



BERYĀNĪ

BERYĀNĪ (from *beryān* “roast”), an Iranian meat dish usually served wrapped in flat bread, in later times particularly popular in Isfahan. Methods of preparing it have varied in different periods and places. The 4th/10th century author Akawaynī (p. 636) mentions taking the *beryānī* out of the oven and wrapping it in flat bread, which is the modern method (cf. Boshāq, p. 57). In the 5th/11th-century translation of Ebn Boṭlān (pp. 98-99), only the qualities of the *beryānī* are described. Verses by Najīb Jorfādaqānī (5th/11th century) and Kāqānī Šervānī (6th/12th century), quoted in Dehḵodā’s *Loğat-nāma* (s.v.) show that the meat was mutton. The early 10th/16th-century cookbook of Moḥammad-‘Alī Bāvaṛčī (pp. 159-61) contains descriptions of roast (*beryān*) meat dishes that are not of the usual *beryānī* type. The 11th/17th-century traveler Tavernier describes certain cookshops at Isfahan where a whole skinned sheep carcass was hung in an oven to be roasted and a potful of rice was put on the floor of the oven to be cooked by the melted fat dripping from the carcass (Pers. tr., pp. 636-37). His description concurs with one given by the 13th/19th-century writer Taḥwīldār (pp. 119-20) except that, according to Taḥwīldār, a pot half-full of boiling water (instead of rice) was put in the oven, the door of the oven was kept shut all through the night, and when it was opened in the morning, the sheep was well roasted and the drippings that had fallen into the pot formed a rich broth. The same method of preparing *beryānīs* from a sheep roasted whole was practiced at Isfahan until the early 1330s Š./1950s. In the early 14th/20th century, the *beryānī* of fat mutton is mentioned by Nāder Mīrzā (p. 220) as a dish on sale in Tabrīz in summer and autumn. The definition of *beryānī* as a “sort of salted *polow*” given in *Gīāt at-*



loğāt (s.v.) and *Farhang-e Ānand Rāj* (I, p. 697) is evidently unattested.

The method of preparation in use today is as follows: fat mutton, together with onions and a little water, is put in a pot and stewed until the meat is half-cooked, when it is taken off and left to cool down. Then the meat and the same onions are minced together, and spread in a pan; small amounts of cinnamon and saffron are sprinkled on the mince, which is then put in an oven (*tanūr*), or today on a stove or a gas cooker, to broil. It is served wrapped between sheets of warm *sangak* bread, with rice (as a *polow*), with pickles, or with fresh vegetables.

Among old, established families at Isfahan it has always been customary either to mix sheep's lights (*jegar-e safīd*) with the *beryanī* meat and the onions or to stew the lights separately with a little tail fat (*donba*) and then mince and grill them to be served with the *beryanīs*. Otherwise the method is the same as that described above. The use of lights in the cooking of *beryanīs* is also mentioned by 'Alī-Akbar Khan Āšpazbāšī (pp. 56-57), Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah's chef.

Entirely different was the *beryan-pelāv* and the method of its preparation described by Shah 'Abbās I's chef Nūr-Allāh (pp. 214-15). This was a rice dish, as evidenced by Mīr Şadr-al-Dīn Moḥammad Şīrāzī's reply to a versified letter from Moḥtašam Kāšānī (in *Tābetiān*, p. 371). Ostād Fūlād Beryānī was famous at the time for his skill in cooking *beryan-polow*.

In India (according to an Indian informant, Mr. 'Abd-al-Qāder Hāšemī), two sorts of *beryanī* are to be found. One is the *moğolī beryānī*, which is eaten with rice; the meat is boiled with yogurt, onions, and spices (ginger, garlic, cloves, black and green cardamom seeds, cinnamon, black pepper, black cumin seeds, nutmeg, sometimes also red pepper, turmeric), and the rice is cooked separately in the *polow* style (see *berenj*). This dish is often served at weddings and is considered a sufficient repast for guests. The other sort, found mainly at Hyderabad (Deccan), is called *kaččī* (raw) *beryanī* because the meat is not cooked but tenderized with juice of the papaya fruit. This dish is the same as the *taḥčīn-e barra* (see *berenj*) which in Iran in past times was similarly cooked with spices (today most often with saffron, pepper, and cinnamon). The Hyderabad *beryanī* resembles a dish once made in Iran from lamb taken from the womb of the ewe, which, being sufficiently tender, was not boiled but marinated in yogurt and served with steamed rice. Today, since unborn lamb is unavailable, the meat is always cooked.



Fayzī Serhendī (s.v.), the *Borhān-e qāṭeʿ*, and Demaisons mention a *beryān-e moḥallā* served with leeks (*tara*), pennyroyal (*pūna*), tarragon, onions, bread, and radishes. The name suggests that it meant only a garnish. The method of cooking is not indicated, but it is unlikely to have been an ordinary *beryānī* because wrapping it in bread would hardly be practicable.

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