As Baghdad became the centre of the Islamic world, Muslims from all over (Africa, India, China, Indonesia, etc.) visited Iraq, which gave Iraq new twists to its food. As Iraqis traveled, trading absorbed Mediterranean flavors.

With the Ottoman rule of Iraq, influences of Turkish cuisine also became incorporated into Iraqi recipes.

Popular Dishes

Amba (condiment)	Arak	Baba ghanoush	Baklava
Bamia Burek	Dates	Dolma	Eggplant salad
Falafel	Fasoulia	Fried eggplant	Halva
Harissa (dish)	Hummus	Jallab	Jameed
Jibneh Arabieh	Kadaif	Kaymak	Kebabs
Khichdi	Kibbeh	Kibbeh nayyeh	Kleicha
Kofta	Lentil soup	Mahlab	Maqluba
Markook	Masgouf	Moussaka	Mujaddara
Pastırma	Pita	SabichSfiha	Shawarma
Strained yoghurt	Sujuk	Tabbouleh	Tahini
Tepsi Baytinijan	Tursu	Tzatziki	

IRANIAN CUISINE

Persian cuisine or the cuisine of Iran is diverse, with each province featuring dishes, culinary traditions and styles distinct to their regions. It includes a wide variety of foods ranging from chelo kabab (*barg*, *koobideh*, *joojeh*, *shishleek*, *soltani*, *chenjeh*), *khoresht* (stew that is served with white Basmati or Iranian rice: *ghormeh sabzi*, *gheimeh*, and others), *aash* (a thick soup:as an example Ash-e anar), *kookoo* (vegetable omeletes), *pollo* (white rice alone or with addition of meat and/or vegetables and herbs, including *loobia pollo*, *albaloo pollo*, *Sabzi pollo* , *zerehshk pollo*, and others), and a diverse variety of salads, pastries, and drinks specific to different parts of Iran. The list of Persian recipes, appetizers and desserts is extensive.

Herbs are frequently used along with fruits such as plums, pomegranates, quince, prunes, apricots, and raisins. The main Persian cuisines are combinations of rice with meat, chicken or fish and some onion, vegetables, nuts, and herbs. To achieve a balanced taste, characteristic Persian flavourings such as saffron, dried limes, cinnamon, and parsley are mixed delicately and used in some special dishes.

It is believed that rice (*berenj* in Persian) was brought to Iran from southeast Asia or the Indian subcontinent in ancient times. Varieties of rice in Iran include *champa*, *rasmi*, *anbarbu*, *mowlai*, *sadri*, *khanjari*, *shekari*, *doodi*, and others. Basmati rice from India is very similar to these Persian varieties and is also readily available in Iran. Traditionally, rice was most prevalent as a major staple item in northern Iran, while in the rest of the country bread was the dominant staple. The varieties of rice most valued in Persian cuisine are prized for their aroma, and grow in

the north of Iran.

Methods of cooking rice

There are three primary methods of cooking rice in Iran:

- ***Polo*** : rice is prepared by soaking in salted water and boiled, (parboiled rice is called Chelo.) Chelo is drained and put back in the pot to be steamed. This method results in an exceptionally fluffy rice with the rice grains separated and not sticky. A golden rice crust is created at the bottom of the pot called Tah-deeg (literally "bottom of the pot"). Tah-deeg can be plain or with spreading lavash or other thin breads or slices of raw potatoes on the bottom of the pot. Meat, vegetable, nuts and fruits are sometimes added in layers or completely mixed with the chelo and then steamed, such as Baghali Polo, Lubia Polo, Zerehs Polo and Sabzi Polo. When Chelo is in the pot the heat is reduced and a piece of thick cloth or towel is placed on top of the pot for absorbing the extra steam.
- ***Kateh*** : rice that is cooked until the water is absorbed completely. This is also the traditional dish of Gilan Province (described in detail below).
- ***Damy*** : cooked almost the same as *Kateh* but at the start ingredients that can be cooked thoroughly with the rice are added such as grains and beans such as lentile in "Adass Polo". In making *Kateh* the heat is reduced to minimum when the rice and other ingredients are almost cooked. If kept long enough on the stove without burning and over-cooking *Damy* and *Kateh* can also produce Tah-deeg. *Damy* literally means "Steaming."

Bread

There are four major Iranian flat breads:

- ***Nan-e barbari***: thick and oval-shaped, also known as Tabrizi Bread or Nan-e Tabrizi, for its origins in and links to the city of Tabriz.
- ***Nan-e lavash***: thin, crispy and round or oval, and is also the oldest known bread in the Middle East and Central Asia.
- ***Nan-e sangak***: Triangle-shaped bread that is stone-baked.
- ***Nan-e taftoon***: Thin, but thicker than Lavash, soft and round.

Other breads include:

- ***Nan-e shirmal***: Made like *barbari*, except with milk instead of water, in addition to a bit of sugar, and is eaten during breakfast or with tea.
- ***Nan-e Gandhi***: Sweet bread made like taftoon, and is eaten during breakfast or with tea.
- ***Nan-e gisu***: a sweet Armenian bread, and also is eaten in the morning or with tea later in the day.
- ***Nan-e dushabi***: bread made with grape syrup.
- ***Nan-e tiri***: like *lavash*.
- ***Nan-e tokhme-ru***: breads with sweet-smelling seeds on them.
- ***Nan-e khoshke-shirin***: sweet brittle bread baked in gentle heat.
- ***Nan-e khoshke-tanur***: brittle bread baked in gentle heat.
- ***Nan-e kopoli***: any kind of thick bread.

