

# UNITED THROUGH FOOD



# Foreword

United Through Food is not just a cookbook, but a tribute to the rich tapestry of diversity that is Iraqi culture. With ancient Mesopotamia at its heart, Iraq is home to a multitude of ethnic groups and religions. Home-cooked food is one of life's staples that brings Iraqis together and underpins their national identity.

Hospitality, generosity, and community are a vital component of Iraqi culture. Mealtimes are shared experiences where family and friends prepare food and join together to eat. Communal meals are a daily affair, driven by rich, culinary traditions. Nothing brings people together more than the scent of dolma bubbling away on a cool January afternoon, or the sound of tea rolling to a boil as families, friends and neighbors gather and chat in the kitchen.

While we celebrate its vibrant cuisines, we cannot forget the hardships and challenges Iraqis have endured as a result of decades of conflict – most recently following the end of occupation by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. As a result of social divides that have remained, UNDP Iraq is working to support the country move forward - building peaceful and prosperous communities, with the tolerance among Iraq's communities that has always been there. We do not only address and mitigate the root causes for dividers, but also amplify what brings Iraqis together in history and culture such as music, poetry, and food. Across the globe, food unites us, allowing us to speak in a common language and better understand one another by learning about each other's unique traditions. A pleasure we should never take for granted.

This cookbook is an opportunity for us to celebrate the time-honored traditions of Iraq and acknowledge the important role of small things that bring Iraqis together. I hope that you will enjoy reading about the history of Iraq's varied governorates and cuisines as much as you will enjoy preparing and sharing the mouth-watering recipes with your loved ones and neighbors.

Bil-Afiya.

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# IRAQ: AN OVERVIEW

According to researchers, the first inhabited settlements in Mesopotamia date back to 60 000-9500 B.C, between the Stone Age and the Middle Stone Age. Inhabitants at that time were concentrated in the mountainous areas, near Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah. Archeologists discovered the first caves there known as “Shanidar,” “Hezar Merd,” “Barak,” “Kiwan,” and “Hajiya,” among others. At a later stage, Mesopotamians shifted from living in caves and built the first residential areas in small villages, like Zawi Shami, Karim Shaher, including a settlement called “Jermu,” 11km east of JemJemal, in which the remains of 30-40 houses have been discovered.<sup>1</sup> Human habitation had later moved southward, where the first town, Eridu, was built, and which the archeologists believe was closer to the port, situated near some lakes. They also believed that the town had connections with the Gulf. Eridu inhabitants were primarily engaged in fishing and offered fish as sacrifice for the temple.<sup>2</sup> Tel Suwan, 11 kilometers from Samarra, is another settlement and was the earliest existing town in Mesopotamia. This settlement was founded about 5350 B.C, along with other settlements like Yarim Tepe in the Sinjar Plains.<sup>3</sup>

Following these early stages of civilization, Iraq’s ancient history started when the Sumarian civilization emerged in the South, and concentrated in Uruk, Kish, Lagash and Ur. At that stage, city states emerged, and the Sumerians invented the cuneiform inscriptions, followed by the emergence of kingdoms and the Acadian, Babylon and Assyrian empires.

This region was plagued with Achaemenid, Sasanian, and Roman invasions. The Muslim Arabs entered and founded the cities of Kufa, Basra, Baghdad, and Wasit. During this time, Iraq became the center of Arab Muslim civilization and a global attraction, especially during the Abbasid period. However, these golden centuries ended in a series of occupations, the longest of which was the Ottoman occupation which lasted six centuries culminating in World War I, and the British occupation and incursion into Iraq in 1918. Two years later, the British mandate started, and King Faysal I was installed, and the State of Iraq, which gained independence in 1932, was formed.<sup>4</sup>

## DEMOGRAPHY OF IRAQ

Geographically, Iraq is situated in the northern part of the Arab Peninsula. It is bordered to the north by Turkey, to the east by Iran, to the west by Syria and Jordan and to the south by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Iraq is about 143,250 square miles, equivalent to 446,713 square kilometers. It has an extremely diverse climate, with mountainous and plain areas and an expansive desert, in addition to the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, from which the name the ‘land of the two rivers’ comes from, or Mesopotamia, which was used by the Greek historian Herodotus after visiting the country.<sup>5</sup> Iraq is also famous for the large water surfaces in the south, known as al-Ahwar (marshland), which is considered a unique cultural environment. Iraq has a seaport on the Arabian Gulf at Shat al-Arab into which the two tributaries of Tigris and Euphrates drain.

The population of Iraq consists of numerous ethnicities. In its ancient history, Iraq was inhabited by Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Arabs and Kurds in addition to other minorities like Mandaeans and Jews. This diversity continued into modern times and was further expanded to include other ethnic groups that migrated to Iraq over the past centuries, including Turkmans and Armenians. The Turkmans came to Iraq during the Umayyad period, and their number increased during the second Abbasid period. The word Turkman in modern times refers to the population who inhabited the territories that separate the Kurdish region from the Arab region. They occupy the stretch of land extending from the north-west to south-east, i.e. from Tal Afar in Ninewa Governorate to Altun Kupri in Kirkuk and Tuz Khurmatu in Salah al-Din Governorate and Kuz Ribat and Mendeli in Diyala. It is believed that their ancestors came along with the forces that arrived with the army of Sultan Murad IV, who recovered Iraq from Safavids in 1638 A.D.<sup>6</sup>

Iraqi society is comprised of urban, rural and Bedouin tribes. This eclectic population is a product of the biodiversity characterizing Mesopotamia, which reflects on the cultures of ancestral Iraqi groups. It has caused diverse Iraqi groups to influence each other and transmute their cultural elements and milieus to other communities. Elements of various cultures are reflected on the prevailing system of social values, through arts, literature, dress code, architecture, and food variety.

## Agricultural and Animal Products

For thousands of years, Iraq has been known for its agricultural and animal products, thanks to the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, that give life to thousands of villages. These rivers were the mainstay for the rise of successive civilizations in Mesopotamia. When Arabs entered Mesopotamia, they were surprised by the abundant vegetation and thick palm trees, which they termed Iraq Sawad Land (black land) as it looked black from afar due to the dense greeneries and palm trees. This was also observed by Herodotus when he toured Babel and Assyria. He described it as a country characterized by plenty of rivers and canals, as in Egypt, adding that due to its extremely fertile land, the plant leaves are very wide.<sup>7</sup>

Among the agricultural products of Iraq are different varieties of cereals, most prominent of which are wheat, barley, rice, sesame, legumes, and fruit trees like grapes, oranges, watermelons, and pears. Cultivated vegetables include eggplant, cucumber, okra, and onion. Farm animal products are characterized by their marked diversity and abundance, including sheep, cows, goats, and poultry, in addition to fish, which is an Iraqi staple.



# IRAQ: AN OVERVIEW

## HISTORY OF IRAQI CUISINE

Iraqi cuisine dates back to nearly 10,000 years ago. According to cooking utensils discovered by archeologists, Iraqis have long developed their unique cuisine, cooking elaborate dishes. Kaufman, the author of a book titled “Cooking in Ancient Civilizations,” has noted that although Mesopotamia was a mixture of different ethnicities, documented evidence indicates that the multiethnic groups have shared similar cooking habits<sup>8</sup>, including social culture related to food preparation. He added that there is an absence of information about recipes used by the Mesopotamian population in ancient times. However, there are about 35 such recipes engraved on three clay tablets written in 1650 B.C, some of which are still used until today.<sup>9</sup>

According to Kaufman, ancient Iraqis widely celebrated baked bread and porridge, with over 300 documented varieties of bread. In the 35 recipes engraved on tablets, biscuits and porridge mixed with dates and animal butter are described, and are still used today, termed Zibd Al-Arab (Arabian Butter). Other food items mentioned include yogurt and mustard cheese, as well as Aylami porridge, which implies that some meals were imported from outside Mesopotamia. There are certain dishes that originated in Iran, Turkey and the Gulf countries, not to mention the dishes of the Arab Peninsula and the Levant (Greater Syria). The Babylonian description of Aylami porridge is evidence of the existence of other food varieties that have influenced Iraqi cuisine.

In a list published by the University of Lille, special dishes such as Mufattah are identified, also known as lamb or roasted baby lamb.<sup>10</sup> Other dishes include roasted duck and amoor sano pigeon with gravy, which is similar to dishes available currently in the Ahwar region, including Kh dairy bird and Miskeh among others. The list also refers to Yakhni stew, which is very popular across Iraq. Kibbeh Nayyeh (raw kibbeh) is made of bulgar (steamed or parboiled, dried and ground wheat). The availability of this dish in Iraq negates the theory that the kibbeh variety known as Mosul Kibbeh originated in the Levant. In addition, roasted fish, fried onion, fava bean soup, mashed eggplant, cucumber and sugar beet salads are among other local dishes. Another food variety is the Marsu Pie, which consists of dates and peanuts.<sup>11</sup>

Over the years, these recipes were passed down through the generations to the medieval period, when Arabs started arriving in Iraq and established one of the largest civilizations. During these centuries, many dishes circulated and authors of culinary books wrote about them. Author Ahmad Bin al-Hassan al-Baghdadi Ahmad wrote a book titled “Book on Culinary and Damascene Cuisine,” consisting of 170 recipes circulating in Iraq and the Levant. Most of them were Iraqi in nature and belonged to numerous environments from the extreme east to the extreme north. One recipe in the book is a shrimp dish related to the marine environment of Basra<sup>12</sup>, in addition to other varieties of the Mosul Madqouka. It also describes how to make the flat bread (Ragag) that is widespread in Kurdistan region.<sup>13</sup> This food culture contributed to the formation of a common national identity as time passed. The southern, northern, western, and eastern parts of Iraq share identical dishes, in addition to other locally produced ones. This is attributed to the anthropological diversity and multiple ethnicities of the Iraqi population.

