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GILĀN XXI. COOKING

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xxi. Cooking

Eating habits and culinary preparations in Gilān have several distinct characteristics. In this rice-producing region, the consumption of rice is much higher than elsewhere in Persia. Garden vegetables and kitchen herbs (*sabzi*) generally appear in the makeup of most dishes and give the regional cuisine the green touch that is its hallmark. These preparations are usually associated with eggs, consumed in great quantities in a society where each rural family raises hens, ducks, geese, and turkeys; as the saying goes: *Bāqāla qātoq / bi morḡāne / haft-tā olāḡ / ti mehmān-e* ("a broad bean stew without eggs, seven donkeys must be your guests!"). Poultry and wildfowl, fish, along with olives, are also sought-after items and contribute to the uniqueness of the local recipes. As elsewhere in Persia, cooking is a long and complex operation, since the constituent ingredients of most dishes oftenrequire individual preparation of their own. Finally, the regional style of cooking is characterized by generous helpings of fat and oil and by a preference for a sour (*torš*) flavor: especially appreciated are condiments with a vinegar base and fruit juices made from unripe fruit, which are used to enhance the flavor of dishes. The most typical dishes of the region symbolize, each in its own way, a facet of this cooking style: *kate* is a simple rice preparation; the recipe for *mirzā qāsemi* includes the pulp of an eggplant, garlic, tomato, and egg; *bāqāla qātoq* is a broad bean stew; *ašbol polo* is a rice dish eaten with "white fish" (*māhi sefid*) roe; *sir-e torši* is pickled garlic, and *haft-e bijār* ("seven paddy-fields"), is a mixture of vinegar

marinated chopped plants and vegetables.

Ingredients. Rice is the staple food of the populations of Gilān and the Caspian lowlands of Persia in general. In the 1970s, it was still customary to have rice with all three dailymeals (Bromberger, 1994, p. 187, and map on p. 188). In the central plain, where rice is practically the sole crop, an adult male would eat about two pounds (uncooked weight) of polished white rice a day, which represented between40 to65 per cent of his daily diet. Since then, people have become used to eating bread with breakfast, and even with dinner, whereas in the 1950s this basic food of the Iranian highlands was practically unknown in the Caspian region. As some Ṭāleši people told Marcel Bazin (1980, II, p. 57): "Had you mentioned bread to us then, we would have responded: 'what is it?'" In spite of the general trend towards uniformity in dietary habits under the pressure of dominant urban models, rice remains the emblematic food of the Gilaki and Ṭāleši living in the lowlands, and bread that of the inhabitants of the arid slopes of the Alborz highlands and, more generally, of the people of the plateau, stigmatized as *dahān gošād* "wide-mouthed" (on account of their chewing bread) by their Caspian neighbors. The Gilaki criticize diets based on bread with their saying:*Šokr-e ḵodā ke tork našodim!* "Thank God we are not Turks!" As rice growers, they distinguish about twenty varieties and sub-varieties of rice in each area, depending on the shape of the grain (more or less long), the ripening period of the transplanted seedling, the color of the chaff, the presence or absence of awn at the end of the hull, and possibly the color of the awn; whereas the people of the plateau recognize only two or three varieties (rice with round, long, or medium grain; see Berenj i; Bromberger, 1979).

Regional cooking uses an abundance of vegetables, grown in the gardens around every house in rural areas and even on the slopes bordering rice fields and roads. The remarkably diverserange of crops makes it possible to renew and change, according to the time of year, the recipes for stews (*ḵoreš*) and vegetable cakes (*kuku*) served with rice. The harvest of summer vegetables (generically called *seyfikāri*) yields tomatoes (*pāmādor*, from the Russian word *pomodor*, itself a loanword from the Italian *pomodoro*), cucumbers, andsquash (*kuʾï* in Gilaki) in various forms and colors (e.g.,the *ḵāna-mār kuʾï* "squash [in the shape of] a house snake," oblong and twisted; the *ḵāše kuʾï* "squash with ribs," spherical and ribbed; etc.), melons and watermelons, eggplants, broad beans, short and long (*pāč* and *pil-bāqāla*), white (*sefid*) and yellow (*zard*); a great variety of kidney beans (*lubiā*, including *čiti* "with [the look of] a printed

fabric"; *češm bolboli* "nightingale eyes," beige with a black spot; *qermez* "red," etc.), *tare* (*Allium porrum* L.), generously used in stews, sweet peppers, spinach, various kinds of cabbage, potatoes, beets, usually steamed (*labu*) and eaten as snacks in the fall and winter, and carrots (used for making jam). Turnips, radishes, lettuces (romaine lettuce, *Lactuca sativa longifolia* D.C.), and watercress (*kakaj*, *kakij* in Gilaki) complete the list of vegetables. Chickpeas, although used in great quantities in cooking on the plateau, particularly in the preparation of *āb-gušt* (q.v.; pot-au-feu), are not popular on Gilāni spreads, except in the arid areas of Deylamān and Rudbār.