Second only to rice is the production and use of wheat. There are said to be more than forty types of wheat breads from very dark to very light. From crisp to limp, and at least one type of flat bread will be a part of every meal. *Nan-e lavash* is an example of the thin crisp bread with good keeping qualities, while *nan-e sangak* is a fresh yeast bread, baked on hot stones and eaten while still warm.

Fruits and vegetables

Iran has terrific agriculture, producing many fruits and vegetables, especially what a lot of countries consider "exotic" are easier to come by. A bowl full of fruit is common on most Persian tables and dishes of vegetables and herbs are standard sides to most meals.

Iran is one of the top date producers in the world; some of the most succulent dates come from there.

For generations, Iranians have been eating various fruits, vegetables, and herbs for their health benefits that have only recently been discovered in other parts of the world. For example, onions and garlic, pomegranate, and sabzijat (various green herbs) are regular ingredients in many Persian dishes.

While the climate of the Middle East is conducive to the growing of fruits, the orchards and vineyards of Iran

produce fruits of legendary flavour and size. These are not only enjoyed fresh and ripe as desserts but are also imaginatively combined with meats and form unusual accompaniments to main dishes. When fresh fruits are not available, a large variety of excellent dried fruits such as dates, figs, apricots and peaches are used instead. The list of fruits includes fresh dates and fresh figs. Many citrus fruits, apricots, peaches, sweet and sour cherries, apples, plums, pears, pomegranates and many varieties of grapes and melons.

While the eggplant (aubergine) is "*the potato of Iran*", Iranians are fond of fresh green salads dressed with olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper and a little garlic. Vegetables such as pumpkin, spinach, green beans, broad beans, courgettes, varieties of squashes and carrots are commonly used in rice and meat dishes. Tomatoes, cucumbers and spring onions often accompany a meal. A small sweet variety of cucumber is popularly served as a fruit. The term "*dolmeh*" is used to describe any vegetable or fruit stuffed with a rice or rice-and meat mixture: vine leaves, cabbage leaves, spinach, eggplant, sweet peppers, tomatoes, even apples and quince.

To underline both the skill and imagination of Iranian cookery, a few examples of the main ingredients in Iranian specialties would include duck, pomegranates and walnuts; lamb, prunes and cinnamon; spinach, orange and garlic; and chicken and sliced peaches sautéed in onions and butter, seasoned with cinnamon and lemon juice.

The above are only a few examples of the combination of meats and vegetables, or meats and fruits plus unusual seasonings that may go into "*chelo khoresh*", the favorite Iranian dish that is served at least once daily. This dish of crusty baked rice is topped by one of the sauces listed, or one of dozens more limited only by price and availability of ingredients.

Khoresht Beh (Quince Stew), is an example of using fruits in Iranian cooking :chunks of lamb are stewed with slices or cubes of tart quince, and yellow split peas; this dish is always served with.

Essential accompaniments

There are certain accompaniments (*mokhalafat*) which are essential to every Iranian meal at lunch (*nahar*) and dinner (*shaam*), regardless of the region. These include, first and foremost, a plate of fresh herbs, called *sabzi* (basil, cilantro, fenugreek, tarragon, Persian watercress or *shaahi*), a variety of flat breads, called *naan* or *noon* (*sangak*, *lavash*, *barbari*), cheese (called *panir*, a Persian variant of feta), sliced and peeled cucumbers, sliced tomatoes and onions, yoghurt, and lemon juice. Persian gherkins (*khiyarshur*) and pickles (*torshi*) are also considered essential in most regions.

Tea (*chai*) is served at breakfast. At other times it is served based on the region, usually many times throughout the day. For example, in the province of *Khorasan* it is served immediately before and after lunch and dinner. The traditional methods of tea preparation and drinking differ between regions and peoples.

LEBANESE CUISINE

Lebanese Cuisine, Lebanese and Levant cuisine in general is regarded as one of the world's healthiest cuisines because of the use of minimally processed vegetarian recipes, in addition to an abundance of fruits, vegetables, cereals, legumes, and nuts.

The similarities between most Middle Eastern cuisines cannot be denied. With the language of the countries surrounding the eastern and southern Mediterranean being predominantly Arabic, many of the dishes carry the same names from region to region, though they may be prepared or seasoned somewhat differently. Because of this, the cuisines of the Middle East are often lumped into one homogeneous category, when in truth they can vary greatly.

Lebanese food combines the sophistication and subtleties of European cuisines with the exotic ingredients of the Middle and Far East, it includes an abundance of starches, fruits, vegetables, fresh fish and seafood; animal fats are consumed sparingly. Poultry is eaten more often than red meat, and when red meat is eaten it is usually lamb. It also includes copious amounts of garlic and olive oil, often seasoned by lemon juice. Rarely a meal goes by in Lebanon that does not include these ingredients. Most often foods are either grilled, baked or sautéed in olive oil; butter or cream is rarely used other than in a few desserts. Vegetables are often eaten raw or pickled as well as cooked. While the cuisine of Lebanon doesn't boast an entire repertoire of sauces, it focuses on herbs, spices and the freshness of ingredients; the assortment of dishes and combinations are almost limitless. The meals are full of robust, earthy flavors and, like most Mediterranean countries, much of what the Lebanese eat is dictated by the seasons.