## FOOD CULTURE

Iraqi food culture is generally characterized by many features, and most of these diverse food varieties have been a part of the Iraqi system of ethical values and a byproduct of their compassion, harmony, and amity towards each other. Therefore, they used food to satisfy their deities and offered it as vows to their gods. Later, food was used as a blessing for the dead, when the most delicious dishes were distributed for the departed souls of loved ones. That practice continued for thousands of years and the Iraqi population is still using food as a means of invoking reward.

The tradition of distributing and exchanging food during feasts and religious occasions helped to promote cohesion within Iraqi society and spread tolerance and acceptance of others. Christians appreciate the food offered by Muslims, and Muslims share food with the Jewish community. This feature is a common characteristic shared by all Muslim denominations that account for most of Iraq's population, where families from all religions, sects, and nationalities meet at a banquet and welcome the dishes offered to them during certain religious occasions like the fasting month of Ramadan, the 10th of Muharram or the birth of the Prophet.

# BASRA

## CHAPTER 2

# GOVERNORATE

**Basra Governorate** is in southern Iraq. It borders the governorates of Maysan and Dhi Qar to the north, Al Muthanna to the west, Kuwait to the south and Iran to the east. It has an area of 19,730 square kilometers and is inhabited by nearly 2.5 million people, distributed over seven districts, constituting 16 administrative units (sub-districts). In terms of climate, Basra has hot desert weather with little rainfall and high humidity.

The city was founded in 635 A.D. by order of the second Caliph Umar bin Al-Khattab, who ordered that the city be built as a camp for Arab fighters. In the beginning the city was composed of many cottages made of reeds and palm leaves. However, that settlement was soon developed into a populated city, thanks to an influx of Persian traders and artisans, in addition to many maids and slaves taken as spoils of war during army expeditions. Later, settlers from the Arab Peninsula moved to the newly established city, and the population of Basra 35 years after its establishment ranged from 150,000 to 200,000 inhabitants.<sup>14</sup> After the establishment of Kufa and later Baghdad in 762 A.D., Iraq consisted of three cities, also known as main centers for Arab civilization. Basra maintained its cultural importance through to the modern era, when it turned into a state, and then became a district in 1866. Late in the Ottoman period, Basra changed from a sanjak (district) to a wilayah or governorate as one of the three governorates of Baghdad, Mosul and Basra that comprised Iraq.<sup>15</sup>

### Society and the Environment

Basra overlooks the sea and the desert at the same time, setting it apart from other Iraqi cities. To the east, lies the Shat Al-Arab (a 200 km long river formed by the confluence of the Euphrates and Tigris), which is connected with the Arabian Gulf, and to the west, Basra is bordered by the desert. It is the only Iraqi city into which two rivers flow; the Euphrates flows into the city from the western hills, while the Tigris flows into it from the east. Both rivers meet at Shat Al-Arab.

Hundreds of rivers and streams branch off from these two rivers, so much so that the "Lughat al-Arab" journal mentions that in the early 20th century, Basra was home to 634 rivers, of which 164 rivers branched off at the eastern part of Shat Al-Arab, starting from Al-Qurnah District and ending in the Iranian city of Khorramshahr.<sup>16</sup> Besides the sea and rivers, Basra is bordered to the north by large marshland areas, extending to the Hawizeh Marshes shared by Iraq and Iran.

In 725 H. Ibn Battuta describes Basra as, "one of Iraq's most renowned cities, whose gardens and orchards have plenty of tasty fruits. By virtue of fertility, it is blessed with fresh clean water. The people of Basra are known for their magnanimity and hospitality to strangers, making them feel comfortable and at home."<sup>17</sup>

This biodiversity has reflected on the city's agricultural and animal products and its rich and varied meals. You can find sea and river fish, fresh fruits and vegetables, mutton and beef meat, in addition to a variety of birds and chicken meat on Basra tables. Basra is famous for its variety of dates and has the largest number of palm tree orchards in the world.

Historically, the population of Basra is known for its diversity. From its establishment, the population was composed of Arabs, Persians, Indians, and Africans, whose forefathers migrated to the city after the Arab conquests. Basra was a center for the slave trade, with large markets during the Abbasid period, ultimately becoming one of the most important market areas in the region.

Basra hosted a minority population from Najd, who settled in Az Zubayr district at the end of the 19th century after fleeing the civil war in the Arab Peninsula and Najd.<sup>18</sup> Shaikh Ali Al-Sharqi mentions that Az Zubayr district suddenly changed in 13th century AH when many families from Najd migrated and chose Az Zubayr as a sanctuary. They built magnificent houses, schools, and bazaars. In addition to the Najdis, there were other communities of Indian, Persian and Turkish descent.

Basra society is considered a model of diversity, with Muslims, Christians of Chaldean, Syriac and Assyrian origin, in addition to Jewish, Mandaean Sabeen and Bahai minority groups. When Armenians fled the massacres perpetrated against them, some sought refuge in Basra. The Muslims of Basra are divided into majority Shiites and minority Sunnis. Even the Shiites themselves are divided into two doctrines; the imamate and Shaykhism.

### Basra Cuisine

The cuisine of Basra consists of three types dishes, of which the ingredients are only grown and produced in Basra Governorate. The first type of dishes are made with sea fish, including the Zubaidi fish variety, shrimp, sabbour fish, and sole, in addition to other fish varieties caught by local fishermen. Basra cuisine is somewhat associated with the Gulf culinary system in that both share the same seafood elements. Therefore, the dishes available in Basra are identical with those prepared by Kuwaitis and other Arab Gulf populations, albeit with different names.

A distinguishing feature of Basra cuisine lies in its influence by dishes from neighboring southern cities and other Iraqi cities through social relationships. This explains the exemplary food diversity of Basra cuisine. In addition to the customary seafood, Basra has added its distinctive feel to other Iraqi dishes. The Basra population, for example, prepares shabzi stew in two ways; with meat or sabbour fish. While meat in shabzi stew is common all over Iraq, sabbour stew is exclusively prepared in Basra. The same applies to the sweets prepared in Basra, including Khouz River sweets, maghoutha and qarbooj, which consist of roasted flour mixed with sugar and cinnamon, presented in sandwiches.

The second type of dishes consists of food varieties which Basra shares with nearby southern villages. There are many common dishes among the governorates of Basra, Dhi Qar, and Maysan, including masmouta (dried fish), tathkhana, fish gravy, and mutabbaq samak (rice-based fish meal). These common dishes are cooked distinctly in different towns and cities. For example. Basra inhabitants prepare fish gravy in two ways; the first is similar to that of Maysan and Dhi Qar and is called Al-Masmouta, and the second, which is prepared in Basra, is called Al-Ma'alouka, and will be described later.

The third type of dishes consists of national recipes found across Iraqi cities like maroqat, (stews), roasted and grilled meats, varieties of mutabbaq (rice-based fish), kibbeh, rice varieties, bread, sweets, beverages, and many other traditional dishes. Among the modern dishes are dolma, Sheikh Mahshi, fish masgouf, tava kebab or irook kebab, okra stew, dilimi, qouzi, fried fish, and tipsi, among others.



# BASRA

## CHAPTER 2

# GOVERNORATE

### Fish Dishes

The Basra kitchen is famous for sea and river fish, to the extent that fish has become a distinguishing mark of the city. Basra overlooks the sea and the river, and seafood has become a vital part of local life. Traditionally, the inhabitants of Basra earmark Wednesday and Friday for fish eating. Wednesday is kept for sea fish, which is prepared in an elaborate way, cooked in gravy, with rice. Friday is exclusively reserved for grilled fish. This is not an absolute norm, although it characterizes life in general in Basra. Hosts in Basra are hospitable and often keen to offer seafood dishes to their guests. Among the fish varieties offered on the Basra banquet are Sabbour, Zubaydi, Hamour, Mazlaq, Sha'ek, Nuwaybi, Dakouk, Makheet, Shamahi, Bayyah, shrimp, Al-Khashni, Al-Zouri, Al-Samti, Al-Qattan, Al-Jirri, Shabout, Abu Ulaywi, Matout and Hamam. Basra is famous for preparing the fish filling, especially used with the Sabbour fish variety, called dokuz salsa (a Turkish word meaning nine) The name refers to the nine ingredients used for the salsa, which consists of onion, date, tamarind, celery, garlic, vinegar, tomato, hot pepper, noomi basra (black lime) and green pepper. Sea fish can either be grilled or fried, and is offered alone, with sauce or with rice and other side dishes.

One of the most delicious dishes in Basra that spread to other cities is known as Al-Mugashat, which is a coastal dish widespread in the Gulf coast. It can be prepared from Hamour or tuna fish, which is boiled with black pepper and mixed with onion, dill, ground lime, carrots, sultanas (golden raisins), garlic and spices in addition to a small amount of rice and placed on the fire. Another variety includes shrimp fried in sauce or cooked with rice, golden raisins, almonds, and noodles. There are also other dishes in which Zubaydi fish is the main ingredient, such as Mutabaq Al-Zubaydi or Kabsit Al-Zubaydi. Some prefer to serve fried Zubaydi fish alone. Regarding the fish broth, Basra inhabitants use fresh fish or Masmout or Mankout fish. The difference between the two is that the Masmout is salted, cleaned and flavored with spices and then placed in the sun until it dries. The Mankout is cut open and cleaned from inside by rubbing it with a cloth without washing. It is then salted and put on a covered tray in a shaded place. Two days later the fish is dried and frozen or used to make a fish broth called Malouka. In ancient times, fish was put into burlap bags and buried underground. Malouka soup consists of Sabbour fish stuffed and peppered and fried after wrapping it with palm leaves, with water, tomato paste and other ingredients added. Fish are also grilled in a clay oven, as is done in other southern Iraqi towns. In recent decades, Masgouf fish (grilled) has been prepared according to the typical Baghdadi recipe.

