



KAŠK

KAŠK (Ar. *kešk*, Turk. *keşk*), Persian term used primarily for a popular processed dairy food but also applied to various grain products, both in Iran and widely in the Middle East.

TERMINOLOGY

Iranian languages. In Middle Persian the word *kašk* is attested in the Pahlavi text *Xusraw ud rēdag* (sec. 26, ed. Monchi-zadeh) in adjectival form: *ārd ī kaškēn* “barley flour.” This form also occurs as a loanword in the Armenian language by the 5th century CE (Hübschmann, p. 238; Bailey, 1986, p. 462); the historian [Elišē](#) uses *kaškēn* to mean “barley bread.” Narrating the events of 453/4 CE, he relates that the Sasanian king’s chief mage set a prison ration of 2 barley loaves for each six men among the Christian priests, whom he had separated from the other Armenian prisoners in order to apply greater pressure to convert (Elišē, tr., p. 195). New Persian *kaškin(a)* continues that meaning (see below). H. W. Bailey (1979, p. 107) connected the word *kašk* with those of Eastern Iranian languages—ancient Khotanese *chaska* “barley” and modern equivalents, such as Šuynī *čušč*—and with grain terms of other Indo-European languages.

The word *kašk* and the constructs *nān-e kašk* and *nān-e kaškin(a)* (barley bread) are mentioned several times in Ferdowsi’s *Šāh-nāma* (V, p. 564; VII, pp. 64.179, 174.2046, 438, 472.533, 474, 537, 545; Wolff, p. 657). Maḥmud Zamaḳšari, a 12th-century Persian lexicographer, cites three preparations from *kašk*: *kaškbā* (gruel), *kaškāb*, and *āš-e kašk* (broth; Zamaḳšari, pp. 344,



346). For the dish called *kašk* in Mughal India, see below. In Iran, *kaškak* (diminutive) is a complex dish, *kaškāb* (barley water) is a medicinal tisane (*Borhān-e qāṭe'*, ed. Mo'in, III, pp. 1651-52), and *kašku* is barley broth. *Kaškin* and *kaškina* designate bread and different kinds of dry preserved foods. Phrase constructs indicate varieties according to color, such as *kašk-e siāh* (black) and *kašk-e sefid* (white).

The word *kašk* in contemporary Persian refers to dry yoghurt (*māst-e košk*). It is used in many construct terms, such as *kašk o bādenjān*, a dish made with a mixture of *kašk* and eggplants. Among pastoralists speaking Iranian languages (e.g., Ṭāleši, Gilaki, Kurdish, Baḳtiāri Lori), *kašk* or *kešk* refers to dairy products. This word does not seem to be used by the contemporary Baluchi people who live in [Baluchistan](#), part of the southeasternmost province of Iran. The word was probably replaced by the Turkish term *qorut* (see below; Doerfer, III, pp. 458-59), which was possibly borrowed from the neighboring Pashtuns. Among the Afghan Pashtuns, *kašk*, according to Aslanov (p. 680), designates a cereal broth or a bread soup.

Semitic languages. The word *kešk*, a loanword from Persian (Dozy, p. 472), is used in the Arabic of the Middle East and Egypt, in Syriac, and in Neo-Aramaic. In Arabic, it varies a little in form but greatly in meaning. Ebn al-Sayyār (fl. 4th/10th cent.) mentions numerous composite terms formed with the derivative *keškiya*, referring to dishes used in Iraq in his time. He classifies them according to the staple (wheat), the taste (sour), and by regions (Ebn al-Sayyār, pp. 102, 165). Later texts mention varieties *kešk korāsāni* ("of the East"; *Kanz al-fawā'ed*, p. 193) and *Kešk bābeli* ("of Babylon"; Ebn al-Bayṭār, I, p. 445), *kešk aḥmar* (with leaven) and *kešk laban* (with curd milk; Ebn al-'Adim, pp. 870-71). A certain dish called *kešk mosabba'un* (of seven products) is mentioned as a variety prepared for the Mamluk kings in Egypt, but its ingredients are not specified (Ḳalil b. Šāhin, p. 125). Among the Egyptian farmers of the 17th century, *kešk* was "a popular meal of curded milk with flour and honey," a kind of halvah (see [HALWĀ](#); Mehren, p. 34).