In Lebanon, very rarely are drinks served without being accompanied by food. One of the more healthy aspects of Lebanese cuisine is the manner or custom in which their food is often served, it's referred to as *mezze*. Similar to the *tapas* of Spain and *antipasto* of Italy, *mezze* is an array of small dishes placed before the guests creating an array of colors, flavors, textures and aromas. This style of serving food is less a part of family life than it

is of entertaining and cafes. Mezze may be as simple as pickled vegetables, hummus and bread, or it may become an entire meal consisting of grilled marinated seafood, skewered meats, a variety of cooked and raw salads and an arrangement of desserts.

Although simple fresh fruits are often served towards the end of a Lebanese meal, there is also dessert and coffee. Baklava, which is usually associated with Greek cuisine, is also a popular Lebanese dessert. The main difference between the Lebanese variety and its Greek cousin, is Lebanese baklava often contains pistachio nuts and is drizzled with a rose-water syrup, the Greek variety usually contains walnuts and honey.

History

A unique cultural history has helped to make Lebanese food the most popular of all Middle Eastern cuisines. For most of its past, Lebanon has been ruled by foreign powers that have influenced the types of food the Lebanese ate. From 1516 to 1918, the Ottoman Turks controlled Lebanon and introduced a variety of foods that have become staples in the Lebanese diet, including olive oil, fresh bread, baklava (a sweet pastry dessert), laban (homemade yogurt), stuffed vegetables, and a variety of nuts. The Ottomans also increased the popularity of lamb.

After the Ottomans were defeated in World War I (1914–1918), France took control of Lebanon until 1946, when the country won its independence. During this time, the French introduced some of their most widely eaten foods, particularly treats such as flan, a caramel custard dessert dating back to the 1500s, and buttery croissants.

The Lebanese themselves have also helped to bring foods of other cultures into their diet. Ancient tribes journeyed throughout the Middle East, carrying with them food that would not spoil easily, such as rice and dates. These foods slowly became part of the Lebanese diet. Exotic ingredients from the Far East (east and southeast Asia) and other areas of the world were often discovered by these early tribes.

Introduction

The Lebanese gastronomy is a rich mixture of various products and ingredients coming from the different Lebanese regions. Olive oil, herbs, spices, fresh fruits and vegetables are commonly used, as well as dairy products, cereals, fishes and meat. The Lebanese cuisine is extremely rich in flavors and colors and yet often offers recipes easy to prepare and suitable for a healthy diet.

The Mezze, an elaborate variety of thirty hot and cold dishes, had made the Lebanese cuisine renowned worldwide. A typical Mezze may consist, of salads such as the Tabouleh and Fattoush, together with the caviars: Hummus and [Baba ghanoush|Moutabal] , and some patties such as the Sambusacs and finally the stuffed grape leaves.

The family cuisine offers also a range of dishes, such as the stews or Yakhnehs, which can be cooked in many forms depending on the ingredients used and are usually served with meat and rice vermicelli.

The Lebanese flat pita bread is essential to every Lebanese meal, and can be used to replace the usage of the fork.

The Arak, an anise-flavored liqueur, is the Lebanese national alcoholic drink and is usually served with the traditional convivial Lebanese meals. Another Lebanese drink is the Lebanese wine, which is now enjoying a worldwide reputation.

Known among the great variety of Lebanese sweets, are pastries such as the Baklawas, and the Lebanese ice cream with its oriental flavors.

Social events play a significant role in the Lebanese gastronomy, as some dishes are particularly prepared on special occasions: the Meghli desert, for instance is served to celebrate a newborn baby in the family.

Coffee

Coffee drinking in Lebanon is so much a part of the culture that it is joked that a Lebanese who didn't drink coffee could lose his nationality.

Coffee is served throughout the day, at home and in the public cafes. Lebanese coffee is strong, thick and often flavored with cardamom. It is also usually heavily sweetened. When guests arrive at one's home, they are invariably persuaded to stay for a coffee, no matter how short their visit.

Whenever you're visiting a friend, you'll always be served a traditional Arab coffee as a sign of welcome, served in a demitasse. It is poured out in front of the guest from a long-handled coffee pot, and generally served with a glass of water. Lebanese coffee is made with a rakweh (special coffee pot).

The Lebanese host usually asks the guests how they take their coffee; with or without sugar, since sugar is added during preparation, not afterward. When you drink Lebanese coffee, stop before you reach the grounds (tefl)

left in the bottom of the cup.

PALESTENIAN CUISINE

Palestinian cuisine consists of foods from or commonly eaten by the Arabs of historical Palestine — which includes those living in the Palestinian territories, Israel, refugee camps in nearby countries as well as by Palestinians living abroad. The cuisine is a diffusion of the cultures of civilizations that settled in Palestine, particularly during and after the Islamic era beginning with the Arab Ummayyad conquest, then the eventual Persian-influenced Abbasids and ending with the coming of the Ottoman Turks. It is similar to other Levantine cuisines, including Lebanese, Syrian, and Jordanian.

