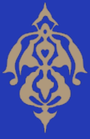
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ĀŠPAZĪ
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ĀŠPAZĪ, cooking . 1. Iranian foodstuffs. 2. Iranian cookery.

1. Iranian foodstuffs. The history of food consumption in Iran is primarily part of the history of agriculture and stockbreeding on the Iranian plateau. The staple food since ancient times has been based on wheat (*gandom*), millet (*arzan*), and to some extent barley (*ǰow*) as a substitute for wheat. Reports from the Islamic period show that rises in the price of barley relative to that of wheat, with accompanying disappearances of wheat from the markets, were always seen as portents of incipient famine. Rye, (*čāvdār*), though apparently indigenous to the east of the plateau (Afghanistan), is not normally eaten. After the development and spread of intensive plantation systems dependent mainly on use of elaborate irrigation techniques, fresh fruit and vegetables, eaten raw, became important items in the people's diet. Quinces, apples, pears, muskmelons, watermelons, pomegranates, grapes, peaches, and mulberries have been grown in Iran since antiquity. In keeping with Iran's historic role as center of interchange between the civilizations of Anatolia, Caucasia, the Near East, India, Central Asia, many crops, fruits, and vegetables were transplanted from one to another of these regions by way of Iran. Plants brought from or through India were acclimatized in Iran earlier than in the lands of other Near and Middle Eastern civilizations: e.g., sugarcane, eggplant, citrus (lime, bitter orange, sweet lemon), and watermelon (*hendovāna*, i.e., Indian-type), later also rice and tropical spices (which had further uses in medicine). There are indications that saffron, rhubarb, and spinach were first cultivated on the Iranian plateau. Onions, garlic, carrots, broad beans, chickpeas, and linseed

are known to have been used for food in Iran since early in the ancient period (Watson, *Agricultural Innovation*, passim. Laufer, *Sino-Iranica*, pp. 372, 392, 399, 580f.).

The methods of preparing milk products stem, in the main, from the traditions of pastoral and nomadic groups living both on the Iranian plateau and in Central Asia. These products, together with cereals, formed the staple food of the nomadic tribes, being much more important than meat in their diet. The making of yogurt (Persian *māst*, standard Turkish *yoğurt*, Azeri *qāteq*), dried yogurt (Persian *kašk*, Turkish *qurut*), and white cheese (Persian *panīr*, similar to the Greek *feta*) probably originated from Central Asia but spread in ancient times to the Iranian plateau. The raw material for these products used by Central Asian tribes has always been ewe's milk. In Iran likewise, popular taste preferred ewe's milk to cow's milk and still does today. The Central Asian beverage koumiss only came into use in Iran during the Mongol and Timurid periods and thereafter went out of vogue (Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente*, nos. 481, 1472, 1866).

Together with milk and eggs, meat was of course a source of animal protein. From ancient times breeders supplied goat flesh, mutton, beef, pork, and poultry. With the spread of Islam, pork lost its place in Iranian cookery. In suitably endowed regions, particularly the Caspian coastlands and Ḵūzestān, and localities on river banks, fishing made and still makes a quite big contribution to the people's diet. From early times, however, most of the meat available from pastoralism went to the tables of the upper classes, and so did all of the meat obtained through hunting (in the Sasanian period for stags, gazelles, hares, wild boars, and wildfowl), except in areas still dependent on hunting as a regular economic activity.

The inventory of traditional foods has always shown regional variations. Dietary habits were determined primarily by what the locality could produce. Many varieties of fruit and vegetables were only produced in particular, often narrowly limited, areas; mainly on account of the high cost of transport, they were considered in distant regions and cities to be exotic luxuries, and consumption of them was one of the "fine distinctions" (Bourdieu) by which the upper classes could set themselves apart. Dried fruits and nuts, however, not being perishable, were less expensive and had a wider market (See Spuler, *Iran*, pp. 508-512; Polak, *Persien* I, pp. 106f.).