It is mostly the use of kitchen herbs (*sabzi*) and condiments that give the local kitchen its individual stamp. Onions, served raw and used in the majority of dishes (a cook's first move is often to sauté onions), and garlic, readily consumed when pickled in vinegar (garlic must be marinated for seven years in order for it to melt away smoothly in one's mouth) and added to practically all preparations, are part of all meals. Fresh herbs or dried seeds, used to enhance the flavor of local dishes, are the same as elsewhere in Persia: coriander (called *hel* locally; however, *hel*is the common term for cardamom seeds elsewhere in Iran, where *gešniz* is used to refer to coriander), oregano (*golpar*), turmeric (*zardčuba*), cumin (*zira*), cinnamon (*dārčin*), parsley (*jaʿfari*), basil (*reyḥān*), tarragon (*tarḵun*), dill (*ševid*). The local aromatic touch comes from an ingenious use of several varieties of mint: *Mentha sylvestris* (*bina* in the Gilaki of Rašt, *pitanak* in the Gilaki of Lāhijān), *Mentha pulegium* L. (pennyroyal or pudding grass, *ḵalvāš* in Rašti, *kutkutu* in Lāhijāni), common mint (scornfully named *ḵalḵāli naʿnā,* "mint from Ḵalḵāl," west of Ṭāleš, Turkish-speaking and a source of seasonal labor for Gilān). The Gilaki relish *delār* (or *darār*), a paste also called *namak-e sabz* ("green salt"), is prepared by mixing chopped *pitanak* and *ḵalvāš* with coriander and salt, which they eat with sliced cucumber, damson plums (*āluča*), salad, etc. Also typical of the area is the use of *čučāḡ* (*Eryngium coerulum* M.B., see Zargari, II, p. 619) leaves to flavor, among other dishes, olive preparations and the *torš-e vāš* (*Oxalis corniculata*) which, as its name suggests, gives a sour taste to stews, particularly to *sabzi ḵoreš* ("herb stew").

A natural orchard, Gilān is home to many varieties of wild fruit trees whose domestic counterparts are grown in gardens. The fruits are used for stews, turned into jams and syrups, or eaten raw, before ripening if possible. The Gilaki are especially fond of sour *āluča*—to the point of protecting their trees rather than their henhouses against foxes, or so the story goes! They also

consume, depending on the season, but always before or between meals, quinces (*beh*), citrons (*bādrang*), peaches (*āštālu*), apples (*sib*), pears (*ḵoj*), figs (*anjir*), medlars (*kunus*), sweet oranges (*portoḡāl*), sour oranges (*nāranj*), cherries (*gilās*), morello or sour cherries (*ālbālu*), and wild blackberries (*buluš*—of which they eat the peeled stems with salt—and the fruit of the mulberry trees (*Morus alba*) grown to feed silkworms. They also make syrup out of the fruit of the white mulberry (*tut*). Many of the fruit flavors contribute to the uniqueness of local culinary preparations. A paste of wild pomegranate (*torše anār*), sour grape juice (*āb-ḡura*), wild grape juice (called *sag-angur*, literally "dog grape"), and damson plum juice (*āb-e āluča*), which all add a sour touch to the dish, are particularly appreciated. Among favorites are jams made of the following: *aḵta* (cornelian cherry, *Cornus mas.* L.), *arbā*, the fruit of false date plum (*Diospyros Lotus* L.*)*, and wild grapes (*rāz*). Crushed walnut (*āḡuz* in Gilaki) halves are an ingredient in several stews and, when mixed with pomegranate paste, are used in the preparation of green olives. Olives (*zeytun*) also provide an oil prized as seasoning well beyond its production area (the region of Rudbār).

Although the diet of the region is primarily vegetarian, animal products do, in fact, play a significant part. The people of Gilān eat great quantities of poultry and eggs, wildfowl from the ponds, and, to a lesser extent, mutton and beef. They are also very fond of fish.

Chicken and duck are the ingredients of many stews (*ālu ḵoreš* "plum stew," *āḡuz ḵoreš* "nut stew," or *fesenjān* [q.v.] à la mode du Gilān, etc.). A rural family of four consumes between five and ten farm birds per month. On special occasions, and depending on the season, they may substitute waterfowl: *ḵutkā* (from the Russian word *utka*, teal), *čangar* (coot), *ḡāz* (goose), *morḡābi* (wild duck), etc., caught with nets or shot. Eggs hold an essential place in the cooking and, more generally, in the culture of Gilān. They are found everywhere: in the culinary preparations of typical regional dishes (*bāqāla qātoq*, *mirzā qāsemi*, *šāmi rašti*; see below), in games (such as *morḡāne jang* ("egg wars"), in propitiatory rites, and in popular medicine. In fact, Gilān could, with some justice, be described as an "egg culture."

