



ĀB-GŪŠT

ĀB-GŪŠT, literally “water-meat” signifying “meat juice” (i.e., *āb-e gūšt*), a popular Persian meat-based soup or stew, consisting of lamb, some legume, and herb and seasoning. Currently the standard variety of *āb-gūšt* is made of lamb shank (*māhīčā*), dried chick peas, white beans, and potato, with salt, turmeric, and dried Persian lime (*līmū-ye ‘omānī*) for seasoning.

The application of the name *āb-gūšt* to this dish must be of recent origin. The word occurs in the poetry of **Boshāq Aṭ‘ama**, the 14th century humorous poet of foods (*Dīvān*, Istanbul, 1303/1885-86, pp. 18, 64), but from one of the instances (p. 18), it appears that Boshāq means by it what is not understood today, but a meat broth recommended for the ailing. *Āb-gūšt* does not occur in the earlier Persian dictionaries, including *Borhān-e qāṭe‘* (1062/1651-52), but the Ānandarāj dictionary (1306/1888-89) cites it with the simple definition of *šūrbā* (broth). This meaning is confirmed by J. L. Schlimmer, a physician of Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah, who in his dictionary (1878) translates *bouillon de viande* (Eng. “Broth,” Germ. “Fleischbruehe”) as *āb-e gūšt*. Handjeri in his multi-language dictionary (1840) translates *bouillon de viande* as *gūš(t)āba*; and *consommé*, i.e., *bouillon fort* (Eng. “gravy soup,” Germ. “Kraftbruehe”) as *āb-e gūšt-e pormāya* (“*āb- gūšt* of substance”); and *bouillon (viande)* (Eng. “boiled meat,” Germ. “Gesottenes Fleisch”) as *gūšt-e āb-paz* and *yaḳnī*. Mīrzā ‘Alī-Akbar Khan Āšpaz-bāšī, a chief of Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah (1264-313/1848-96) who composed a compact but comprehensive treatise on Persian foods and delicacies, does not describe the dish under *āb-gūšt*, which he mentions only once in the sense of bouillon (*Sofra-ye Aṭ‘ama*, p. 14), but under *yaḳnī* (ibid., pp.



43f.). Thus it is clear that the term *āb-gūšt* was not applied to lamb stew until at least the last decades of the 19th century. Novvāb ‘Azīz Jang Bahādor, the author of *Āṣaf al-logāt* (Hyderabad, 1324/1906, s.v.) cites two meanings for *āb-gūšt*: meat broth (*šūrbā-ye gūšt*) and meat stew (*yaknī*). Nāẓem-al-aṭebbā’, however, who began his dictionary about the turn of the century and completed it in 1349/1923, defines *āb-gūšt* as “a dish made of meat and some legumes” and adds that “it is one of the tasty and nutritious dishes” (*Farhang-e Naftīsī*, Tehran, 1318-34 Š./1939-55, I, p. 8). Obviously by his time the current meaning of *āb-gūšt* had taken root.

The author of the *Sofra-ye Aṭ‘ama* describes fourteen varieties of *yaknī*, of which the first, made with peas, onion, and seasoning, largely corresponds to the more common variety of *āb-gūšt*. The other varieties are 2. with red beans; 3. with red beans, dried apricots, dried plums, walnut, quince, and apple; 4. with quince and red beans, also apple if desired; 5. with eggplants, split peas, and sour grape juice or sour grapes or ground sour grapes; 6. with ample onion and *serkašīra* (a soursweet syrup made of vinegar and grape syrup); 7. with cabbage and chickling vetch (*māš*); 8. with carrots, yellow split peas, and *serkašīra*; 9. with lentil and beetroot and pomegranate syrup; 10. with fresh, unripe plums (*ālūčā*), split peas, fresh mint leaves, and parsley; 11. with apple and sour cherry (*ālūbālū*) and split peas; 12. *beryānī*, with lungs; 13. with split peas, and whole dried limes if desired; 14. *bozbāš*, with white beans, fresh mint, dill, leek (*tara*) and some other herbs, and optionally with *āb-gūra* or dried lime. Neither potatoes, nowadays commonly used in *āb-gūšt*, nor tomatoes, frequently used in it, had become popular at the time of the author.