Palestinians eat several times during the day, with lunch being the largest meal. Cooking styles vary by region and each type of cooking style and the ingredients used are generally based on the climate and location of the particular region and on traditions. Rice and variations of *kibbee* are common in the Galilee, the West Bank engages primarily in heavier meals involving the use of taboon bread, rice and meat and Gaza's inhabitants frequent fish, other seafood, chili peppers and lentils. Meals are usually eaten in the household but dining out has become prominent particularly during parties where light meals like salads, bread dips and skewered meats are served.

The area is also home to many desserts, ranging from those made regularly and those that are commonly reserved for the holidays. Most Palestinian sweets are pastries filled with either sweetened cheeses, dates or various nuts such as almonds, walnuts or pistachios. Beverages could also depend on holidays such as during Ramadan, where carob, tamarind and apricot juices are consumed at daybreak. Coffee is consumed throughout the day and liquor is not very prevalent amongst the population, however, some alcoholic beverages such as *arak* or beer are frequented by Christians and less conservative Muslims.

History

The region that has become Palestine has a varied past and as such, its cuisine has contributions from various cultures. After Palestine was conquered by the Muslims, it became part or province of a Greater Syria under the name Jund Filastin. Therefore, many aspects of Palestinian cuisine are similar to the cuisine of Syria — especially in the Galilee. Modern Syrian-Palestinian dishes have been generally influenced by the rule of three major Islamic groups: the Arabs, the Persian-influenced Arabs and the Turks.

The Arabs that conquered Syria and Palestine had simple culinary traditions primarily based on the use of rice, lamb and yogurt, as well as dates. The already simple cuisine did not advance for centuries due to Islam's strict rules of parsimony and restraint until the coming of the Abbasid Caliphate that established Baghdad as its capital. Baghdad was historically located on Persian soil and henceforth, Persian culture was integrated into Arab culture during the 800-1000s as ideas spread throughout central areas of the Abbasid empire. The Arab geographer al-Muqaddasi said this of Palestine's foods:

From Palestine comes olives, dried figs, raisins, the carob fruit... from Jerusalem comes cheeses and the celebrated raisins of the species known as *Ainuni* and *Duri*, excellent apples... also pine nuts of the kind called *Kuraish-bite*, and their equal is not found elsewhere... from Sughar and Baysan come dates, the treacle called *dibs* and rice.

The cuisine of the Ottoman Empire — which incorporated Palestine as one of its provinces in 1512-14 — was partially made up of what had become, by then a "rich" Arab cuisine. After the Crimean War, in 1855, many other communities including Bosnians, Greeks, French and Italians began settling in the area especially in urban centers such as Jerusalem, Jaffa and Bethlehem. These communities' cuisines contributed to the character of Palestinian cuisine, especially communities from the Balkans. Until around the 1950s-60s, the main ingredients for rural Palestinians was olive oil, oregano and bread baked in a simple oven called a taboon. G. Robinson Lees, writing in 1905, observed that "The oven is not in the house, it has a building of its own, the joint property of several families whose duty is to keep it always hot."

Meal structure

Palestinian culture and life revolves around food in every aspect, whether it is an ordinary day or a special occasion such as a wedding or holiday. Meals are structured in a cyclical order by Palestinians and span into two main courses and several intermediate ones like coffee, fruits and sweets as well as dinner. Like in most Arab cultures, meals are a time to spend with family and could last 1-2 hours depending on the specific time of the day. Unlike other cultures, lunch is the primary course and breakfast and dinner are lighter in contents.

· *Iftur* (lit. 'break-fast') is a term for breakfast, usually consists of fried eggs, olives, labaneh, olive oil or jams. *Hummus bi-tahini* is also eaten primarily during this time the day.

· *Gheda* is a term for lunch, usually late in the afternoon. Lunch is the heaviest meal of the day and main

ingredients could include rice, lamb, chicken, cooked vegetables and forms of *mahashi*.

- *Asrooneh* Derives from the word '*Aasr* (lit. 'afternoon') is a term for the consumption of a variety of fruits and legumes after *gheda*.

- '*Asha* is a term for dinner, usually eaten anytime from 8-10 pm. '*Asha* is simpler than *gheda* and some foods consumed include *fatayer*, *hummus bi-tahini*, a variety of salads and a Levantine-style omelette called *ijee*.

- '*Hilew* Sometimes after or just before '*asha* as well as when hosting guests come various sweets. Baklawa is common and is usually purchased from pastry shops instead of made at home like *muhallabiyeh*.

- *Shay wa Kahwe* Tea and coffee are served in throughout the day in before, after and between *iftur*, *gheda* and '*asha*.

SOMALIAN CUISINE

The Cuisine of Somalia varies from region to region and consists of an exotic mixture of native Somali, Ethiopian, Yemeni, Persian, Turkish, Indian and Italian influences. It is the product of Somalia's rich tradition of trade and commerce. Despite the variety, there remains one thing that unites the various regional cuisines: all food is served halal.