### Other Dishes

Over and above seafood dishes, Basra residents give great attention to their banquets, and there are many recipes that reflect the richness and diversity of Basra community heritage. For example, the Indian samosa is often prepared, which consists of a special dough made of flour, mung bean, boiled lentil, minced onion, fried potato with curry, red pepper, cumin, and salt. Soups preferred by Basra residents include a seven-ingredient soup consisting of mashed mung bean, black-eyed peas, beans, broad beans, rice, green lentils, and chickpeas. Some also add chard. In Basra, some families cook famous dishes of other countries in their own way, such as masmouta with okra. Another dish called muarraqa is prepared by Basra inhabitants, in which fresh fish is prepared without okra. Tomato paste and dried apricot are added to the broth, which created a reddish color. Masmouta broth is usually yellow and without fresh tomato, tomato paste and spices.





## INGREDIENTS (serves 5)

2 cups	Long grain basmati rice
	Water as required
1 Tbsp.	Salt
3-4 Tbsp.	Vegetable oil
¼ cup	Olive oil or coconut oil
2	Cloves grated garlic
2	Sliced onions
1 Tsp.	Curry powder
½ Tsp.	Ground fresh ginger
½ Tsp.	Coriander
1 Tsp.	Dry lime powder
3 Tbsp.	Saffron water
1 cup	Small shrimps
3 Tbsp.	Raisins
1 cup	Large shrimps
¼ cup	Toasted pine nuts

## PREPARATION

Use the rice, salt and vegetable oil to cook the rice. Heat the oil in a frying pan and brown the onion and garlic. Add the curry powder, ginger, coriander, lime and saffron water and mix well. Add the small shrimps and continue cooking for 3-4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the raisins and remove from the heat.

Fry the large shrimps in a small amount of oil for approximately 2-3 minutes on each side. To serve, either combine the prepared rice with the shrimp mixture, garnishing with the larger shrimp and pine nuts or layer the rice and shrimp on a plate.



## TEMMAN ROBYAN

### RICE WITH SHRIMPS

The origins of this dish are in Southern Iraq – the city of Basra to be precise – whose proximity close to the Arabian Gulf has blessed it with an abundance of seafood. Dry lime (also known as Noomi Basra) is made by boiling fresh lime in salt water and then sun drying until the insides turn black. Although the dry lime powder used in this recipe can be purchased it's enough easy to make your own. Boil in salt water and sun-dry the fresh lime until the insides turn black. Crush each lime with a knife and remove the seeds to avoid any bitter aftertaste. Using a spice grinder, pulverise the lime to a fine powder.



## INGREDIENTS (serves 5)

4 Tbsp.	Oil
1	Thinly sliced onion
½ Kg	Lamb with bones, cut into small pieces Water as required
5 cups	Chopped spinach or 2 ½ cups frozen spinach
¼ Tsp.	Cumin.
½ Tsp.	Turmeric
½ Tbsp.	Dry lime powder
2	Whole dried limes
2 Tbsp.	Chopped Coriander
3 Tbsp.	Lemon juice
1 Tbsp.	Chopped Fresh dill
¼ cup	chopped Fresh parsley
¼ cup	pre-soaked and cooked kidney beans
	Salt and pepper to taste

## PREPARATION

Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a large pot and sauté the onions, garlic and meat until brown. Fill the pot with water and bring to boil, then reduce the heat and simmer covered until the meat is tender (approximately 1-2 hours).

In a separate frying pan heat 2 tablespoons of oil and sauté the spinach. When softened, add turmeric, dry lime powder, whole dry limes, coriander, lemon juice, dill, parsley, kidney beans and salt and pepper.

Add the spinach mix to the pot of meat, cover and cook on low heat for an additional 10-15 Minutes and serve.





# MAYSAN

## CHAPTER 3

# GOVERNORATE

**Maysan Governorate's** boundaries extend from the southern part of Wasit Governorate to north of Basra. It is bound to the north by Al Jibab river valley, to the south by Al Satih river, which flows into the right side of Tigris River, and the Al Aqiq river on the left. To the east it is bound by the Hawizeh Marshes, which extend into Iran .

The total area of the governorate is 16072 sq. km and it has a population of about 1,100,000 inhabitants. Marshes constitute more than 40% of its area, extending from its southern, southeastern and southwestern borders. The Tigris River runs through the middle of Amara town, branching into a number of rivers like Al Majer, Kahla'a, Al Mashrah and Al Amara, in addition to many small tributaries.

Maysan was named after the famous kingdom that ruled between 223-187 BC. Sources mention that the kingdom was established south of Babel territory. It was earlier under the control of the Seleucids but later gained independence. It was ruled by 23 kings.<sup>19</sup>

Documented accounts note that the city of Amara, Maysan's capital, was established by the Ottoman governor Muhammad Namiq Pasha, who ruled from 1861 until 1867.<sup>20</sup> That governor established a camp on the Tigris River, named 'Al-Ourdi,' which means 'camp.' It later became a small town called Al Amara. In the beginning it consisted of a limited number of houses inhabited by soldiers. Later, many people arrived to form a city. It remained under a military system for a year until it was annexed to Basra Governorate and changed into an administrative division. The name 'Amara' was mentioned in several travel diaries, the oldest of which was in 1656 AD, when traveler Sebastiani mentioned it along with Al Mansouriya and Al Majer. He described it as a village located at three-days travel from Baghdad.<sup>21</sup> In the twentieth century, the city was made independent from Basra and became a governorate, comprising several districts, including Al-Amara, Ali Al-Gharbi, Ali Al-Sharqi and Qala'at Salah al-Din.

### Society and the Environment

Maysan's topographically is divided into two parts; a highly fertile landmass that accounts for 60% of the governorate 's overall area with plenty of rivers, and the remaining part consists of water-covered marshes. Maysan has a distinctive identity by virtue of its unique natural life and the culture of its population, who live on fishing, buffalo breeding and poultry. The marshes of Maysan have remarkable economic and tourism potential. Marshland products create indispensable resources for the governorate and Iraq in general. Official statistics have revealed that the governorate's rice production in 2018 reached about 721 tons, and Maysan produced over 135 tons wheat and about 26 tons barley. Date products amounted to more than 8,000 tons.<sup>22</sup>

Maysan is considered one of Iraq's richest governorates in terms of livestock thanks to its fish resources in the marshland areas. Sheep, cow, and buffalo breeding represents another important source of livelihood. In addition, existing birdlife, both indigenous and migratory, characterizes the marshland environment. Among the birds most favored by the population of Maysan, the south and the other Iraqi towns are Burhan, Khudairi, Barbasha, Misaka, Hidhaf, and other aquatic bird species.

For thousands of years, the Maysan population has lived in a charming marshland environment and has been known for their kindness and tolerance. Although the society predominantly consists of Muslims, there are numerous minority groups that have lived amongst them, including Christians, Jews and Sabian Mandeans.<sup>23</sup> Often, Jews and Mandeans worked with gold and silver, and the latter also mastered the manufacture and repair of boats near rivers.<sup>23</sup>

### Maysan Cuisine

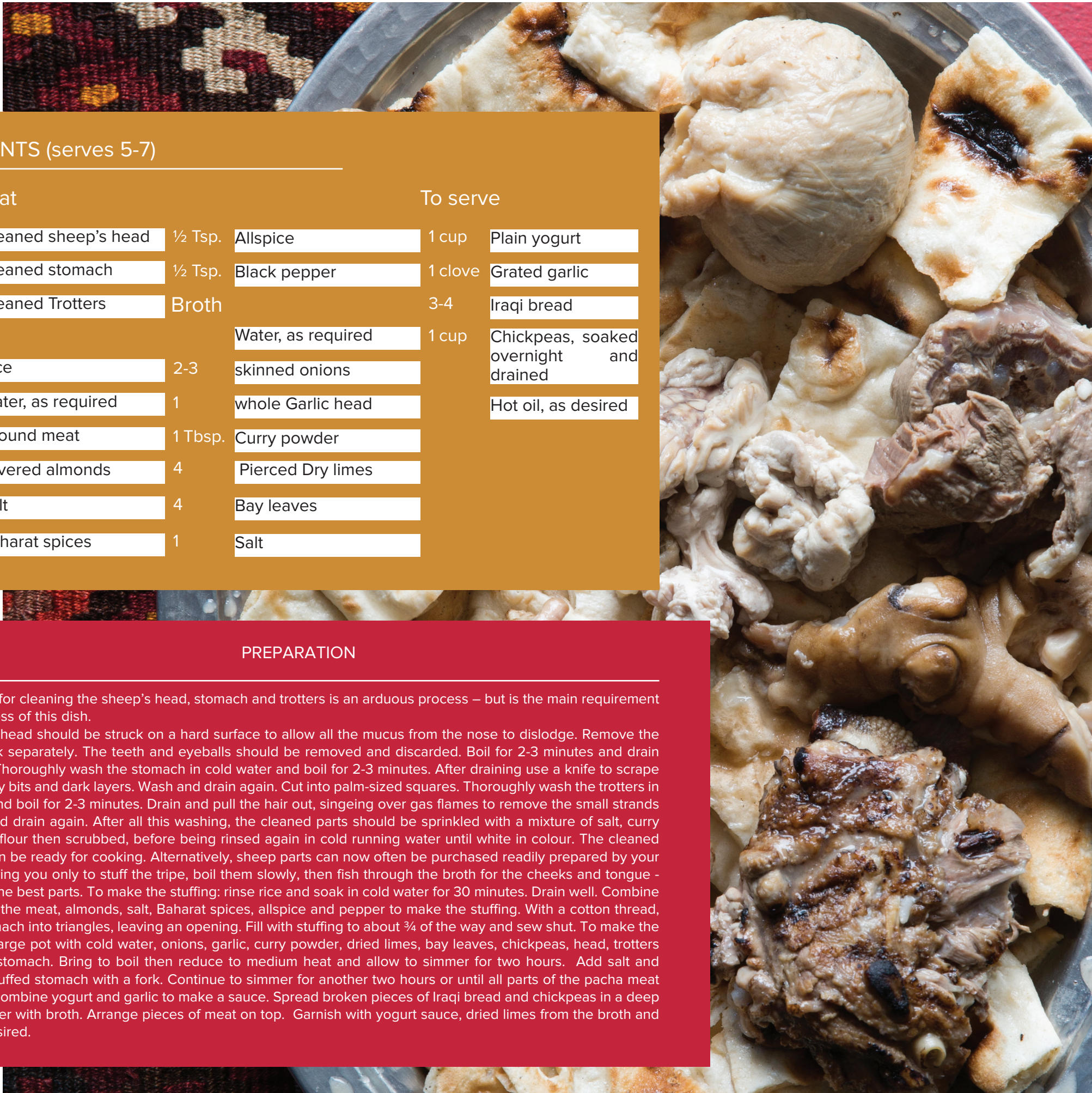
Maysan's food variety can be divided into three categories; the first consists of local dishes that are exclusively available in Maysan. Among these dishes are Tabiq and Samak (bread and fish) and Al-Sayyah. These two dishes are purely Maysan's specialty and are not found in other cities. However, in the middle of the twentieth century when people started migrating from the Maysan countryside to other cities, especially Baghdad, these two dishes became popular in other Iraqi cities, and Maysan restaurateurs began to serve them in some areas like Al-Nahdha Passenger Transport Station, to manual laborers at 55 Square at the Revolution (Al-Sadr) city, and in other public squares like the famous Eastern Gate area.<sup>24</sup> Rural women from southern Iraq specialized in preparing these two food varieties. Other local dishes in Maysan Governorate include birds and some sweet dishes made of milk, rice, and carrots.