Altaic languages. The terms *keš/keş* (sour curd), *kešek/ keşkek* (a dish made with wheat), and *keškina/keşkina* (barley bread) in Turkish are Persian loanwords. The term *kašk* in Azeri Turkish, a Persian loanword, is cited as an Azeri loanword in the 19th-century Syriac dialect (Maclean, p. 141).

The extensive diffusion of *kašk/kešk* as a popular variety of food is probably best explained by the fact that its basic ingredients (milk and grain) form the



fundamental productions of agro-pastoral societies. However, the exact nature of each variety is not quite clear, since sources up to the 19th century are imprecise concerning this point. In contrast, modern sources are quite specific in showing the complexity of the situation. In those cultures where milk is the original source, each product, including *kašk*, is named and sets a stage in the culinary process. But the inconsistency of naming between the old sources and modern ones makes it almost impossible to reliably trace the historical development. For example, *tarf* in (Semnan Province) Turan today (Martin, p. 24; see below) seems different from *kašk*, while, according to Zamaḡšari (d. 1144), they were synonymous in his time. The term *kašk* is discussed below in its simple, derivative (suffixed), and construct forms with three criteria according to main ingredient: a milk product, a grain product, and a mixture of both (or one of them plus another ingredient).

PRODUCTS FROM CURD MILK

These are, generally, preserved food items such as dried yogurt or sour milk in the form of small, sun-dried balls called *kašk* in Iran (Ramazani, p. 70), *keř/keř* in Turkey (*qorut* in the Turkish societies of Central Asia; Zenker, s.v.), and *keřk* in the Middle East (Denizeau, p. 454).

There is also a dry product obtained from buttermilk in the form of small, sun-dried balls, commonly used in Iran, and generally among the agro-pastoral societies. *Kašk* is popular among the Baktiāris (q.v.; Digard, p. 198) but rarely made or consumed by the people of Gilan (Bazin and Bromberger, p. 35). It is prepared there only by the Talesh people of Jowkandān and Siāhčāl, who dry the *řowra* obtained from buttermilk in the sun (Bazin, II, p. 49). *Kašk* or *keřk* is known by the Kurdish of the Hakari district (Rhea) and is very common among the people of Azarbaijan (Bazin and Bromberger, p. 35).

The botanist and pharmacologist Ebn al-Bayṡār (d. 646/ 1248) refers to *keřk bābeli* (*kašk* of Babylon) as a variety in the form of black pieces (I, p. 445); this may be the first mention of a dry, black product that is used as a condiment in Iran, Afghanistan, and some parts of Turkey.

The word *kařk-e siāh* seems to no longer be used in Iran, but the product is still in use and known by the Turkish name *qara qorut*. *Qara qorut*, a dark paste used as a condiment among the Azeris, is obtained through the cooking and drying out of *kařk* (Bazin and Bromberger, p. 35). *Qorut* is well known and very much appreciated as a hot condiment for winter use among the rural



Afghans, as it is by the urbanized people of Tehran, who prepare it from the sour milk that has been heated with a low temperature for a long time (personal communication with Françoise Kotobi).