Breakfast

Quraac or breakfast is one of the most important meals of the day in Somalia. As Muslims, Somalis wake up to the adhan, or the call to prayer by the Masjid.

More often than not, people start the day with many styles of *shaah* or tea. The main dish is typically *Canjeero* -- a Somali version of the Ethiopian injera. Unlike the Ethiopian type, canjeero is smaller and thinner, so people eat quite a few of them at a time.

There are many ways to eat the canjeero. You can break it into small pieces and add *subag* (a kind of Somali butter) and sugar, and wash that down with black tea. Or you can eat it with *shakshuka* -- an Egyptian dish made of eggs that are cooked with onions and tomatoes. Many prefer it served with *beer* or liver, while others favor goat meat. *Suqaar*, beef cut in small pieces and cooked in a bed of soup, is also a favorite side-dish.

Boorish or *mishaari* (Porridge) is popular in Mogadishu. It is identical to the porridge eaten in Italy, but with butter and sugar added for flavor.

In the north, *rooti* or bread is popular. In the country at large, a sweeter and more oily version of canjeero called *malawax* is staple of most home-cooked meals.

Lunch

Qado or lunch is often elaborate, and here is where you find most exotic dishes. Varieties of *bariis* (rice), the most popular probably being basmati, usually serve as the main dish. Spices like cumin, cardamom, cloves, cinnamon and sage are used to aromatize these different rice dishes.

In the south, a mixture of rice and vegetables (and sometimes even meat) called *Iskudhexkaris* is fairly common. Aside from the many different styles of *maraq* (stew), rice is also served with meat on the side. In Mogadishu, *buskeeti* (steak) and *kaluun* (fish) are widely consumed.

Soor (cornmeal) is popular. Unlike the Ugali of Kenya, Somalis have a softer cornmeal mashed with fresh milk, butter and sugar. Or, a hole is made in the soor and filled with a *maraq*.

Then there is the *sabaayad*, a variation of the Indian chapati. Like the rice, it is served with *maraq* and meat on the side. The sabaayad of Somalia is often a little bit sweet, and is cooked with a little bit of oil.

Baasto (Pasta) is a popular in the south. To give this European dish a distinctly Somali twist, Somalis serve it with stew instead of pasta sauce, and sometimes it is served with a banana.

The most popular drinks for lunch are *balbeelmo* (grapefruit), *raqey* (tamarind) and *isbarmuunto* (lemonade). In Mogadishu, *cambe* (mango), *seytuun* (guava) and *laas* (Lassi) are popular as well. In Hargeysa in the North, the preferred drinks are *fimto* (Vimto) and *tufaax* (apple).

Dinner

Somali people serve dinner as late as 9 pm. During Ramadan, it is often eaten after Tarawih prayers -- sometimes as late as 11 pm. *Cambuulo*, a favorite dish come dinnertime, is made out of well-cooked azuki beans mixed with butter and sugar. The beans, which on their own are referred to as *digir*, can take as long as five hours to

finish cooking when left on the stove at a low temperature.

In 1988, the Somali newspaper *Xidigta Oktober* conducted a survey in which it determined that 83% of the Mogadishu residents preferred cambuulo as their dinnertime main dish. It was a startling discovery since the dish is considered of to be somewhat "low class" due to its flatulent after-effects caused by the natural sugars (known as oligosaccharides) in its beans.

Likewise, *qamadi* (wheat) is used. Cracked or uncracked, it is cooked and served just like the Azuki beans.

Rooti iyo xalwo, slices of bread and Somali jelly, is another popular dinnertime dish.

Muufo, a variation of cornbread, is a dish made of maize and is baked in a foorno (clay oven). It is eaten by cutting it into small pieces, adding *macsaro* (Sesame oil), sugar and then mashing the whole with black tea. And before bed, a glass of milk spiced with cardamom is often consumed.

Snacks

Sambuusa, a Somali version of the South Asian samosa, is probably the most popular form of a snack in Somalia. It is especially popular during Ramadan, as it is the dish of the *afur* (iftar). The Somali version is spiced with hot green pepper, and the main ingredient is often ground meat.

Bajiye, a variation of the Indian pakora, is a popular snack in southern Somalia. The Somali version is a mixture of maize, vegetables, meat, spices and is then deep fried. It's eaten by dipping in *bisbaas*, a hot sauce.

Kabaab, Kebab similar to that of Persia is not that widespread, but a few Somalis in the diaspora eat it. Fruits like mango, guava, banana, grapefruit and others are used as snacks throughout the day.

Sweets

Gashaato, a very popular coconut-based confection, set here to a backdrop of the Somali national flag.

Xalwo, a sweet hardened Somali jelly that they enjoy a lot, is by far the most popular of all sweets in Somalia. It is a delicacy in the south, where it is favored as a wedding dish. *Xalwadii waad qarsatey!* ("You hid your *xalwo!*") is the phrase that follows a person who has eloped or had a small, private wedding. It is made out of basic ingredients, water, sugar and honey. Being extremely sweet and loaded with sugar, it should be consumed in moderation as it can cause some harm if eaten a lot.

Gashaato or *qumbe*, made of coconut, oils and sugar, and spiced with cardamom, is a much-loved sweet. The sugar is brought to boil with a bit of water, then the cardamom is added followed by shredded coconut.