The second food variety is composed of traditional food from the south that can be found in Basra, Nasiriya, Al-Shatra, and Al-Rifae, as well as in Samawa and Wasit. The food variety is based on fish, meat, rice and wheat, characteristic of the southern Iraqi environment. Methods of preparing these special dishes include grilled fish, fried fish, fish cooked in gravy, in addition to serving it with red or biryani rice. The same applies to red meats, and the southern Iraqi table abounds with tens of dishes, including Tashreeb (broth-soaked bread), fried meat, known in Iraq as Chilli-Fry, sometimes made with Biryani or grilled on skewers in the traditional tanour (oven) and eaten with bread. The same applies to rice and wheat, which constitute an essential part of the food culture in the south. There are many rice-based dishes, some borrowed from neighboring Iran or Turkey, like Perde Pilavi (curtained rice). Chilleh consists of rice mixed with lentils, mung beans, onion, and spices, and is like a thick soup. Other traditional dishes include rice and cooked mung beans, eaten with yogurt.

In southern Iraq, wheat is an essential food element and there are special ways of preparing it, such as using it for making bread served with the main dishes or in local pastries eaten alone or with yogurt, tea or milk. One bread variety is called Al Rasaa, which is a little thick and baked on a metal or clay oven. Another variety is fried bread, prepared by frying round dough in a frying pan with some oil or fat. This kind of bread has different names in different cities. In the south they call it Arook Biltawa and in the central region it is called fatty bread. In the south, they bake a bread variety called Khubz Al-Qa'a in which the round dough is baked in the fire and is thick. It is eaten with butter or ghee, or it can be rubbed by hand and mixed with butter, called Marees. There are also traditional sweets prepared by the people in southern Iraq and Maysan, such as Bahit, which consists of a sweet dish made of rice, sugar and milk. There is also carrot halva made from carrot, in addition to some other sweet dishes that are no longer available and have been replaced by modern sweets.

The third food variety in Maysan includes many traditional dishes available all over Iraq that originate in different cities. Examples of these food varieties are the broth-based dishes, kibbeh, stuffed vegetables, Biryani, gravy dishes, kebab, rice-based dishes, tikka, in addition to grilled meat varieties, like fish and chicken, as well as numerous baked breads and pastries. Breakfast foods include kaymak (clotted cream), homemade cheese and butter. There is also pacha (a traditional Iraqi dish made from sheep's head, trotters, and stomach; all boiled slowly and served with bread sunken in the broth. In Maysan, people prefer the cow-based pacha to the sheep pacha, contrary to the restaurants in other cities like Baghdad and Mosul, which prepare this dish in different ways.





INGREDIENTS (serves 5-7)

Pacha Meat

1	Cleaned sheep's head	½ Tsp.	Allspice	1 cup	Plain yogurt
1	Cleaned stomach	½ Tsp.	Black pepper	1 clove	Grated garlic
4	Cleaned Trotters	Broth		3-4	Iraqi bread
Stuffing			Water, as required	1 cup	Chickpeas, soaked overnight and drained
1 cup	Rice	2-3	skinned onions		
	Water, as required	1	whole Garlic head		Hot oil, as desired
200g	Ground meat	1 Tbsp.	Curry powder		
¼ cup	Slivered almonds	4	Pierced Dry limes		
1 Tsp	Salt	4	Bay leaves		
1 Tsp	Baharat spices	1	Salt		

To serve

PREPARATION

The method for cleaning the sheep's head, stomach and trotters is an arduous process – but is the main requirement for the success of this dish.

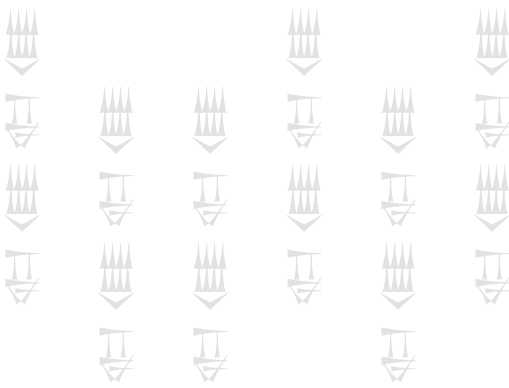
The sheep's head should be struck on a hard surface to allow all the mucus from the nose to dislodge. Remove the brain to cook separately. The teeth and eyeballs should be removed and discarded. Boil for 2-3 minutes and drain thoroughly. Thoroughly wash the stomach in cold water and boil for 2-3 minutes. After draining use a knife to scrape away the fatty bits and dark layers. Wash and drain again. Cut into palm-sized squares. Thoroughly wash the trotters in cold water and boil for 2-3 minutes. Drain and pull the hair out, singeing over gas flames to remove the small strands and wash and drain again. After all this washing, the cleaned parts should be sprinkled with a mixture of salt, curry powder and flour then scrubbed, before being rinsed again in cold running water until white in colour. The cleaned parts will then be ready for cooking. Alternatively, sheep parts can now often be purchased readily prepared by your butcher, leaving you only to stuff the tripe, boil them slowly, then fish through the broth for the cheeks and tongue - considered the best parts. To make the stuffing: rinse rice and soak in cold water for 30 minutes. Drain well. Combine the rice with the meat, almonds, salt, Baharat spices, allspice and pepper to make the stuffing. With a cotton thread, sew the stomach into triangles, leaving an opening. Fill with stuffing to about ¾ of the way and sew shut. To make the broth: Fill a large pot with cold water, onions, garlic, curry powder, dried limes, bay leaves, chickpeas, head, trotters and stuffed stomach. Bring to boil then reduce to medium heat and allow to simmer for two hours. Add salt and pierce the stuffed stomach with a fork. Continue to simmer for another two hours or until all parts of the pacha meat are tender. Combine yogurt and garlic to make a sauce. Spread broken pieces of Iraqi bread and chickpeas in a deep dish and cover with broth. Arrange pieces of meat on top. Garnish with yogurt sauce, dried limes from the broth and hot oil as desired.

Marshes Dishes

As mentioned earlier, one of Maysan's famous traditional dishes is Tabiq and Fish. Tabiq refers to the way in which rice flour paste is baked, and the loaves themselves. Tabiq consists of a round thick clay tool, placed on three bricks. A fire is made underneath, and a round rice flour paste is baked on it. When the lower part of the bread ripens, small burning pieces of cow dung are placed on the top part of the baked bread. When the top part is baked, the dung residuals will be removed and the baked bread is served with roasted fish, typically carp. Some villagers mix the Tabiq paste with small fish and bake it in the same way, and the loaf is eaten like pizza.

Sayyah is the same as Tabiq. It also consists of rice flour paste, but in thinner round pieces and baked on a metal flat sheet called sajj, where the paste is placed and left to bake. The water-based rice flour paste is made by hand and does not usually take much time to prepare. This bread is served hot with eggs or butter, and sometimes with medium size barbus fish. The sayyah bread must be served hot, otherwise it will lose its taste and flavor.