Tarf, *tarp*, or *tarf-e siāh*, a Persian word mentioned by Zamaḳṣari (p. 353) as another name of a dish called *roḳbin*, is defined as “black, dried, curded milk,” that is to say “black kašk” (*Borhān-e qāṭeʿ*, ed. Moʿin, I, p. 486; Vullers, I, p. 436). According to the 17th-century *Borhān-e qāṭeʿ* (ed. Moʿin, II, p. 941), “some say” *roḳbin/raḳbin* is a specific product made of *kašk*, flour, and milk, and is black like *qara qorut* (cf. Ebn al-Sayyār, tr. Nasrallah, p. 590); some others use the term for anything made with churned soured milk (*duḡ*). *Tarf* may be white and similar to *kašk-e sefid* (white kašk); it is then “sour clotted, milk strained and dried in the sun for winter use” (Steingass, p. 295). In Turan today, *tarf* is “dried boiled liquid residue of qorut” (Martin, p. 24). In Turkish, *keš* corresponded to the Persian *kašk-e siāh* and *tarp/tarf* in the 19th century (Zenker, s.v.).

The similarity of the terms and products among the speakers of Iranian languages (except Pashto and Baluchi) to those of Turkic speakers indicates the influence of both in the diffusion of the terms and the products. Nevertheless, some differences exist; for instance, *kešk* designates a soft product among the Kurds and Turks, and a dry product among the people of other Iranian languages and the Azeris.

GRAIN PRODUCTS

Medieval sources of medicine discuss the barley tisane in reference to the consumption of *kešk*, *keška*, *kaškāb*, and *kašk al-šaʿir*. They are apparently influenced by Greek medicine, which considered *ptisana* (barley water) as a real panacea. *Avicenna* (d. 1037) recommends that *keška* be put on hot tumors (II, p. 440). Rāzi (d. 925 or 935 criticizes the use of *kaškiya*, which provokes inflammations of all kinds (p. 29). Ebn al-Sayyār (10th cent.) prescribes a broth of kašk to treat coughs, fatigue, and pleurisy (p. 269). *Kašk al-šaʿir* (barley kašk) was a medical recipe in 12th-century Egypt, recommended by Maimonide (d. 1204) in hot weather (p. 39), just as in 12th-century Andalusia, where Ebn Zohr (d. ca. 1162 considered it to be refreshing, evacuating, and very good for fever (p. 11). Samarqandi (early 13th cent.) considers barley kašk prepared with dill as a good emetic to eliminate phlegm (p. 106). According to Ebn al-Bayṭār *kaška* is made from barley and corresponds exactly to Greek *ptisana*.



Āb-kašk was in the 12th century a synonym of the Persian *tarina/tarķina* (words probably of Greek origin; Zamaķšari, p. 346). Later on, *tarķina*, also called *tarkvāna*, is mentioned as a thick pottage (Steingass, p. 293; *Borhān-e qāte'*, ed. Mo'in, I, p. 483).

Kaškbā and *āš-e kašk* were, according to Zamaķšari (p. 344), synonyms of *tarfbā* and the equivalent of Arabic *mašliya*; these products were prepared with sour milk or whey (Pers. *tarf*, Ar. *mašl*) as the basic ingredient. *Kešk* was “gruel from wheat or barley” in 13th-century Egypt (Ebn al-Bayṭār, III, pp. 280-82); it is a “barley cream” in modern Syriac (Lagarde, p. 35). *Kašk* among contemporary Pashtuns is a thick broth (Russ. *kashitsa*) or a broth made with pieces of bread (Russ. *pokhlyobka*; Aslanov, p. 680).

As was described above, the first meaning for suffixed forms and constructs with *kašk* was “barley bread.” The terms *kaškin* and *kaškina* also denote a complex bread “made of barley, millet, beans, and lentils,” and *kaškena* is defined as a bread “made of wheat, barley, beans and vetches” (Steingass, p. 1033; *Borhān-e qāte'*, ed. Mo'in, III, p. 1653; for the other usage of *kaškena*, see below). The mixing of other elements with barley is very common because of the bad quality of barley bread in general. *Keškina* is barley bread in 19th century Turkish (Zenker, s.v.).