Loos iyo sisin is a favorite sweet in the south, made of a mixture of peanuts (*loos*) and sesame seeds (*sisin*) in a bed of caramel. It sticks together to form a delicious bar.

Jalaato, similar to the American popsicle, is made by freezing naturally sweet fruits with a stick in the middle. In the later years in Mogadishu, it has grown to include *caano*/milk *jalaato*, which then requires sugaring up. The word *jalaato* comes from *gelato*, which is Italian for frozen.

Buskut or *Buskud*, comprise many different types of cookies, including super-soft ones called *daardaar* (literally: touch-touch, for its smooth delicate body.)

Doolshe, encompass many delectable styles of cakes.

SYRIAN CUISINE

The term Syrian cuisine refers to the style or method of cooking in Syria.

Pita bread (*khubz*), which is round flat bread, and *hummus*, a dip made of ground chickpeas, sesame tahini, lemon juice, and garlic, are two popular Syrian foods. *Baba ghanoush*, or eggplant spread, is also a dish made by Syrians.

The Syrian cuisine includes other dishes like stuffed zucchini (*mahshe*), dolma, kebab, *kibbeh*, *kibbeh nayyeh*, *mujaddara*, shawarma and *shanklish*. Syrians often serve selections of appetizers, known as *meze*, before the main course. *Za'atar*, minced beef, and cheese manakish are popular hors d'oeuvre. Syrians are also well-known for their *cheese*. The very popular string cheese *Jibbneh Mashallale* is made of curd cheese and is pulled and twisted together. Syrians also make cookies to usually accompany their cheese called *ka'ak*. These are made of farina and other ingredients, rolled out, shaped into rings and baked. Another form of a similar cookie is to fill with crushed dates mixed with butter to eat with their *jibbneh mashallale*. Another way to eat *jibbneh mashallale* is to toast some "khubz" (Arabic for bread) and top with cheese. The Syrian alcoholic drink is the *arak* beverage. One of the popular *desserts* made by Syrians is the *ba'lawa*, which is made of *filo* pastry filled with chopped nuts and soaked in honey.

A spice mixture called *baharat mshakale'* is widely used in Syrian cooking.

TURKISH CUISINE

Turkish cuisine is largely the heritage of Ottoman cuisine, which can be described as a fusion and refinement of Central Asian, Middle Eastern and Balkan cuisines. Turkish cuisine also influenced these cuisines and other neighbouring cuisines, as well as western European cuisines. The Ottomans fused various culinary traditions of their realm with influences from Middle Eastern cuisines, along with traditional Turkic elements from Central Asia such as yogurt. The Ottoman Empire indeed created a vast array of technical specialities. It can be observed that various regions of the Ottoman Empire contain varying selections from the vast array of Ottoman dishes.

Taken as a whole, Turkish cuisine is not homogeneous. Aside from common Turkish specialities that can be found throughout the country, there are also many region-specific specialities. The Black Sea region's cuisine (northern Turkey) is based on corn and anchovies. The southeast—Urfa, Gaziantep and Adana—is famous for its kebabs, *mezes* and dough-based desserts such as *baklava*, *kadayıf* and *kişnefe*. Especially in the western parts of Turkey, where olive trees are grown abundantly, olive oil is the major type of oil used for cooking. The cuisines of the Aegean, Marmara and Mediterranean regions display basic characteristics of Mediterranean cuisine as they are rich in vegetables, herbs, and fish. Central Anatolia is famous for its pastry specialities such as *ke kek* (kashkak), *manti* (especially of Kayseri) and *gözleme*.

The name of specialities sometimes includes the name of a city or a region (either in Turkey or outside). This suggests that a dish is a speciality of that area, or may refer to the specific technique or ingredients used in that area. For example, the difference between Urfa kebab and Adana kebab is the use of garlic instead of onion and the larger amount of hot pepper that kebab contains.

Turkish Pilaf & Pastas

It is a common belief that the taste of pilav comes from the butter and stock used for cooking it. However, nowadays most people prefer olive oil to butter.

- **Sade pilav/pilaf:** ordinary rice, which can accompany almost all dishes.
- **Etli pilav:** rice containing meat pieces.
- **Nohutlu pilav:** rice cooked with chickpeas.
- **Bulgur :** a cereal food generally made of durum wheat. Most of the time, tomato, green pepper and minced meat are mixed with bulgur. The Turkish name (bulgur pilavı) indicates that this is a kind of rice but it is, in fact, wheat.
- **Perde pilavı:** rice with chicken, onion and peanuts enveloped in a thin layer of dough, topped with almonds.
- **Manti:** Turkish pasta that consists of folded triangles of dough filled with minced meat, often with minced onions and parsley. It is typically served hot topped with garlic yoghurt and melted butter or warmed olive oil, and a range of spices such as oregano, dried mint, ground sumac, and red pepper powder. The combination of meat-filled dough with yoghurt differentiates it from other dumplings such as tortellini, ravioli, and Chinese wonton. Manti is usually eaten as a main dish.
- **Eri te:** home made pasta is called eri te in Turkey. It can be combined with vegetables but it can also be used in soups and rice.