The Gilaki eat mutton in *kebāb* on special family or ritual occasions, though men may also consume some in a neighboring village on Fridays, among their own friends and without their families being present, a practice shared, to a lesser extent, with people of the plateau. They are also fond of beef, an original feature which struck most observers, including Aleksander Borejko Chodźko

(q.v.), who served as the Russian consul in Rasht in the mid-nineteenth century: “Among all the regions of Persia, Gilān is the only one where beef is consumed and sold in the bazaars. As for the Persians living beyond the chain of the Caspian mountains, they abhor [beef]” (Chodźko, p. 203). They eat it as meatballs (*šāmi rašti*), or they eat the offal (heart, liver, kidneys) in a very popular dish, the *vaviškā* (which can be also prepared from mutton or wildfowl); as for the intestines (*ruda*) seasoned and preserved in bottles, they constitute the only meat-base food of the poorest during the *gedā-bāhār* (“the spring of the mendicant”), the lean season which precede harvests.

On the coast and the plains, the Gilaki eat vast quantities of sea fish, or fish which spawn their eggs in the rivers during the winter, and this has earned them the disparaging nickname of *kalla-māhi-ḵ̌or* (“eaters of fish heads”). We should not forget that, according to the Shiʿite dogma, only fish with scales are acceptable in religious terms (*ḥalāl*). Sturgeon (*uzun burun* “long nose”) and their precious roe (*ḵ̲āviār*, caviar, q.v.) are thus traditionally prohibited (*ḥarām*). In 1983, however, a *fatwā* prepared by Ayatollah Eḥsānbaḵ̲š, the leader of the Friday Prayers (*emām-jomʿa*) from Rasht, and promulgated by Ayatollah Khomeini declared the consumption of sturgeon and caviar as *ḥalāl*. The decision was taken after several seminars and technical consultations. Experts, including marine biologists and religious authorities, had initially denounced the imperialist exploitation of the ban by the Russians in the past, depriving “the Moslems and the Iranians” of a food “rich in proteins.” A college of experts had then specially scrutinized from every angle the four varieties of sturgeon and noticed on parts of their bodies some diamond-shaped scales, particularly on the higher lobe of their asymmetrical caudal fin. As it happens, the local consumption of sturgeon and caviar, quite expensive products, has not increased since the decision was taken (for further sources and extensive documentation, see CAVIAR).

A favorite among scale fish, the *māhi sefid* (“white fish”), a variety of goatfish (*Rutilus frisii kutum*), is used in the most sophisticated recipes (*fefič*, *malata*; see below). Salmon (*māhi āzād*, the “free fish” or “noble fish”) is caught and consumed only in small quantities. Pike (*suf*) is also valued. In everyday life, the less expensive varieties of carp (*kapur*), bream (*sim*), and *kuli*, a small clupeid, are served with rice in less affluent households. All the soft parts of the fish are consumed: in addition to the flesh, the fish roe, eaten raw or prepared as a cake with herbs (this dish is called *ašbol kuku*), the intestines, which are browned and specially liked for their sweet taste, the heads, whose

contents are sucked or else which are prepared in stews with herbs (a recipe called *māhi kalle qātoq*, fish head stew, or *taboryān*). Fish heads are also used in bouillons (*māhi kalle āb*: “Fish head broth”), after being browned in oil with a mixture of garlic and turmeric.

The production and consumption of dairy products on the plain, where only cattle are raised, is limited, but it is high in the pastoral uplands of Ṭāleš and Gāleš. On the plain, the only products derived from cow and buffalo milk (the Kurds specialize in the breeding of the latter) are yogurt (*māst*) and, through the process of churning (Bazin and Bromberger, p. 33), butter (*kara*) and buttermilk (*dūg*). Mountain stockbreeders use additional techniques to produce other dairy products; by heating, they process part of the fresh butter into ghee (*rowḡan*) which can be stored for several months; from cooked, drained, and salted buttermilk they make a paste, *šur*, which is very popular among the Ṭāleši; when dried and turned into balls or chips, *šur* is made into *kašk*, whose cooked, drained water gives a sour paste (*serja*) which is used as a condiment. Stockbreeders also produce cheese (*panir*) by mixing sheep and goat milk, including the famous yellow paste *siāh mazgi*, a specialty of a village in southern Ṭāleš from which it derives its name. Milk, mixed with rennet, coagulates at first (the product obtained is called *dalama*), then solidifies, after being heated and brewed; finally, it is salted, pressed, and placed in molds. Whey, mixed with fresh and heated milk, makes *lor*, whose liquid, salted and dried residue, turns into *šura*, a condiment that can be stored for several months. While cheese consumption for breakfast is still high, the use of butter in cooking has diminished considerably and has been widely replaced by margarine.

On the whole, and as one can readily see, the basic dishes in Gilān are quite varied (Plate I), combiningrice, an essential yet somewhat monotonous and flavorless element, with a multitude of vegetable ingredients and animal products. The diversity is reinforced when one looks more closely at the variety of culinary processes and recipes.