PRODUCTS AND DISHES WITH KAŠK

In the Middle East. Concerning dishes prepared with wheat, leaven, and a variety of vegetables, Ebn al-Sayyār (p. 102) provides the following precise recipe for a Syrian variety called *kašk šāmi*: “wheat coarsely cracked, then cleaned and boiled in water, then dried and cleaned again until there is no more bran. Knead with hot water in the right quantity, add a little leaven and put in a large receptacle in the sun for six days, covering it during the night, until it becomes well soured, then add thinly cut vegetables—not chicory and watercress (*jerjir*) since they do not enhance it—but many leeks, fresh coriander, rue, and for those who like it, onions cut into small rounds and pieces, eggplant, squash, cabbage, *ķawķ al-dibb*, which are acid little plums, and good verjuice. Knead all that together and allow it to dry in the sun for five days. Then shape it into round flat cakes.” He also mentions (p. 102) a different dish of *kašk šāmi* made with laban (soured milk, *rib*) instead of water and using no vegetables except mint (*na'nā*) and celery (*karafs*).

Kaškena, probably a product of the coastal provinces of Iran, was a kind of



preserved food made from “fried wheat which, with onions, beet and purslain-seeds, steeped in fish-jelly and dried in the sun” (Steingass, p. 1033). *Borhān-e qāṭeʿ* (ed. Moʿin, III, p. 1653) defines it as a synonym of *kaškina* and gives a similar recipe: “fried wheat with fish-jelly, beets, and purslane seeds, and dried in the sun until it turns sour.”

Kešk is a meal made from coarse flour and milk, which is then dried (13th century). The description of *kešk* in Ebn al-Haššā’s glossary (p. 63) has no vegetables: “*kešk* of barley is soaked in sour milk till it turns sour, then it is dried . . . and preserved in round or other shape” (ibid., p. 63). Here *kešk* of barley means both a certain preparation of the grain of barley (*jašiš* “coarsely ground”) and the final product. A similar recipe is given by Ebn al-ʿAdim (d. 60/1262), the historian of Aleppo: “There are two kinds, *kešk al-ḳamir* and *kešk laban*. They are used in different kinds of gruels, pastry dishes, and omelets” (Ebn al-ʿAdim, pp. 870-71).

This kind of preserved food from cereals and dried sour milk has probably been known in the Levant since at least the 13th century. Jakob Bergrenn (p. 265) gives a very similar description, and it is attested among Syrian mountaineers of the 19th and 20th centuries, who preserved it for winter use, sometimes cooking it with *qurma* (mincemeat preserved in fat) and garlic (Harfouch, p. 304). Today in Lebanon, it is one of the main products of the *mune* (winter provisions) in the farms of the Beqʿa valley (Kanafani, pp. 49-58).

Kešk was also a very common meal prepared from wheat with sour milk in Egypt in the 19th century (Freytag and Bindseil, IV, p. 39). Edward Lane gives a precise description for the same period (pp. 488-89, n. 3).

Dishes in which *kašk* is added to vegetables and/or meat are numerous and varied. In 10th-century Iraq, *keškiya* was a dish prepared with meat, vegetables, and fresh seasonings and left to boil. When it was nearly cooked, finely ground *kašk* was added and, once the *kašk* was cooked, cinnamon, thinly cut onions or cloves, and spikenard (*sonbol*) were added and left on a low fire (Ebn Sayyār, p. 165).

A dish made of wheat cooked in milk was called *kaškāb* in Iran and *kešk* in Turkey (Zenker, s.v.). In 17th-century Georgia, *kaši* was a broth of millet with milk, or a kind of bulgur cooked with milk or with water. Thus, David Tchoubinoff (s.v.) defines *kaši* as (Fr.) *gruau de lait* and (Russ.) *molochnaya kasha*. For the 19th-century Turkmen of Turkey *keškin* was a dish made of



wheat soaked in curdled milk (Bianchi and Kieffer, s.v.)