Āb-gūšt is the daily staple food of poor masses in Iran. It is economical by virtue of the very small quantity of meat ordinarily used in its preparation, the amount varying according to the economic capability of the family preparing it, so that there might be two or three lamb shanks in a pot of *āb-gūšt*, or a small amount of lamb breast with bones, or even a small piece of lamb fat or soup bones (traditionally lamb shanks), a few potatoes, and seasonings. Before serving, the solid ingredients are removed from the soup, mashed to a pulp (*gūšt[-e] kūbīda*), and served separately with flatbread. The liquid is served as a soup, often with pieces of flatbread broken into it (*tarīd*, *talīd*). It is a highly elastic dish, as it can be expanded to accommodate a larger number of people by the simple addition of more water and dried legumes.

The most common dried legume used in preparing *āb-gūšt* is chick peas (*noḳod*). However, the legumes can be varied, so that this dish can be prepared



with a combination of dried cranberry October beans, navy beans, kidney beans, and yellow split peas. Other ingredients can be added to give further variety to this dish, such as slices of sautéed eggplant and lentils (*āb-gūšt-e bādemjān o 'adas*); or slices or cubes of quince (*āb-gūšt-e beh*); or sliced cooking apples and sour cherries (*āb-gūšt-e sīb va āl[ū]bālū*). Sometimes variations in ingredients or seasoning will lend a different character to this dish, e.g., the addition of some herbs and four or five dried Persian limes (*āb-gūšt-e boz bāš*); or sour grape juice (*āb-gūšt-e āb-gūra*); or wheat berries (*āb-gūšt-e gandom*). One variety of *āb-gūšt* considered to be most authentic and traditional is *āb-gūšt-e dīzī*, prepared in a clay pot (*dīzī*) from which it derives its name. These clay pots are traditionally used by villagers and tribespeople, and are suspended over a slow open fire (*oḡāq*). In towns sometimes *dīzī* is left with the baker to have it cooked by the fire of the bakery oven. Some bakers used to make a side business of cooking *dīzīs* and selling them at lunch time.

Besides being an economical dish, *āb-gūšt* is rather easily prepared. Although it requires long, slow cooking, rural and nomadic women can throw the ingredients into a pot, place it over a slow fire, and go off and work in the fields, secure in the knowledge that the dish will be ready in time for the midday meal. Once assembled it needs no attention and can be left to simmer while the cook does her other work, whether picking tea leaves in the fields or weaving a carpet. The same is true for the housewife living in a town or city. She can prepare the meal with few utensils and very simple kitchen facilities, leave it on a low heat, and attend to her shopping, visiting, or household chores. It is customary served as the midday meal.

In spite of its homely character, *āb-gūšt* can be extremely tasty, and because of its combination of vegetable proteins with a small quantity of meat it is also a highly nutritious dish, besides being economical and versatile. As it is always served with bread, this further rounds out the meal, making it nutritionally well-balanced.

In villages, in factories, and in many other places of work, *āb-gūšt* is served in one large communal bowl, with the *gūšt-e kūbīda* (forcemeat) in one large communal tray, with hot flatbread on the side.

Although considered to be a dish for the lower classes and the poor, middle-class Iranians also eat *āb-gūšt* as a family meal, when wishing to economize, but they do not consider it to be a company dish. In recent years *āb-gūšt* has achieved a new popularity in a romantic vein with the affluent, who serve it as



soup before the main dish or as a side dish.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

In addition to the references given in the text, see: F. Hekmat, *The Art of Persian Cooking*, New York, 1961, pp. 78-82.

R. Montazemī, *Majmū'a-ye ḡadāhā-ye īrānī va farangī*, Tehran, 1347 Š./1968, pp. 418-21.

For descriptions of the current varieties of *āb-gūšt*, see N. Ramazani, *Persian Cooking*, New York, 1974.