Culinary processes and types of dishes. Apart from the actual cooking, food preparation is done in several stages which transform the nature and shape of the food. The washing of the ingredients (vegetable and animal) is a preliminary step and requires much time (particularly the cleansing of herbs). Water is also used to soakrice to remove the starch, and with dry vegetables to soften them. To crush, chop, or grind food, cooks use various utensils which are part of their permanent equipment: a rotary pestle made of polished stone

used in a large clay plate (*namakyār* or *nimkār*) to crush walnut halves for *āḡuz ḵoreš* or for *zeytun parvarda* or grind cooked meat to make meatballs; a hatchet (*sāṭur*) to mince meat and herbs on a special cutting board (*sāṭur taḵta*); a pestle (*guštkub*, lit. "meat-pounder") made of wood or metal, and used, for example, to crush fruit to make preserves. Spatulas *(katarā*) and skimming ladles of various sizes made of wood and metal are used to stir up and remove slow-cooking food from the fire. To make rice-flour, used in particular to thicken the juices in the stews, cooks traditionally use a quern with a rotary grinding stone (*āsiāb-e dasti).* Most of these demanding tasks of chopping, crushing, and mixing are carried out today with highly popular electrical appliances, even if the traditional manual practices (crushing nuts on the *nimkār*, for example) retain their own accepted and acknowledged virtues.

In addition to cooking, various biochemical techniques are used to process food. It was customary, until recently, to smoke rice after the harvest, a practice which gave the grains a specific flavor and taste and ensured better cooking conditions (Bromberger, 1979, pp. 170, 181); smoking fish to preserve it is also done in fisheries, although the more traditional salting technique is generally preferred (with the possible addition of madder, *runās*). Fish are stored in large and substantial earthenware jars (*ḵom*s); with their predilection for sour flavors, the Gilaki use great quantities of vinegar to marinate and preserve garlic, turnips, and eggplants stuffed with herbs in glass jars (*noquldān*). On the other hand, to reduce the acidity and bitterness of wild fruit used in syrups and jams, ashes or lime are added in their preparation.

The posture of women while preparing meals has noticeably changed since the introduction of stoves. At one time they cooked squatting down next to a tripod (*se-langa*) or a low fireplace built out of clay, *kura*, shifting its location in line with the seasons (Bromberger, 1989, p. 72). Now they stand in a permanent kitchen watching dishes on the fire. While technical innovations—particularly the freezing of raw and cooked ingredients—have deeply modified the management of time and the seasonal rhythm of culinary preparations, cooks have remained attached to traditional utensils typical of female identity and of the dishes of the area. Among those is the *gamaj*, a green-glazed bowl with a lid (*noḵon*), used to simmer such popular dishes as the *bāqāla qātoq*, the *āḡuz ḵoreš*, the *torši tare*, or to steam *māhi fefij* (stuffed fish). Each cook has several *gamaj* of various sizes, measured in "chicken"

units (one-, two- or three-chicken *gamaj*). Several popular proverbs and expressions are associated with this bowl, a symbol of local culinary culture.

Among cooking methods, “browning” (*vaviš*, *vabij, vavij*) is a favorite, and the word appears frequently in the names of utensils and prepared dishes. *Kulevič* applies to the frying pan, *sirabij* is a dish made with garlic stems browned with eggs, *vaviškā,* a popular dish pompously referred to as *ḥasrat-al-moluk* (“the envy of monarchs,” Ḵāvar -Marʿaši, p. 86), made with a mixture of browned offal, onion and tomato, *ḵamas-e abij*, cooked grapes served with fried eggs, etc. Hardly any dishes are prepared without a phase of cooking on a high fire in a largequantity of oil. Simmering in water is also a widespread culinary method for soups (*āš*) as well as rice, meat, and poultry (*torš-e morḡ* “sour chicken,” for example), and most preparations include both these two cooking methods. Ingredients browned beforehand are often added to soups (such as apricots and dry grapes in *āš qaliya*, a spring vegetable soup thickened with flour and flavored with tangy sour grape juice), and the same goes for stews (a mixture of garlic and eggs, browned with herbs simmered beforehand in water in the *gamaj*, is added to the *torši tare* “sour leek”). The preparation of rice is completed with a steaming phase (*dam*), a method also used in a closed and dry environment for vegetable cakes (*kuku*) browned in oil beforehand (embers are placed on the lid to ensure an even cooking of the lower and top parts of the dish). Nevertheless, this dry environment cooking method, just like roasting (as used to prepare eggplant pulp, *kāl-kebāb*), is exceptional. With little bread consumed in the region, Gilān’s culinary culture is not about ovens or dry cooking or roasting but about browning, simmering, and steaming.

Following local classifications, several categories of dishes stand out, among them: various rice recipes (generically called *polo* in Gilaki), soups, stews, egg-based preparations (*mirzā qāsemi, kuku*), meat, fish, sour condiments, pastries, breads, and jams.