PACHA







INGREDIENTS (serves 4-5)

500 g.	Grated Carrots
¼ cup	Vegetable Oil or butter
2 cups	Brown Sugar
2 Tbsp.	Corn starch
½ cup	Walnuts
1 Tsp	Lemon juice
1 Tbsp.	Ground Cardamom
	Water

PREPARATION

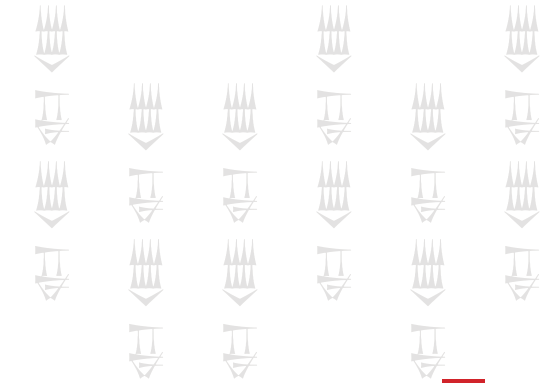
In a deep pan heat ¼ cup of oil and sauté the carrots, stirring occasionally until golden brown.  
Add the corn starch and sugar and mix well.  
Add enough water to cover the carrots and simmer until the mixture thickens and browns.  
Remove from the heat, add the cardamom and walnuts.  
Set aside a few nuts for decoration.  
Spread the halawa in a large, flat serving dish and decorate with walnuts.



HALAWAT JEZAR

CARROT HALAWA

There is no need to readjust your eyes when reading this recipe (particularly if you've been eating the very vegetable that many wives tales credit with improving vision!) Yes, this halawa is indeed really made of carrots - because long before carrot cake was a café menu mainstay, Iraqis had already figured out a way to transform savoury to sweet. And while the formerly virtuous vegetable may have let its healthy halo slip in this halawa, enjoy it – it is sinfully good!





# DHI QAR CHAPTER 4

## GOVERNORATE

**Dhi Qar** Governorate is located to the south of Iraq, on the Euphrates River. To the north, it is bound by Wasit and Al-Diwaniyah, and by Basra to the north, Maysan to the east, and Muthanna to the west. The area of the governorate is 13,839 square kilometers and it has a population of about two million inhabitant.<sup>25</sup>

Historically, ancient human civilization was born in the vicinity of the governorate. The ancient city of Ur had a stratified social system with many slaves populating the area during about 4000 B.C. It was one of the Sumerian city-states in the early dynastic period. Ur reached its height of glory during the reign of Ur-Nammu, the founder of the Sumerian Empire, during the third empire, which lasted from 2112 until 2006 B.C. Five kings successively ruled Ur after the founder.<sup>26</sup> Other than Ur, Dhi Qar Governorate has many ancient sites, including Tal Al-Uwaily in Bat-ha subdistrict, dating back to 6000 B.C. Also, Eridu is one of the earliest civilized cities in human history, which dates to 5000 B.C., and Bad-Tibira, west of Al-Shatrah town, dates to the Ubaid Period. Other ancient sites include Lagash, near Dawiyeh subdistrict and Karsu, 15km to the east of Shatrah town. It flourished during the second Lagash dynasty from 2200-2100 B.C. King Gudea was one of its most famous kings, who was known for building temples.<sup>27</sup>

In earlier times, Dhi Qar was called the sanjak or district of Al-Muntafiq, and it was later called Al-Nasiriya Governorate during the Republican period. In 1969, its name changed to Dhi Qar Governorate after the battle between Arabs and Parisians. The governorate consists of districts, including Nasiriya, Shatrah, Al-Rifaie, Suq Al-Shuyukh, and Al-Chibayish. The most important of these districts is Al-Nasiriya which was established in 1870 by order of the reformer Ottoman Wali (governor) Madhat Basha, who appointed Nasir Pasha Al-Saadoun as Mutasarrif (administrative chief). He preferred to live in town and promote farming instead of nomadic living.<sup>28</sup> After Nasir Al-Saadoun's approval to establish a city, Belgian engineer Julis Trilly was summoned and developed a magnificent modern plan for the city, and houses were built. The first to build in the area was Nimatullah Na'oum Bin Akoubjian Sarkis, who constructed bazaars, inns and coffee houses.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, he built the towns of Suq Al-Shuyukh and Al-Shatrah. Two decades later he founded Al-Rifae district. Suq Al-Shuyukh was a marketplace dedicated to Al-Muntafiq elders, and an ammunition hold and fortress to seek refuge in times of need. Soon after the establishment of the new town, thousands of Najdis and Iraqis moved in.<sup>30</sup> The Al-Rifae district was built as a large village in 1893 and was gradually expanded to become a built-in town.

### Society and the Environment

Dhi Qar Governorate is the twin of Maysan Governorate in terms of environment and community. Rivers constitute a predominant feature of the governorate. Just as the Tigris River flows through Maysan Governorate, the Euphrates and Gharraf (a Tigris tributary) flow through Dhi Qar. The governorate is located on the Euphrates River and marshland occupies large areas of it, like Maysan. Dhi Qar is home to Al-Chibayish Marsh and Hammar Marsh, both of which extend northward into Basra. Al-Chabayesh wetland is the largest in the Mesopotamian marsh area, covering large areas of Maysan, Basra, Dhi Qar, Diwaniyeh and Wasit, with a total area of about 600 square kilometers.<sup>31</sup>

In terms of agriculture, Dhi Qar Governorate has large areas of cultivable land amounting to nearly 1.5 million acres. Dates crops are the most popular, followed by wheat, barley, rice, fruit, and vegetables. In terms of livestock, Dhi Qar has many buffalos, cows, sheep, goats, and camels in addition to poultry and domestic and migrant birds in the wetland areas. The fish stock is plentiful in the Gharraf and Euphrates rivers and the marshlands. Demographically, Muslim Arabs, and more specifically the Shia'a sect population, are predominant in the Dhi Qar community. There are also Sunni minorities and small groups of Jews, Christians, and Sabians. Until the early fifties, the Jewish community in the area consisted of traders and businessmen.<sup>31</sup> Al-Nasiriyah and other Dhi Qar districts have a considerable number of Sabian or Mandaean communities. Among the prominent Al-Muntafiq tribes are Banu Malik, Banu Saeed, and Al-Ajwad, divided into about 15 clans.<sup>32</sup>

### Local Dishes

The culinary map of Dhi Qar towns can be divided into three sections. The first consists of local dishes characterizing the Dhi Qar community, the second, which is the most predominant, consists of dishes that are found in the south and middle Euphrates region. The third type consists of the national dishes available in all Iraqi governorates, like grilled meats, fried food, and rice-based and sweet dishes. The marshlands environment gives the governorate a special identity. Most of the cooked dishes consist of rice and fish. While Maysan Governorate is known for its Mutabbaq Samak (fried fish served over stocked rice) and sayyah, Dhi Qar shares with Maysan Governorate dishes like jabab (fish kebab), a traditional dish passed from one generation to another by the marshland people since ancient times. Many Dhi Qar citizens prefer this dish during Ramadan. The jabab dish consists of fish placed in a container of hot water. The fishbones are removed and then it is mixed with a dough consisting of flour, water and spices like turmeric, pepper, and curry, in addition to onion and tomato. The dough will then be made into small round pieces and put over the cooked rice. Another way to make fish kebab is by crushing fish meat with a wooden tool or a mortar and pestle. The flour and spices will then be emptied into the boiling rice pot until it is completed cooked. In addition to jabab, the marshland population and Dhi Qar inhabitants in general are known for their masmouta dish, which is considered historically distinguishing. It is one of the most renowned dishes and is prepared in various ways in the cities of Basra, Amarah, Samawah, Nasiriyah, Shatra and others. According to many, masmouta is a dish passed from one generation to the other by Sumerian ancestors. The recipe is based on drying fish in the open air to preserve it for long periods and cook it again on special occasions like religious events and the fasting month of Ramadan. To prepare the dish, the fish must be carefully washed, and salt is placed inside it. The next step is to tie the fish together and leave it in the sun to dry for about ten days. To cook it, the fish must be washed again, put in a pot with salt and spices and placed over a low fire. Dhi Qar people prefer to cook river fish such as Shilik, Sha'ek, Himri, Khashni, Simti, Barbs and Carp.

One of the favorite dishes of the Dhi Qar population is Al-Tharb, which consists of fish eggs, or more commonly known as caviar. These can be eaten fresh and served as a meal separate from cooked fish. Sometimes, these eggs can be put inside the fish and eaten grilled. This dish can be easily prepared and does not take a long time. The eggs are mixed with fried onion, dried lime and oil. Iraqis generally prefer the caviar extracted from the stomach of carp or barbs. They discard the eggs of Himiri fish because they believe that some of the eggs of this fish species are poisonous. In Dhi Qar, dishes that include stuffed or grilled chicken are common. Many will cook the chicken with onion, tomato, spices, and dried lime and serve it as soup or broth. The marshland people have different ways of roasting chicken in a clay oven or cooking it in pots inside the oven to give it a special flavor. The Sabians or Mandaeans have specific ways of preparing duck meat, especially for certain religious events.





## INGREDIENTS (serves 5)

- |   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1 | whole, Fresh, fish                 |
|   | Salt, pepper and tamarind to taste |
| 2 | sliced tomatoes                    |
| 2 | sliced onions                      |

## PREPARATION

Cut fish length-wise. Butterfly, clean, wash and sprinkle with salt, pepper and tamarind. Make two incisions on the outer side of the fish skin. Prepare an open flame and spear a pair of sticks into the ground, approximately 30cm away from the flame. Using these sticks, spear the incisions in the fish, and – facing inwards – allow to cook for approximately 50 minutes to an hour, until the fish is well barbequed.

Lay the fish on its back and allow to cook for an additional 10 minutes. Serve with tomato and onion slices.

One commonly prepared sweet dish in Dhi Qar and Maysan is from a plant produced in the marsh environment called Khurrait, which typically appears on the reeds from mid-September to mid-May. The inhabitants collect the sweet yellow content from the marsh reeds and prepare it through a complicated process. It is left in the sun and the extract is separated through a special piece of cloth. It is then put over a container with hot water to allow it to crack and form the shape of medium stone-like pieces. With a sweet taste, it is used as sweets and for medicinal purposes. Dishes with this sweet are exclusively prepared and served in the marshland region. They are also sold in Baghdad and Basra and the other Iraqi cities due to the presence of migrants from the south.