Kaşk is mentioned as a dish of mainly rice and meat prepared in the imperial kitchens of the Mughal emperors in the 16th century. Additional ingredients were kaşk (crushed wheat), ghee, peas, onions, ginger, cinnamon, saffron, cloves, cardamom, cumin seeds, and salt. The recipe follows that for *harisa*, which uses the same base ingredients but adds fewer spices and omits the onions. Kaşk is followed by the recipe for *ħalim*, stated to be basically the dish kaşk but with a mixture of various vegetables (Abu'l-Faẓl 'Allāmi, p. 63).

A dish made into a paste (type *harisa*) with *kaškak* as the dominant ingredient was originally a Persian meal. *Kaškak* is defined by Steingass (p. 1033) as “barley or wheat, especially boiled whole with meat till it has become soft” (cf. Dehḳodā, s.v.). Today the dish seems to be known only to the Armenians of Turkey and northern Iraq. In Syria, among the middle class urbanites of the 15th-16th centuries, it was a dish of meat boiled with wheat (Zayat, s.v.).

In 19th-century Turkey *keškeḳ* was a “soupe de gruau et de viande bouillie dans le genre de la herissa” (Barbier de Meynard, s.v.; cf. Redhouse, p. 1553); like the *harisa*, it suggests a dish similar to the Iranian type. The *Söz derleme dergisi* names the cities where this meal, made from crushed wheat with meat, is in use (Bazin, p. 204).

Among the Armenians of Turkey, wheat soaked overnight is mixed with minced chicken or turkey meat along with one liter of boiling water and half a liter of chicken broth, and the mixture is then cooked on a slow fire until the wheat is tender and the water absorbed; salt and pepper are added for seasoning, and the mixture is then beaten until it turns into a smooth paste. Melted butter mixed with paprika is poured on the dish before it is served. This meal is considered a type of *harisa* (Union arménienne de Bienfaisance, p. 23). This Armenian recipe is very similar to Persian *kaškak* and may have been the original Persian recipe borrowed by the Turks.

Conclusion. Kaşk, whether a product of milk (Iran), a product of cereals, mainly barley, or a product using both (Middle East, Turkey, Egypt) is, in most cases, a popular preserved food for winter use among many of the agropastoral societies of these regions. It is also much valued by city dwellers, who regard it as a strong condiment that “is hot, good in winter” (Ramaẓāni, p. 70) and use it as a thickening agent. *Kašk-e siāh* and kaşk/kešk are used both as a condiment and as a staple, being dried sour milk or bulgur and milk, dried



and powdered. The pottage *kaškbā*, “a kind of milk-diet dressed in Muharram” (Steingass, p. 1033), is the dish used particularly on some religious occasions (cf. the definition in *Borhān-e qāṭeʿ*, ed. Moʿin, III, p. 1652: “ḥalim soup” [āš])

In 19th-century Egypt, where many Muslims observed some of the Coptic religious feasts days and customs, a dish of *kolṭa*, made of *kašk/kešk*, bean sprouts, lentils, rice, and onions, was eaten on Good Friday (Lane, pp. 488-89). In celebration of the birth of a child, a dish made of *kašk* by the women of the house was sent with a few other dishes to female relatives and friends (Lane, p. 504).

The medieval medical scholars discuss barley preparations, mentioning the qualities of *kašk*, *kaškāb*, and *kaškbā*, but criticizing the dish *kaškiya* (Rāzi, p. 29). Modern scholars and nutritionists also take great interest in *kašk*, pointing out the bio-preserving effects of the lactic acid bacteria that it contains in preventing the growth of common, food-spoiling fungi (Tājābādi et al.).

The spread of Persian cultural markers throughout the Middle East and beyond can also be seen in the case of *kašk*. Its diffusion reached as far as Mexico in 1979, where an experimental trial was conducted in which a gruel-type food called *atole* was replaced by *kašk*, a yoghurt cereal product flavored with strawberry and vanilla extracts. It was readily embraced by children and mothers for enhancing the nutritional quality of their food (Cadena and Robinson).

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