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ĀŠPAZ-ḴĀNA
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ĀŠPAZ-ḴĀNA

ĀŠPAZ-ḴĀNA "kitchen." This term seems to have gained currency only in the last two centuries or so, although the words *āš* and *āšpaz* (cook) occur in earlier texts (see, e.g., M. Dabīrsīāqī et al., *Loḡat-nāma-ye-fārsī* I, Tehran, 1363 Š./1984, p. 539). Before that the word *maṭbaḵ* was the one most often used in texts.

The size and specific design of a Persian kitchen naturally varied from place to place and according to the means of the owner of the house, but its general features remained more or less the same. In the homes of the well-to-do, the *āšpaz-ḵāna* was built as an independent unit, well separated from the living quarters, at another end of the courtyard and two or three steps lower than the courtyard level. In contemporary homes, however, kitchens are found adjacent to the dining-room and equipped with modern facilities. A typical unit was made of the kitchen proper and an adjacent pantry (*ābdār-ḵāna*, *šarbat-ḵāna*) between the kitchen and the courtyard. Two separate doors gave direct access to the pantry and the kitchen from the *andarūnī* (women's quarter) and *bīrūnī* ("business" section) of the complex. The pantry, often larger and better lit than the kitchen, was used for the preparation of hors d'oeuvres, relishes, drinks, deserts, and other side dishes, storing and assembling the dinner ware, preparing the nargileh, keeping jugs and basins (*āftābalagan*) for washing the hands, etc. It had a small platform at one corner, where the dishes were kept, before being stored on the shelves (*herra* or *raf*).

The kitchen proper was a fairly large room with a barrel-vault ceiling, where one could find, in addition to fireplaces, a water basin, a large sink, sometimes

a water well, and a platform on which the wash tub was placed. A row of fireplaces (*oǰāq*), usually of equal size were built at the far end of the kitchen at about two feet above the kitchen floor and under a chimney (*tanūra*, *dūdkaš*) that went almost up to the top of the roof. Fireplaces were separated from one another by partitions about one and a half foot high made of bricks and covered with red ocher, Armenian bole, or clay. The hearths were covered with stone (often porphyry) or firebricks. The two fireplaces at the ends of the row were usually left unfinished and were used for keeping tongs, firewood, tripods, shovels, tinder, etc., handy. Pots were placed on top of the fireplace, or in case of a small pot, on a tripod inside it. The firewood was stored underneath the fireplace.

Next to the fireplaces on one side was the coal bin (*kata-ye ḏoḡālī*) and on the opposite side the water basin and the sink. The basin which was kept full at all times and was regularly drained and re-filled with fresh water, had to have a capacity of at least one *korr* (about 350 liters) of water; it was used for rinsing the dishes after they had been washed and cleaned with soapwort, ashes, or brick dust in the wash tub. A dish contaminated by things considered impure (blood, touch of a dog, etc.) was rubbed with dirt before washing. The sink had a drainage of its own not connected with the general sewage of the house, since connecting the two was considered a sign of ingratitude. The light in the kitchen was provided by a lampion, a lantern, or, more recently, a gas lamp.

Many kitchens had direct access to the storing-room of the house where a variety of foodstuffs, sherbets, pickles, and relishes were kept in vats (flour, beans, rice), flasks (sour grape juice, vinegar), bottles, leather bags (*ḵīg*; oil, cheese), jars, and chests (dried fruit).

On certain occasions (e.g., wedding, return from pilgrimage to holy places, votive offerings, convivial celebration of circumcision [*ḵatnasūrān*], etc.) when the kitchen facilities were insufficient to meet the needs of the large number of guests, a makeshift kitchen was set up at one corner of the courtyard and professional cooks were hired for the purpose. A well-known example of such makeshift kitchens was the one used during the Constitutional Revolution, when a large number of people had taken sanctuary (*bast*) at the British Legation in Tehran. Makeshift kitchens used among the tribes and on hunting expeditions are set up under tents. Until very recently catering was limited to the purchase of food routinely available at a traditional restaurant.

The inventory control of the kitchen complex was the responsibility of the

nāẓer or *ḵʷān-sālār* who often held the key of the storeroom and was assisted by an aid (*ḵarǰ-bīār*) who was responsible for daily expenses and an *ābdār* or *šarbatdār* who supervised the affairs of the pantry.

The cook himself was usually assisted by a young apprentice called (*šāgerd(-e) āšpaz*). In older times heavy, dirty jobs at the kitchen was done by a slave girl called *dada(-ye) maṭbaḵī*. In more modest homes it was the responsibility of the lady of the house, or the youngest female member of the family (e.g., daughter-in-law).

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