Several other dishes commonly created in Dhi Qar and the middle Euphrates include Najafi Qeema and Tarshana which consist of stew made from chickpeas and diced meat. In addition, dishes are made with rice and broad beans, broad beans cooked in lard, fried kebab, kofta made from meatballs or meat loaf, and famous Najaf pickles. Dishes also contain barley and harissa, and the famous fudge-like Daheen Sweet consisting of flour, milk, sugar, butter, and date syrup. These shared dishes are reflective of the geographic proximity and intermarriages that occur between the southern cities and middle Euphrates populations, accentuated by religious visits south to Karbala and Najaf through which new dishes have been discovered.

**SAMAK MASGOUF**

**BARBEQUED FISH**





# KAHI

Nutritionists and nurturing mothers would surely disagree on the place of kahi in a healthy diet. The former would struggle to justify the inclusion of this popular pastry in a standard breakfast meal. However, for the latter there is no better way to start the day than with a slice of this flaky filo-style treat. Customarily accompanied with gaymer cream (as well as honey, sugar syrup or date syrup), I also like it sprinkled with ground pistachios or shredded coconut.

A favourite with almost all Iraqis, kahi does not really require a sense of occasion for its enjoyment, but nonetheless, a few exist that add an even greater sense of satisfaction to indulging in it. Kahi is often eaten on Eid al Fitr to break the fast of Ramadan or served to newlyweds by the mother of the new bride – who welcomes her daughter and son-in-law to a life of matrimony with a breakfast spread featuring the treat on the morning after their wedding. I doubt even the strictest of dieticians would object to a sweet start of this sort!

## INGREDIENTS (serves 5)

3 cups	Flour
1 Tsp.	Salt
1 cup	Cold water
¾ cup	Room temperature butter or ghee
	Oil as required

## PREPARATION

Pre-heat the oven to 190C/375F/Gas mark 5.  
Sift flour and salt in a large bowl. Make a well in the centre and pour in ¾ cup of water.  
Knead the mixture and gradually add the remaining water until the dough reaches a coarse consistency. Cover and leave to rest for 25 minutes.  
Divide the dough into 7 portions and, on a lightly floured surface, roll each piece into a very thin rectangular dough and brush with butter or ghee.  
Layer pieces of dough (brushing each with butter or ghee) to a 4-5 level stack.  
Refrigerate the dough for 20 minutes, then lay on a greased baking tray and bake for 15- 20 minutes or until it's fluffy, golden and crisp.



# GAYMER

## CLOTTED CREAM

Google gaymer and you'll find listings for geimer, gaimar, or qaimar. But all refer to the same deliciously, thick cream traditionally made from buffalo milk (although regular milk can also be substituted).

Said to be named for its white colours' resemblance to an illuminated Khamar (Arabic for 'moon'), gaymer is quintessentially Iraqi. A classic all over the country, gaymer is popular sourced from either factories or local farmers known as Arbans and thus it's referred to as Gaymer Arab.

While the most common use of gaymer cream is alongside kahi it is also popular with dibbis (date syrup). In this instance, bread pieces are dipped into cream and then syrup, and eaten with the fingers from communal trays. This creamy delight is usually sold from big trays on the street, and you won't ever find it being sold very far away from the delicious Iraqi pastry Kahi.

### INGREDIENTS (serves 5)

2 cup	Heavy whipping cream
2 cup	Buffala milk

### PREPARATION

Combine the cream and milk in a saucepan, then place on a medium heat until the milk starts to rise. It is important that the liquid does not boil.

Reduce to a low heat and leave to simmer for 2 hours. Remove from heat, place an inverted colander on top of the hot saucepan, cover with a towel and leave at room temperature in a cool dry place for at least 6 hours.

Refrigerate the mixture overnight.

Skim the thick solid layer off the top and serve. The milk left after skimming can be discarded or used to prepare other milk-based desserts.



# MUTHANNA

## CHAPTER 5

# GOVERNORATE

**Muthanna Governorate** is in the extreme south of the Mesopotamian Plain and occupies the southwest part of Iraq. Part of the governorate is situated to the southwest of the western plateaus. To the north, it is bound by Diwaniya Governorate and its southern borders extend up to Saudi Arabia. To the east, it is bound by Dhi Qar and Basra, and to the west by Najaf Governorate. Muthanna Governorate has five districts; namely, Samawa, Rumaytha, Salman, Khudr and Warqa'a. It has a total area of 51,740 sq. kilometers and a population of nearly one million inhabitants, 44% of whom live in urban areas and 55% live in rural areas, mostly Bedouins and herdsman. Samawa district is the main district of Muthanna Governorate and the oldest historically. It belonged to Diwaniya Governorate during the monarchy period in Iraq and later became the capital of Muthanna Governorate.<sup>34</sup>

Samawa was mentioned in Mu'jam Al-Buldan by Yaqut al-Hamawi, known as a travelogue glossary of countries. He says, "Samawa got its name from its level terrain in which there are no stones".<sup>35</sup> Warqaa district is located to the east of Rumaytha and is about 30km from Samawa. It contains ancient Uruk ruins and is considered one of the oldest Sumerian cities. The cuneiform script was started in this area. It witnessed the ancient Epic of Gilgamesh. Researchers believe that the word Iraq is derived from Uruk.

### Society and the Environment

Muthanna's environment is distinctive, with a combination of desert and river life. It opens onto the southern plain which extends into the Arab peninsula and provides a riparian location. The Euphrates flows into the governorate through two tributaries; the Al-Sabil tributary to the east and Al-Atshan tributary, east of Samawa town. The two tributaries enter the governorate in Al-Hilal sub-district. The Al-Sabil tributary branches off at the Samawa town into two tributaries; the eastern branch is called Al-Suwayr, and the western branch is called Al-Samawa tributary. As the Al-Atshan tributary enters the governorate's border, it flows towards Samawa town, from where the Salibyat river on the right bank. The Al-Atshan branch continues to flow downstream towards Al-Khudr district center and Al-Daraji subdistrict and from there to Dhi Qar Governorate.<sup>36</sup>

The Euphrates has turned Muthanna into one of the most fertile governorates of Iraq, over and above the large quantities of groundwater which amount to 20 billion cubic meters, of which 4 billion cubic meters is renewed every year. The area of cultivable land is estimated at one million acres, of which only 300,000 acres are used for cultivating wheat and barley. The governorate has much potential in the field of livestock, especially in Bassiya subdistrict, which is regarded as the capital of the desert. The number of cattle in the governorate including cows, sheep, and goats is estimated at one million heads, while the number of camels comes to 100,000 heads.<sup>37</sup>

This environmental diversity has led Muthanna Governorate to cultivate a mixture of cultures and social values, including division of the community into mostly farmers, nomadic shepherds, and an urban group that is engaged in business and government service.

### Muthanna Cuisine

Muthanna cuisine is like most Iraqi towns and cities and particularly the dishes of the south and middle Euphrates. However, food variety ranges between river fish as a basic element and desert dishes in which meat is the main component. Samawa dishes include many desert dishes similar to those prepared by Arabian Gulf inhabitants like Hobeet (lamb stew) cooked according to the traditional nomadic way. They share the same habits of eating, sitting and serving food to guests. The Muthanna community is known for its hospitality, blending values of the desert people with those of the rural areas. They usually empty the cooked food onto large dinnerware and big trays and give much attention to serving large quantities of food to their guests.

Inside their homes, they often sit on the ground and take food with their hands, except for the more modern families over the more recent decades who started to use dining tables and preparing modern dishes and new salads, contrary to traditional local dishes. Local dishes include truffle, a seasonal culinary delicacy grown in the desert, especially after rainfall. The Samawa desert is the most famous place for growing truffle, which explains why this delicacy has become part of its identity. Truffle is cooked in different ways, including in gravy for meats, or by frying, in which onion, crushed dry lime and spices are added. It can also be served with rice or grilled. Among the famous Muthanna dishes is tashreeb, which consists of bread and meat soup cooked with chickpeas and spiced mutton with onion and tomato paste.

Like other southern and middle Euphrates cities, Samawa families are experts at preparing Qouzi, according to the Mesopotamian or Baghdadi name, or Moufattah as it is called in the south. This dish consists of a whole sheep, stuffed with rice, vegetables, nuts, and spices. It is cooked on a very low fire inside a closed oven. The Samawa people often use charcoal to give the dish a smoked taste. This method is used by desert dwellers and rural area inhabitants.

Among the dishes shared by Samawa and other districts in the southern towns is Shilleh, a dish made of rice mixed with lentils, mung beans, onion and spices, and is usually quite liquid. There is also another dish called Ras al-Asfour (sparrow's head), which consists of diced meat, mixed with onion, garlic, celery and a little flour. As the name indicates, the meat is chopped as small as a sparrow's head and then cooked with tomato gravy and served as soup. This dish is similar to Kofta prepared by those in middle Euphrates towns like Al-Diwaniya, Hillah and Karbala. Samawa, Maysan and Dhi Qar have one dish in common called Doug, which consists of egg and flour mixed and whipped well and then emptied into a pan with ghee and onion. The mixture is overturned on both sides until it turns brown and becomes round in shape. This dish was also common in Euphrates towns in the past but disappeared in recent years.