In Gilān rice is consumed daily as *kate*. It is a simple and quick recipe. Once cleaned and rinsed, rice is poured into a quantity of cold water one-and-a-half to two times its volume, then heated to a boiluntil the water is thoroughly absorbed; eventually a little ghee (*rowḡan*) is added (but the Gilaki rarely appreciate the addition of an oily substance on rice), and cooking ends with steaming (*dam*) on a low fire. The result of this cooking technique is a compact mass of grains stuck together which is turned out of the mold, cut out with a knife, and formed into little balls by hand before being consumed. Dill and broad beans can be added to *kate* (these preparations are respectively called

ševid polo and *bāqālā polo*—here the word *polo* means *kate*). In this case, the additional ingredients are plunged into cold water at the same time as the rice (see Ḵāvar-Marʿaši, pp. 93, 97). Well-known on the Iranian plateau, the methods used in the preparation of *čelo* and *polo,* generally reserved for special occasions (celebrations, receptions) are quite different. The rice intended for *čelo* is washed in lukewarm water and soaked overnight. It is then dipped into boiling water, parboiled, drained, and rinsed. It is shaped into a cone in a pot in which a mixture of *rowḡan* and water has been heated. It is then steamed slowly. These steps (soaking, parboiling, straining) and the choice of long-grain rice help keep the grains from sticking together. *Polo*, for its part, typically combines rice with other ingredients at the time of cooking. The rice is first cooked in the same way as *čelo*, while meat, vegetables, herbs, fruit, andspices are stir-fried together and then placed in alternating layers within the rice; the mixture is then steamed. In this category are *ālbālu polo* with morello (sour) cherries, *torš-e polo* (with a sour base), *zerešk polo* (with barberries), *šir polo* (rice with milk, dates, and raisins; see more in Rabino and Lafont, p. 32). Whereas *polo* is generally served as a single dish, *čelo* is consumed with kebab—the only specialty prepared by men—stew, omelet, boiled poultry, or browned fish. *Kate* is served with the same dishes as *čelo*, except for kebab. Thus one can differentiate between dishes for special occasions (*polo*, and *čelo* with kebab or with a savory stew) and daily food (*kate* with a vegetable stew, a little browned poultry or fish, or fish roe and broad beans—the latter called *ašbol polo*). Rice is not only prepared as part of a main dish; it is also the basic ingredient for several pastry recipes, made on special occasions, which will be described further.

Soups are often complete dishes, such as *āš kuʾi* (squash soup with milk and rice). Their preparation requires several steps and often mixes sweet and sour flavors. *Aš qaliya* is thus made of a mixture of chickpeas, dry beans, carrots, beets, garden herbs, and meat, all chopped and boiled together, to which sour grape juice and rice flour are added; at the end of the cooking time, a little sugar, mint, raisins, and browned apricots are added to the bouillon. The *torše āš* (“sour soup”) is typical of the Gilaki preference for unsweetened preparations; it is made of meat, beans, chickpeas, broad beans, garden herbs, rice, and very sour damson plums, with brown garlic and mint added at the last minute.

The words *qātoq* or *ḵoreš* (stew) generically refer to dishes served with rice and used to season it. There are no less than fifty of these in Gilān (Ḵāvar-

Marʿaši, pp. 21-87), a figure indicative of the craving for variety in flavors and menus. *Ḵoreš* is usually a mix of cheap cuts of meat or poultry, with vegetables and/or fruits and herbs left to simmer. Stews made locally have two specific features: the importance of acidity and the dominating role of plants in the preparations—some *ḵoreš* are made with only vegetables and herbs. Indeed, *fesenjān rašti* is prepared, as elsewhere in Persia, with walnut halves mixed with pomegranate paste and poultry; but its color is darker than in other areas of Persia, a sign of stronger acidity: the pomegranate paste is made with wild fruit; and one never adds sugar in the course of cooking (an anathema to a Gilāni cook!); traditionally, a metal nail or spoon is soaked in the mixture cooking in the *gamaj* to induce a darker color. The sour flavor is characteristic of other stews, like *ḵoreš-e āluče masamā*, where onions browned with damson plums and herbs seared in oil are successively added to the meat boiling in water. Among the exclusively vegetable preparations, we must mention the *torši tare* ("sour 'leek' soup") and the *ḵoreš šiš andāz* ("stew with six things-thrown-in the pot"). The former is a mixture of chopped herbs ("leek" and beet leaves, parsley, coriander, spinach, pennyroyal, mint) simmered for some time in water with a little rice; at the end of the cooking time, chopped garlic browned with turmeric, eggs cooked in the garlic and oil left over in the frying pan, and finally sour grape juice are added. The latter is a kind of vegetarian *fesenjān*: glazed eggplants, in lieu of poultry, are added during cooking to a mixture of crushed walnut halves, pomegranate paste, and turmeric.