Vegetable dishes

A vegetable dish can be a main course in a Turkish meal. A large variety of vegetables is used, such as spinach, leek, cauliflower, artichoke, cabbage, celery, eggplant, green and red bell peppers, string bean and jerusalem artichoke. A typical vegetable dish is prepared with a base of chopped onions, carrots sautéed first in olive oil and later with tomatoes or tomato paste. The vegetables and hot water will then be added. Quite frequently a spoon of rice and lemon juice is also added. Vegetable dishes usually tend to be served with its own water (the cooking water) thus often called in colloquial Turkish *sulu yemek* literally "a dish with juice"). Minced meat can also be added to a vegetable dish but vegetable dishes that are cooked with olive oil (*zeytinya lılar*) are often served cold and do not contain meat. Spinach, leek, string bean and artichoke with olive oil are among the most widespread dishes in Turkey.

Dolma is the name used for stuffed vegetables. Like the vegetables cooked with olive oil as described above dolma with olive oil does not contain meat. Many vegetables are stuffed, most typically green peppers (*biber dolması*), eggplants, tomatoes, courgettes, or Zucchini in the U.S. (*kabak dolması*), vine leaves (*yaprak dolması*). If vine leaves are used, they are first pickled in brine. However, dolma is not limited to these common types; many other vegetables and fruits are stuffed with a meat and/or rice mixture. For example, artichoke dolma (*enginar dolması*) is an Aegean region specialty. Fillings used in dolma may consist of parts of the vegetable carved out for preparation, rice with spices and/or minced meat.

Mercimek köfte, although being named köfte, does not contain any meat. Instead, red lentil is used as the major ingredient together with spring onion, tomato paste etc.

Imam bayildi is a version of karniyarik with no minced meat inside. It can be served as a meze as well.

Fried eggplant and pepper is a common summer dish in Turkey. It is served with yoghurt or tomato sauce and garlic.

Müçver is prepared with minced squash/courgette or potatoes, egg, dill and/or cheese and flour. It can be either fried or cooked in the oven.

Tur u is pickle made with brine, usually with the addition of garlic. It is often enjoyed as an appetizer. It is made with a large variety of vegetables, from cucumber to courgette. In the towns on the Aegean coast, the water of tur u is consumed as a drink.

Dolma & Sarma

Dolma is a verbal noun of the Turkish verb dolmak 'to be stuffed', and means simply 'stuffed thing'. Dolma has a special place in Turkish cuisine. It can be eaten either as a meze or a main dish. It can be cooked either as a vegetable dish or meat dish. If a meat mixture is put in, it is usually served hot with yoghurt and spices such as oregano and red pepper powder with oil.

Zeytinyagli dolma (dolma with olive oil) is the dolma made with vine leaves cooked with olive oil and stuffed with a rice-spice mixture. Such a type does not contain meat, is served cold and also referred to as sarma, which means "wrapping" in Turkish. The word "sarma" is also used for some types of desserts, such as fıstık sarma (wrapped pistachio). If dolma does not contain meat, it is sometimes described as yalancı dolma meaning "fake" dolma. Dried fruit such as figs or cherries and cinnamon used to be added into the mixture to sweeten "zeytinya lı dolma" in Ottoman cuisine. Vine leaves("yaprak") could be filled not only with rice and spices but also with meat and rice, in which case it is served hot with yoghurt etli yaprak sarma.

Melon dolma along with quince or apple dolma was one of the palace's specialities (raw melon stuffed with minced meat, onion, rice, almonds, peanuts, cooked in an oven). In contemporary Turkey, a wide variety of dolma is prepared. Although it is not possible to give an exhaustive list of dolma recipes, courgette ("kabak"), aubergine ("patlıcan"), tomato ("domates"), pumpkin ("balkaba ı"), pepper ("biber"), cabbage ("lahana") (black or white cabbage), chard ("pazı") and mussel ("midye") dolma constitute the most common types. Instead of dried cherry in the palace cuisine, currants are usually added into the filling of dolma cooked in olive oil. A different type of dolma is mumbar dolması, for which the membrane of intestines of sheep is filled up with a spicy rice-nut mixture.

Desserts

One of the world-renowned desserts of Turkish cuisine is baklava. Baklava is made either with pistachio or with walnut. Turkish cuisine has a range of baklava-like desserts which include öbiyet, bülbül yuvası, saray sarması, sütlü nuriye, sarı burma etc.

Kadaif ('Kadayıf') is another very common Turkish dessert which differs from baklava in that shredded dough/phylllo is used. There are different types of kadaif: tel (wire) or burma (wring) kadayıf, both of which can be prepared either with walnut or pistachio.

Although carrying the label "kadayıf", ekmek kadayıfı is totally different from "tel kadayıf". Künefe and ekmek kadayıfı are specialities rich in syrup and butter. Both are usually combined with kaymak (clotted/scrambled butter) when served. Künefe contains wire kadayıf with a layer of melted cheese in between and it is served hot with pistachio or walnut.

Among milk-based desserts, the most popular ones are muhallebi, sütlaç (rice pudding), ke kül, kazandibi (meaning the bottom of "kazan" because of its burnt surface), and tavuk gö sü (a sweet, gelatinous, milk pudding dessert quite similar to kazandibi, to which very thinly peeled chicken breast is added to give a chewy texture).