Sweet dishes common in Muthanna towns include Mabsousa, which consists of date paste, cut into round medium-sized pieces and eaten often by laborers during working time. Like other southern towns, Muthanna residents consume a sweet variety called Kleejat al-Ruz (Rice Kleicha). Water and sugar are boiled until the mixture becomes thick. The pot is then taken off the heat and rice flour is added and it is made into a dough. Pieces of the ready dough are put into special round molds and black seeds are put on top for color. Finally, the Kleicha pieces will be baked in the oven.

People of Muthanna, Maysan and Dhi Qar towns are also known for making Batheeth, which are sour yogurt loaves. They are prepared by boiling yogurt until the water evaporates and a thick mixture results. The mixture is left in the sun to dry and turns into small yellowish chunks, which are stored to be eaten with dates. The Batheeth can also be eaten before drying and is then called Carthi or Reejan. Another kind of sweet called Baht originated in Maysan and Nasiriya and is now common in Muthanna among other areas. It consists of rice cooked in milk and sugar.

In Muthanna many kinds of bread are baked, using barley flour and wheat flour, in addition to millet. Stone oven bread is considered an Iraqi specialty. The millet bread is produced from ground millet after removing the husks, milling the ground millet, and then making it into dough. In Muthanna, bread is made from millet and not rice. In Muthanna, people collect desert-grown plants like hibiscus, saltbushes, and hoary cress for cooking a dish called Toula, adding salt and ghee. Town dwellers add tamarind, lemon, eggs, and beans to the mixture. This dish is served with bread.



### INGREDIENTS (makes 5 round)

500 g	very thinly sliced lamb or beef
¼ cup	Vegetable oil or ghee
2	chopped onion
1 cup	chopped parsley
½ cup	chopped chives
½ cup	chopped spring onion
1 Tbsp.	Turmeric
1 Tsp.	Cumin
1 Tsp.	Ground coriander

#### Dough

5 cups	Plain flour
2 Tbsp.	Yeast
1 Tsp.	Salt
4 cups	Water



Sandy Halawa (or halva) is favored by the Muthanna people, prepared by boiling water and sugar, producing a paste that is poured into special trays and garnished with walnuts and almonds. The sandy halva is soft and has the color of sand. Children prefer Badam Halawa, in which flour and sugar are mixed with cold water, in addition to grated walnut and ghee. The mixture is baked in the oven and can also be prepared as round yellowish loaves.

## KHUBUZ URUG

### HERBED MEAT BREAD

### PREPARATION

Place all dough ingredients in a large mixing bowl and blend them together with light, circular movements. Continue kneading until a soft dough is formed. Add extra water if the dough appears a little stiff and knead again until a good dough is formed.

Place the dough in a fresh bowl, cover with a damp towel and set aside in a warm place for 15 minutes.

Fry the onions in a little oil until transparent.


Mix meat, all spices, spring onions and herbs in a bowl and leave to marinade. Knead the onion and meat mixture into the dough evenly.

Divide the dough into five balls, sprinkle with a little flour and leave to rise for 15 minutes.

Dust a greased baking sheet with a little flour. Space out the dough balls on the sheet and press flat with the back of a spoon.

Bake in the centre of a pre-heated oven for approximately eight minutes or until golden brown.

Eat warm for breakfast or serve with tea as an afternoon snack.



There is no need to readjust your eyes when reading this recipe (particularly if you’ve been eating the very vegetable that many wives tales credit with improving vision!) Yes, this halawa is indeed really made of carrots - because long before carrot cake was a café menu mainstay, Iraqis had already figured out a way to transform savoury to sweet. And while the formerly virtuous vegetable may have let its healthy halo slip in this halawa, enjoy it – it is sinfully good!



## INGREDIENTS (serves 4-5)

1 ½ cups	Long grain rice; soaked in water for 30 minutes
¼ cup	Oil
2 cups	Carrots (cut into cubes)
500 g.	Lamb or beef (cut into thin strips)
1	chopped medium size onion
1 Tbsp.	Cinnamon
1 Tbsp.	Black pepper
1 Tbsp.	Salt
2 cups	Chicken broth
	almonds and raisins (optional)

## PREPARATION

Soak the rice in water for 30 minutes then drain. Set aside.

Brown the meat and onions in 2 tablespoons of hot oil, add the spices, salt and 2 cups of broth and bring to a boil then reduce the heat and simmer for 25 minutes.

Add the cubed carrots and stir for 5 more minutes or until the carrots are slightly tender.

Cook the rice using the basic method for perfect plain rice (see page #1).

1-mix the rice and the carrot and meat mixture and put on low heat for 10 minutes stirring occasionally.

2-serve hot and garnish with fried almonds and raisins (if desired).

## TEMAMAN ALA JEZAR

### CARROT AND MEAT RICE

People often ask me to cook a quintessential Iraqi meal. While this is rather asking an indecisive toddler to nominate her favourite toy, it must be said that this simple rice dish is extremely popular among guests. While despite requiring less effort than, say, Pacha or Qouzi, the accolades are nonetheless, delivered in abundance!



# WASIT

## CHAPTER 7

# GOVERNORATE

The city of **Wasit** was founded in 81A.H (770 A.D.) by al-hajjāj ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafī as a camp for his soldiers. The Arabs lived to the west of the Tigris River, which flows into the city. The non-Arabs, on the other hand, lived east of the river, where the city borders were open into Persia. The name Wasit is attributed to the site chosen by al-Hajjaj for building his town. It was named Wasit al-Qasab, but some say that it was named because it occupied a middle position between Kufa and Basra.<sup>38</sup> Wasit borders Diyala Governorate to the northeast, Maysan to the southeast, and Dhi Qar Governorate to the south, along the Gharraf River. To the west, it is bound by the governorates of Diwaniya and Babel, and to the east by the Iranian city of Mehran. A number of rivers branch off from the Tigris, which flows through Kut city, most notable are al-Dujayli, al-Gharraf, Shat al-Shatra and Shat al-Badaa. Administratively, the governorate consists of 17 units comprising the six districts of Kut, the center, al-Aziziya, al-Suwayra al-Hay, al-Noumaniya and Badrah. Wasit has a marshland, called al-Shuwayja, extending 18 kilometers to the east of Kut. This body of water swells in winter as a result of the rainfall and flows down Kalal river.<sup>39</sup>

Sabi' bin Khamis, an elder of the al-Mayyah tribe, built himself a castle of clay bricks in the present Kut town in 1812. That castle was the nucleus of Wasit construction development<sup>40</sup> and is said to have been ascribed to him and was named Kut Sabi. Abdul Razzaq al-Hassani quoted Amin al-Hulwani in his book titled Mukhtasar Matali' al-Saoud (A Short Survey of Matali' al-Saoud) that Kut existed during the reign of Suleiman Pasha, extending from 1779 to 1802. Kut was also mentioned in the travel of Elles Iron who lived in Basra in 1781. When Steven Ling River Transport Company opened a branch in Iraq, Kut was the main port on the Tigris between Baghdad and Basra.<sup>41</sup>

### Society and the Environment

The area of Wasit Governorate is 38,317 sq. kilometers and has a population of about 1.5 million. It is a predominantly tribal society and is inhabited by descendants of many Arab tribes such as the Rabia, Bani Zubayd, Shammari, and Bani Lam. It is also home to other tribes that belong to al-Dulaym, in addition to a minority population of Iranian descent.

For hundreds of years Wasit was known as an agricultural area, despite its urbanized nature in the past decades, as the percentage of urban population reached 58.2% compared to the 41.8% rural population. Recent official statistics published in 2018 reveal that the area in which wheat is grown is 947,658 acres while barely is grown in 34,508 acres.<sup>42</sup> In the same year, total date production in Wasit reached 45,594 tons, making Wasit Iraq's breadbasket, assisted by the governorate's excellent water resources. In 2016-2017 total water resources came to 40 billion cubic meters, which points to a large fish stock. The governorate exports fish to nearby governorates, especially carp, barbus, binni, shabout and mullet.<sup>43</sup> The recovery of fisheries in Wasit is attributed to the regular flow of its rivers after the building of the Kut dam in 1939.

The Wasit community is mostly rural, but that does not mean they are not active in the commercial field. The governorate has a large echelon of experienced tradesmen who have achieved great success, thanks to its prime geographic location.

It is situated between Baghdad, Amarah and Basra, not to mention that Wasit is an important border crossing between Iraq and Iran. These advantages have created a class of active businessmen, mainly comprised of wealthy traders from Baghdad, in addition to Iranians and Kurds.

This central position between the other towns and cities, in addition to its social and cultural background, have directly influenced Wasit social culture. It is a diverse culture in which there are Arabs and non-Arab communities. The Arabs settled west of the Tigris River, and a mixture of non-Arabs, Arabs and Kurds lived to the east of the river. This demographic distribution lasted hundreds of years, although the inhabitants to the west of Tigris River became predominately Kurds in later years. This distribution has been reflected in the food culture of the governorate.

### Wasit Cuisine

The food dishes in Wasit Governorate are not much different from those in other Iraqi cities. There are many dishes Wasit Governorate has in common with those of the south or middle Euphrates. However, these shared food varieties become relatively less available in the north of the country. Many dishes are shared with the towns and cities in west Iraq, due to the similarity between the background of the two regions, coupled with Wasit being close to the desert. Comparatively speaking, the commonality with them is less than what the Wasit community has in common with the southern and middle Euphrates culinary habits. In Wasit, people eat the same dishes eaten by their compatriots in Basra, Maysan, Dhi Qar, al-Hilla, Karbala and Diwaniya.

Rice-based dishes are the main preferred daily food in Wasit, including biryani, red rice, rice with green beans and rice with fish or chicken, in addition to the Anbar Dilimieh dish, although the Wasit people, like Baghdad residents, prefer to serve okra potage along with Dilimieh, which consists of rice, mutton and bread. The main course in Anbar does not include okra, it includes meat soup instead.