The two most famous dishes which go with rice are prepared with eggs, the *bāqāla qātoq* and the *mirzā qāsemi* (popular etymology relates this to the creator of the dish, a certain Mirzā Qāsem). The former is a stew made with short broad beans (*pāč-bāqāla*) cut in two, browned with chopped garlic, dill, and turmeric, then simmered in a little water, to which eggs are added at the end of the cooking time. The latter is a mixture of eggplant pulp, chopped garlic browned beforehand with turmeric, and tomato purée added during cooking. At the end of the process, one adds beaten eggs or eggs cooked in the oil used to brown the garlic. In this, as in other preparations, much attention is paid to the seasoning of the oil used for cooking, thus enhancing the flavor of the ingredients.

The ingredients for *kuku*s are closely related to those of an omelet (a mixture of beaten eggs and other elements cooked together), but they are cooked like cakes (in a closed environment, in frying pans with lids covered with embers

and more often today in ovens). The addition of yeast gives these dishes even more firmness and thickness. There are a number of recipes: the *vereqā* is a *kuku* made with glazed eggplant; the *ašbol kuku* is made with fish eggs and herbs; the less costly *sabzi kuku* (made with chopped "leek" leaves and parsley) is the most popular recipe among cooks.

As mentioned earlier, meats and poultry are mainly consumed as stews; cut in pieces, they are either cooked in water and seasoned during cooking with pre-browned ingredients (as in the *torš-e morḡ*) or simmered in oil or a fatty sauce. The latter are called *kebāb* (a term which usually refers to grilled meat in Persia); thus the *morḡ lāku* ("young girl chick"; *lāku* literally means "girl" in the Gilaki of Lāhijān) or *morḡ kebāb* ("roast chicken") is a variety of *fesenjān* where chicken is cooked in a mixture of walnut halves and sour pomegranate paste; *ṭās kebāb* is made with successive layers of cut beef, onion, tomato, and potato; the first layer of meat is cooked in oil and the whole dish sprinkled with oil and water, then covered with a lid and left to simmer. Meat can also be browned (in *vaviškā*) or shaped into balls, as in *šāmi rašti*, a mixture of cut veal and split peas (*lappe*) cooked in water, crushed with the rotary pestle in the *nimkār*, mixed with beaten eggs and kneaded, then glazed with oil. While these long and economical methods of using meat and poultry are widespread, roasting, on the other hand, is exclusively reserved for special occasions.

In everyday life, fish is simply browned in oil. For receptions and special occasions, more elaborate recipes are used, such as *fefič* or *febij* and *malate*. *Fefič* is fish (generally white fish) gutted and stuffed with crushed walnut halves, pomegranate paste, herbs, and various spices and possibly the washed fish-eggs. Once stuffed, the fish is sewn up and cooked in the *gamaj*, placed on two pieces of tile or wood to keep it from sticking. *Malate* is a fish prepared on the grill or in the oven after being gutted and coated with pomegranate paste or seasoned with sumac (*somāq*).

The Gilāni, as pointed out several times already, are fond of sour condiments, a must to accompany most meals. Among the favorites are pickled heads of garlic (*sir-e torši*) to which barberries (*zerešk*) are added to enhance the sourness, eggplant cooked in vinegar, seeded, stuffed with herbs and mint, and preserved in glass jars filled with vinegar (*bādanjān torši*), and also more elaborate preparations such as *torši-maḵlut* (mixed pickles) and *haft-e bijār* ("seven rice fields"). The former is a mix of vegetables (carrots, eggplant pieces or pulp, beets) cooked in vinegar beforehand and other plants (cauliflowers, potatoes, onions, watercress, oregano) dipped raw. The latter is a mix of thin

eggplant with tops cut off, green peppers, green tomatoes, crushed onion and garlic, cabbage, turnip, and other ingredients (the choice of ingredients depends on tastes and availability) and a bouquet of finely chopped herbs (pennyroyal, *čučāq*, coriander, oregano). All ingredients are salted and preserved in vinegar covered to a depth of one finger. Another favorite sour accompaniment is the *zeytun parvarda* (“marinated olives”), a mixture of pitted green olives, crushed walnut halves, and pomegranate juice, flavored with garlic, mint, pennyroyal and *čučāq,* and later seasoned with oregano and pepper. The preference for sour foods is again revealed in the generous use of unripe, or sour, fruit juices for seasoning: *āb-limu* (“lime juice”), *āb-e nāranj* (“sour orange juice”), and especially *āb-ḡura* (q.v.; “unripe or sour grape juice”). The latter is made from wild grapes pressed by trampling or by stone, then filtered. The juice is cooked down into a concentrate (*rob-e āb-ḡura*), then salted and preserved in bottles. The Gilaki are also fond of *delār* or *derār,* a bitter-tasting condiment, made, as mentioned earlier, of a generously salted mixture of various mints and coriander. It is eaten with cucumbers, damson plums, whole or crushed in the *nimkār* (this latter preparation, called *āluče-feškan*, is particularly appreciated by pregnant women; Ḵāvar-Marʿaši, p. 251) or even lettuce leaves soaked in vinegar and powdered with sugar (the passion for acidic foods does not exclude a strong taste for opposite flavors).