2. Iranian cookery. It may be assumed that particular regional, ethnic, and

social traditions of food preparation existed in every period and that their mutual interaction and differentiation led to the emergence of traditions definable as “Iranian cookery.” The scanty direct and indirect information on eating habits in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods suggests that very refined culinary traditions were maintained at royal courts and in wealty households. The ampler information on the haute cuisine of the ʿAbbasid period leaves no doubt that many practices of Sasanian royal and aristocratic cookery were taken over more or less directly. On the other hand there is little evidence of any continuous threads of development linking the elite cookery of pre-Islamic and early Islamic Iran to the ordinary cookery current in Iran today. In all probability modern Iranian cookery belongs to a line of tradition traceable to the period between the 8th/14th and 10th/16th centuries. As a result of the vast conquests of the Mongols and Tīmūr, Central Asian and Far Eastern culinary practices penetrated to the Iranian plateau and merged with regional traditions of everyday cookery rather than with pre-Mongol aristocratic forms of fine cookery.

Reports which have come down present a rough picture of the everyday cooking of townsfolk in the Iranian lands in the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries. Soups with the consistency of porridge, generically known as *āš* and mainly composed of cereals, vegetables, and herbs, doubtless very similar to the present-day concoctions of that name, were a legacy from old Iranian tradition. The word *āš* had passed several centuries earlier from Persian into the Central Asian Turkish languages (see Āš, i.). The versatile and skillful use of viscera probably also stemmed from Iranian tradition. The wider use of milk products (e.g., of *kašk* for flavoring *āš*) is likely to have been due to the Central Asian influences at work in the Mongol and Timurid periods. The same is probably true of the use of boiled pasta, which is known to have spread to the Iranian plateau at that time. Pasta was made into various sorts of noodles, ravioli, and dumplings, mostly with Turkish names (Afšār, *Āšpazī-e dawra-ye ṣafawī*, part 1, passim. Various Central Asian cookery books with recipes similar to early Safavid items but not found in later Iranian cookery books. M. Mīnovī and Ī. Afšār, eds., *Waqf – nāma-ye Rabʿ-e Rašīdī*, Tehran, 1350 Š./1971, chaps. 7, 8, 9).

In the present-day cookery of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, pasta preparations, particularly ravioli with various stuffings (under names such as *āš, āšak, mantū, ḡōšbāra, qūš-tīlī,* and others), still occupy an important place. In these territories, rice in a limited number of

recipes is offered as a prestige food at festivals and banquets. The position is very different in Iran, where the use of rice, at first a specialty of Safavid court cuisine, evolved by the end of the 10th/16th century into a major branch of Iranian cookery. From that period have come down the two methods of serving rice most popular in Iran today: *čelow-ḵoreš*, a combination of boiled white rice (*čelow*) with a stew or sauce (*ḵoreš*), and *polow*, rice combined with various ingredients. Both are evidently techniques of Central Asian origin elaborated and diversified in Iran during the first century of Safavid rule. The rising demand led to an expansion of rice growing, mainly in the Caspian coastal provinces. Attention was concentrated on costlier, better-flavored varieties originating from northwest India, and for a long time recurrent importation of Indian seed was found necessary (Polak, *Persien* II, p. 138). In contrast with Afghanistan and Central Asia, the once popular pasta dishes vanished from Iranian menus. Millet consumption, long traditional in Iran, also fell because rice was preferred, and likewise the use of wheat groats (*bolḡūr*), which in vther Middle Eastern countries is much commoner than in Iran. On the other hand, the new fashionableness of rice at the Safavid court influenced the *haute* cuisine of the Mughal empire. The modern cookery of north India (sometimes known as Mughal cookery) evolved from the adaptation of Safavid skills to Indian traditions and circumstances. Many Persian and Turkish words, imported from Iran, are still current in the culinary vocabulary of North India. (See also Fragner, "Zur Erforschung.")