Helva (halva): un helvası (flour helva is usually cooked after someone has died), irmik helvası (cooked with semolina and pine nuts), yaz helvası (made from walnut or almond), tahin helvası (crushed sesame seeds), kos helva, pi maniye (floss halva).

Other popular desserts include; Revani (with semolina and starch), ekerpare, kalburabasma, dilber duda ı, vezir parma ı, hanım göbe i, kemalpa a, tulumba, zerde, hö merim, paluze, irmik tatlısı/peltesi, lokma.

Güllaç is a "Ramadan" dessert which consists of very thin large dough layers put in the milk and rose water, served with pomegranate seeds and walnut. The story tells that in the cuisines of the Palace, those extra thin dough layers were prepared with "prayers" as it was believed that if one did not pray while opening phyllo dough, it would never be possible to obtain such thin layers.

A ure can be described as a sweet soup containing boiled beans, wheat and dried fruits. Sometimes cinnamon and rose water is added when being served. According to legend, it was first cooked on Noah's Ark and contained seven different ingredients in one dish. All the Anatolian peoples have cooked and are still cooking a ure especially during the month of Muharrem.

Some traditional Turkish desserts are fruit-based: (quince), incir tatlısı (fig), kabak tatlısı (pumpkin), elma tatlısı (apple) and armut tatlısı (pear). Fruits are cooked in a pot or in the oven with sugar, carnation and cinnamon (without adding water). After being chilled, they are served with walnut or pistachio and kaymak.

Homemade cookies are commonly called kurabiye in Turkish. The most common types are (prepared only with egg, sugar and almond), un kurabiyesi (flour kurabiye) and cevizli kurabiye (kurabiye with walnut). Another dough based dessert is ay çöre i.

Tahin-pekmez is a traditional combination especially in rural areas. Tahin is sesame paste and pekmez is grape syrup. These are sold separately and mixed before consumption.

Lokum (Turkish delight), which was eaten for digestion after meals and called "rahat hulkum" in the Ottoman era, is another well-known sweet/candy with a range of varieties.

Cezerye, cevizli (walnut) sucuk (named after its sucuk/sujuk like shape, also known as Churchkhela in Circassian region) and pestil (fruit pestils) are among other common sweets.

Marzipan badem ezmesi or fıstık ezmesi (made of ground pistachio) is another common confection in Turkey.

Another jelly like Turkish sweet is macun. Mesir macunu of Manisa/ zmir (which was also called "nevruziye" as this macun was distributed on the first day of spring in the Ottoman Palace) contains 41 different spices. It is still believed that "mesir macunu" is good for health and has healing effects. As with lokum, nane macunu (prepared with mint) used to be eaten as a digestive after heavy meals. Herbs and flowers having curative effects were grown in the gardens of Topkapı under the control of the chief doctor "hekimba 1" and pharmacists of the Palace who used those herbs for preparing special types of macun and sherbet.

Dried fruit, used in dolma, pilav, meat dishes and other desserts is also eaten with almonds or walnuts as a dessert. Figs, grapes, apricots are the most widespread dried fruits.

Kaymak (clotted cream-butter) is often served with desserts to cut the sweetness.

Tea or Turkish coffee, with or without sugar, is usually served after dinner or more rarely together with desserts.

YEMENI CUISINE

The cuisine of Yemen is entirely distinct from the more widely known Middle Eastern cuisines. Yemeni cuisine also differs slightly from region to region.

Ingredients

Chicken and lamb are eaten more often than beef, which is expensive. Fish is also eaten especially in the coastal areas.

Cheese, butter, and other dairy products are less common in the Yemeni diet. Buttermilk, however, is enjoyed almost daily in some villages where it is most available. The most commonly used lipids are vegetable oil used in savory dishes, and *semn* pastries.

Saltah

Although each region has their own variation, *saltah* national dish. The base is a brown meat stew of Turkish origin called *maraq* fenugreek froth, and *sahawiq sahawqa* (a mixture of chillies, tomatoes, garlic and herbs ground into a salsa.) Rice, potatoes, scrambled eggs, and vegetables are common additions to *saltah*. It is eaten with flat bread, which serves as a utensil to scoop up the food.

Other Yemeni dishes

Aseed, Fahsa, Thareed, Samak Mofa, Lahm Mandi, Fattah, Shafut, Bint AlSahn, Jachnun, Mutabbaq

Yemeni bread varieties

Tawa, Tameez, Laxoox, Malooga, Kader, Fateer, Kudam, Rashoosh, Oshar, Khamira Flat bread is usually baked at home in a tandoor called *taboon*. Malooga, khubz, and *khamira* are popular homemade breads. Store-bought pita bread and roti (bread rolls like French bread) are also common.

Drinks

Milk tea (after Qat), black tea (with clove, cardamom or mint), Qishr (coffee husks), Qahwa (coffee), Karkadin (dried karkadin flowers), Naqe'e Al Zabib cold raisin drink, Diba'a squash nectar.

Although coffee is extensively cultivated in Yemen, black tea is the beverage of choice. Tea is consumed along with breakfast, after lunch (occasionally with sweets and pastries), and along with dinner. Popular flavorings include cloves with cardamom and mint. A drink made from coffee husks called qishr is also enjoyed.