Not very popular until recently among peasants in the plain, bread is an essential element in the diet of mountain populations (Bazin and Bromberger, pp. 80-82, and map 39). Grain farmers in the areas of Deylamān and Rudbār and in northern Ṭāleš generally cook bread in oval-shaped ovens (*tanur*) set in an adjoining part of the house, never in the main part, as is the case in Azarbaijan, where ovens are used as cooking areas for most of the food and are the principal source of heating. The making of bread, a thin pancake—*lavāš, nazök čörek* in Turkish-speaking Ṭāleš—begins with the preparation of the dough (*ḵamir*), a mixture of corn flour, water, and salt. Women knead the dough in a wooden tray (*majmaʿa*) and add sourdough (*ḵamir-e torš*); after the dough has risen, they make loaves, which they roll on a flour-covered tray with a rolling pin (*nān-čub, vardana*); the pancakes are then pressed onto the sides of the oven with a pad (*nān-āviz*) and, once cooked, separated with a small spatula. Cooking techniques used by Ṭāleši and Gāleši stockbreeders are more rudimentary. The simplest way is to place the raw pancake on hot ash (*nun-e āteš*); sometimes the pancake is topped with a metal cup (*tāva*) turned upside down and covered with embers. Another basic technique, used in central and southern Ṭāleš, consists in pressing the

kneaded dough upon a stone set up and heated beforehand. Elsewhere, the *sāj* technique is used: the dough is cooked on an inverted metal plate or on the back of the *gamaj* placed on a cooking tripod. Special kinds of bread, like bread made for departing travelers, and for celebrations, include other ingredients besides flour. Milk and oil are used for a bread known as *kulvā*; crushed walnut halves, oil, milk, and saffron are used for a preparation called *zarinun*.

On the plain, the only traditional bread is made with rice flour (*nān-e berenji, baj-e nān*) for special family and holiday celebrations. Rice flour is not suitable for bread making because of its low gluten content; therefore a little wheat flour is added to the kneaded and shaped dough after it is boiled in water (thus the name given to some varieties of these breads: *nān-e gandomi* "wheat bread"). Flattened with a rolling pin, the thin crepes are cooked according to the *sāj* method on the back of a *gamaj* or an inverted *tāba* (metal container). This type of plain bread (called *lāsunun*) is served at mealtime during the New Year celebration, as well as more complex preparations such as *kulabij-nān*, a paste made with a mixture of eggs, turmeric, cinnamon, and sugar, cooked in oil as its name indicates.

Most pastries and delicacies are made with rice. When the season arrives, women traditionally pick armfuls of green rice (*jukul*), which they roast and peel to eat with a mixture of milk and sugar. *Jukul-ku* is prepared with rice bulgur cooked in grape must in which crushed walnut halves and cumin (*zira*) is soaked (see Rabino and Lafont, p. 33). But the most frequently used ingredients are rice flour, ground with *āsiāb-e dasti*, or rice soaked and reduced to a paste in a *nimkār*. The *rešte-ḵoškār*, a well-liked delicacy sold in bazaars, is a thin bar of rice paste mixed with nuts and sugar, cooked on a plate coated with egg yolk and butter and shaped with a comb in a mesh design (Plate II). *Ferini* is another popular dessert dish in Gilān and elsewhere in Persia; it is a rice paste cooked on a slow fire in water to which are successively added milk and sugar, and, at the end, rose water and cardamom. *Halvā*, Gilān**i** style, is made with a mixture of rice flour cooked in butter, to which honey is often added (in *halvā ʿasali*), along with, when the cooking is done, sugar water flavored with rose water, powdered cardamom, and saffron. Rice flour is also used to prepare squash fritters (*kuʾi kākā*), to which eggs, milk, crushed walnut halves, cinnamon, rose water, cardamom, and other ingredients are added. These sweetened specialties are not part of the daily routine; they are consumed on special occasions or traditional

celebrations.

Several varieties of fruits are used to make pastes (*ḵamas*) or jams (*morabbā*). Hard, sour, and bitter fruits undergo a preliminary treatment: cornelian cherries (*aḵte*) are soaked until they get soft; to reduce the acidity of wild grape, ashes are added during the cooking; to remove the bitterness from citrons (*bādrang*), or from the fruit of the false date plum (*arbā*), they are dipped in a lime solution before rinsing and cooking. A compact preparation called *ḵamas* is made with grape, figs, and cornelian cherries, and sometimes damson plums; preferred *morabbā***s** are *arbā*, quinces, morello or sour cherries, cherries, carrots, and citrons. Some fruit, particularly grapes and homegrown blackberries, are also used for syrups (*dušāb*), prepared with crushed and cooked fruits. These are consumed with added water and sugar in the summer as refreshing drinks.