The Iranian culinary style, shaped by Central Asian and indigenous traditions and developed to a high degree of refinement in the Safavid period, has remained until today the norm of good cookery for the middle and upper classes. Its characteristics differ markedly from those of Ottoman cookery, which is a special combination of Central Asian Turkish and to some extent Iranian elements with old Mediterranean culinary traditions, and consequently from those of the Ottoman-influenced types of cookery now current in Turkey, some of the Arab countries, and the Balkan peninsula. While rice, so widely used in Iran, remained on the whole alien to Ottoman cookery, vegetables of American origin such as tomatoes, paprika, and potatoes, likewise maize, and also another import from America, the turkey (known in Turkish and Arabic as *hendī*, in Persian as *būqalamūn* because thought to change color like a chameleon) did not come to Iran until the nineteenth century, much later than to the Mediterranean lands comprised in the Ottoman empire. These vegetables figure in Iranian dishes far less than is the case of Mediterranean cookery.

European (mainly French) and American culinary styles have hardly at all supplanted the traditional Iranian style in domestic cookery, though they have made their mark in another sector, restaurant cuisine. Until well into the nineteenth century, eating houses in Iran were limited to a small number of types, particularly cookshops serving *āš* (see above), *kalla-pāčă* (soups made from sheep's heads and trotters), *šekamba* (soups made from tripe), *kabāb* (skewered meats or viscera grilled over charcoal) and *čelow kabāb* (grilled mutton with rice). Taverns, so often mentioned in Persian lyric poetry, maintained a shadowy existence on the fringe of legality and usually under non-Moslem ownership. The only establishments providing company and entertainment as well as refreshment were coffee-houses, where since the nineteenth century tea has been served though the name *qahva-ḵāna* is retained. The first real restaurants appeared at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, mainly in Tehran; they were on the Russian-Caucasian model with terraces and gardens. Restaurants on the western European model grew in number from the 1930s onward, and more recently American-style quick food places. For a long time these Western-type establishments supplied predominantly Western-type food, but in the 1960s some of the modern restaurants went in for Iranian cuisine and folkloric decor. The only really successful and popular compromise between the European-type restaurant and the traditional cookshop is the so-called *čelow-kabābī*.

In traditional Iranian practice, most foods are cooked over an open fire. Another important methods is slow cooking, without exposure to flame, in a copper cauldron (*dīg-e mesī*) or a special oven (*tanūr*) made of fireclay (once widely used but today largely forgotten). Soups (*āš*), broths (*āb-gūšt*), rice (*čelow, polow*), stews (*ḵoreš*), pot-roasts, and many sorts of sweets were cooked in this way. The method remains in favor today with modern gas or kerosene heating appliances. The old-type cooking stove (*fer*) has ceased to be popular, though it remains the best means of cooking certain traditional dishes (e.g., the vegetable omelet called *kūkū*). Another traditional skill, which still thrives, is the grilling of all sorts of *kabāb*s over red-hot charcoal (*zoḡāl-e čūb*).

Since ancient times Iranians have supplemented their diet with vitamin-rich fresh vegetables, fresh fruits (including cucumbers), white cheese, and several kinds of flat bread. For thirst quenching, iced fruit syrups were formerly used but have been largely replaced by American-type soft drinks. Until well into the present century the flat bread also served to lift food to the mouth. Only in quite recent times have Western-style table implements, particularly spoons

and forks, become popular; with Iranian dishes, knives are seldom used. Chronologically the introduction of cutlery coincided with the adoption of table and chairs in place of the traditional cloth spread on the floor (*sofra*).

The outstanding characteristic of modern Iranian cookery is its conservatism. The much discussed "craze for Western things" (*ḡarb-zadagī*) has had little or no effect on the people's eating habits. In this field, Iranian cultural resistance to Western influences has shown particular strength.

See also Āš and Āšpaz-ḵāna.

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