The everyday, year-round drink is, as everywhere else in Persia, tea, drunk *širin* (sweetened) for breakfast (with several spoonfuls of sugar) and *talḵ* (bitter) with a lump of sugar placed at the tip of the tongue, with other meals, and at any time of the day. In the Gilān region, "weak" tea (*kam-rang* "light-colored") is generally preferred to "strong" tea (*por-rang* "full-colored"), which is more popular on the plateau (*Report* ...; Bromberger, 1985, p. 31). In addition, infusions are sometimes prepared and essences (*ʿaraq*) extracted using basic techniques, for the cure of various ailments. *Pulḵom* (*Sambucus ebulus*) infusion is famous as a cure for high blood pressure, *kutkutu* (pennyroyal) essence will stop diarrhea—a common illness in the spring, when the Gilaki take particular pleasure in eating green plums.

Meals. Whereas in the West different courses follow each other according to a well-established pattern, in Persia all the different dishes are placed on the spread simultaneously so that they can be tried and tasted at the same time (Plate III). Menus are radically structured according to the time of day and year, or according to life's rituals and celebrations, and also according to the cooks' dietetic concern for balanced menus of "cold" and "hot" dishes according to the season, the age, and the status of their guests (Bromberger, 1985, p. 26).

Traditionally, *kate* is the main food for breakfast. It can be eaten cold (usually leftovers from the day before), accompanied by cheese, preserved garlic, onion, fish roe, uncooked broad beans soaked in water, nuts, and olives, or, eaten hot, swimming in sweetened milk, mixed with syrup of *arbā* or simply

served with jams. In the past thirty years, bread has gradually replaced rice, and breakfast (*ṣobḥāne*) is more and more similar to that of the Iranian plateau. The usual mid-morning collation (*qalye nāhār*) includes boiled vegetables (broad beans, beans, beets), possibly seasoned with lime juice and a dash of olive oil. Lunch (*nāhār*) is more consistent: the ever-present *kate* is served with stews, browned or salted fish, yogurt, onion, and raw herbs (in the spring and summer). The mid-afternoon snack (*ʿaṣrāna*), similar to the mid-morning collation or simply a soup with sour flavors (*torše āš*), is a welcome pause, considering the late time of dinner (*šām*), usually between nine to ten at night. The menu for the latter is less copious than the lunch menu: a vegetable cake (*kuku*), a soup, stewed leftovers, or fried eggs are served with the *kate*, which now competes with bread. In the dry areas of Gilān, dairy products, pot-au-feu (*āb-gušt*), dry vegetable stews, and bread consumed in great quantities are the basic elements of a less varied diet and less sophisticated cooking. In the last decades, however, standardization of the ways of life has brought an increase in rice consumption to these dry regions, while, as a corollary, eating bread has become popular in the plain of Gilān.

The cold season is a time for hot (*garm*) food such as dry vegetable stews slowly simmered in fat. With the arrival of spring, food is colder (*sard*) and greener, as in fresh vegetable dishes and herbs eaten raw. *Bāqāla qātoq—a* mixture of freshly cut broad beans and herbs with eggs produced in quantities during that season—is the typical dish in this season of renewal. Dishes served at the time of the *kulkule čāršanbe* (the eve of the last Wednesday of the year; see Čahāršanba-suri) and *sizdah be-dar* (the thirteenth day of the new year; Plate IV) are proof of this culinary transition: spinach stews, *tare, polo* with herbs, fried eggs, in the first instance; lettuce soaked in vinegar and powdered with sugar in the latter case. Dishes served cold, such as *kāl-kebāb* (eggplant pulp) are often consumed during the spring and summer cycles. Menus for special occasions are characterized by hot seasoning and sweet flavoring: *āḡuz ḵoreš* (*fesenjān*) with teal is served with *polo kišmiš* (rice with dry grapes), or a stew with peaches or dried apricots (*qeysi*) served with *čelo*, bread with eggs and milk. At the time of annual celebrations or important events in the cycle of life, special attention is given to cooking: the food prepared during Ramadan is particularly hot and nourishing, and includes rice, butter, and sugar for *saḥari* (the meal before sunrise), and a complete dish (*šāmi rašti*, for example), served with herbs, and many sweets (*halvā, bāmiya, zulbiyā*) at the time of *efṭār* (the meal after the day's fast). As time passes, mothers cook up more or less hot menus for their sons: cold dishes if they need to be tempered at the

time of puberty, burning hot on the day before their wedding.

Table manners symbolize the hierarchy within the family and in the presence of company. Men and women share the same tablecloth. However, there are usually invisible limits between male and female spaces. The men occupy the back (*bālā* "top") of the room, women and young children sit in the front. Eating meals around a table and using forks are practices confined to well-to-do city dwellers; in the country, people continue to shape rice balls with their hands and resort to spoons only to eat specific dishes (yogurt, etc.).

Exploiting the diversity of local resources, and characterized by the importance of vegetables, sour flavors, and oil, Gilān has a highly original cuisine which is a source of pride for the people of the region who are given to criticizing less sophisticated diets (dismissed as *ḵalḵāli ḡaẓā* "Ḵalḵāli food") and who remain resolutely faithful to their gastronomical traditions, even at times of migration or exile.

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