In Wasit Governorate, dolma is prepared the Baghdadi way in which lemon juice and tamarind sauce are added to give it the sour taste, in contrast with the dolma cooked in Amara, Basra and Dhi Qar, where molasses and sometimes sugar are added. Wasit Kebab is not different from the kebab made in other Iraqi cities, except for the special taste and flavor of Kut sheep meat, which is considered the best and most delicious in Iraq and even worldwide. This also applies to kibbeh, which entered the Iraqi kitchen in recent decades, given that the Mosul Kibbeh is known for excellence, and there is hardly a kitchen in Iraq that does not know how to prepare it. In view of Wasit's proximity to Iran, there are certain dishes that have been shared, like Tajineh, which is a mixture of rice, meat, potato and other ingredients. This dish is widespread in Maysan, Wasit, Diyala, and Basra and is one of the common dishes between Iraq and Iran, with little changes in the cities to which the dish travels. What applies to Tajineh also applies to some other dishes like Aysh, or commonly known Haresa in different Iraqi cities. The residents of Badra and Hisan often prepare Aysh. Karbala, Najaf and Euphrates residents call it Shelleh and use wheat grain and a little rice, mung beans or lentil and black-eyed peas. It is also called Aysh in Hisan town, east of Wasit Governorate and other areas adjacent to Iran. Wheat grain is soaked in water all night and put into a pot with chunks of meat on fire. When the mixture boils, the pot is put on low fire and left for some time. The mixture will be mashed with meat, and salt is added. When the dish is ready, it is served on plates and topped with sugar and cinnamon.

Bread varieties in Wasit are common in other Iraqi cities, including the traditional wheat flour bread, which is baked at home in cylindrical clay ovens as round bread. Barley bread is baked the same way, while the stone bread is widespread all over Iraq from the extreme south to the extreme north. In addition, there are other locally made bread varieties in Wasit, including one baked with meat, onion, and pepper, and called Arook bread in some areas. Sometimes, Wasit residents mix the dough with small fish of the Harsh species and call it Muharash bread (bread mixed with small fish and sesame).



## INGREDIENTS (serves 6)

1 Kg. White fish (bream, sea bass or cod)

¼ cup Olive oil

1 chopped onion

3 chopped tomatoes

2 Tbsp. Pomegranate syrup

1 Tbsp. Tomato paste

1 Tbsp. Salt

1 Tsp. Black pepper

1 Tsp. Cumin

1 Tsp. Coriander

1 Tsp. Orange zest (optional)

### Garnish

Toasted pine nuts

Parsley leaves

## SAMAK BIL TAMATA

### FISH WITH TOMATO SAUCE

There is another bread variety baked by families in the southern towns, known as fried bread, in which the round pieces of bread are fried in the pan with ghee and topped with sugar. The name of this bread variety differs from one area to another. In the south, it is called Orook bil-Tawah, which is different from the Baghdad Arook bread that consists of the normal flat bread loaves mixed with meat, celery and onion and baked in the clay oven. The Orook bil-Tawah is fried with ghee and is similar to the bread known in Baghdad and the middle Euphrates towns as 'bread with ghee,' referred to earlier.

## PREPARATION

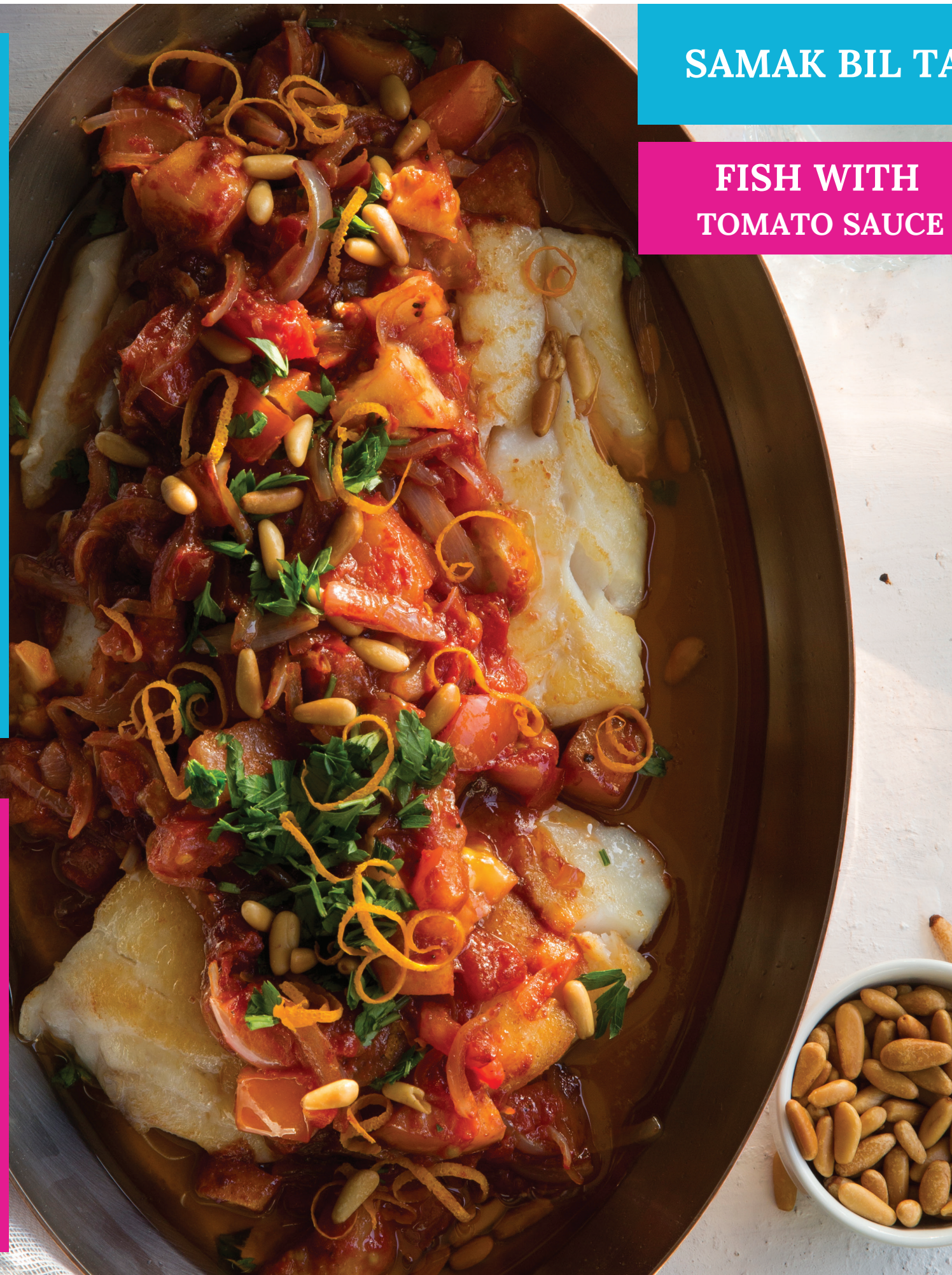
In a deep skillet, fry the fish for 2 minutes on each side and put aside.

In the same skillet, using the same oil, brown the onions and garlic, then add the tomatoes, tomato paste, salt and spices. Cook for 5 minutes.

Add ¼ cup water and cook for another 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Put the fish back in the skillet and cover with the tomato sauce and the pomegranate syrup.

Cook for 7-10 minutes.

Serve with white rice or bread and garnish with toasted pine nuts, orange zest (optional) and parsley leaves.







# HALAWAT TAHEEN

## TOASTED FLOUR HALAWA

### INGREDIENTS (serves 4-6)

1 ½ cups	Water
1 ½ cups	Sugar
½ cup	Vegetable oil
2 cups	Flour
½ cup	Butter
1 Tbsp	Ground Cardamom
1 Tbsp	Coarsely chopped walnuts
7-10 pieces.	Whole walnut (optional)

### PREPARATION

In a pot, dissolve the sugar in water and leave to boil for 5 minutes until slightly thick. Set aside to cool.

In a heavy pot, melt the butter, then add the vegetable oil. Add in the flour and stir. Reduce to medium heat and continue stirring until the flour turns light brown and fragrant.

Remove the pot from the heat and carefully pour in the cooled sugar syrup. Stir until smooth.

Return the pot to medium heat and continue stirring the mixture until it thickens. Add the chopped walnuts and cardamom.

Transfer to a serving plate or small containers and decorate with walnuts if desired.



# NAJAF

## CHAPTER 8

# GOVERNORATE

**Najaf Governorate** is situated to the south of Iraq on the edge of the western plateau. It is bound to the north by Karbala and Anbar governorates, to the east by Babel and Al-Qadisiyah, and to the south by Muthanna. To the west, it has international borders with Saudi Arabia.

Najaf Governorate has an area of 28,532 sq. km and consists of four districts that form 10 administrative units. The population of Najaf is about 1.5 million, of whom 71% live in urban areas and 29% in rural areas.<sup>44</sup> Najaf is the provincial capital and the largest city in the governorate besides Kufa district in which the town of Kufa is the district's main center. Historically, Kufa is the origin of the governorate. It was built by Arab Muslims in 17 AH (638AD) as a camp for the Arab army.<sup>45</sup> During the Caliphate of Ali bin Abu Talib, it became the capital of the Muslim state, and later in the second century of the Islamic Calendar turned into an important cultural center. Many Arabic language schools were established, and the city became a beacon of literature and culture. In 170AH, during the rule of Caliph Haroun Al-Rashid, the burial place of Ali bin Abu Talib was discovered in the vicinity of Kufa, and the city became a visitors' attraction. Najaf city was built around the shrine.<sup>46</sup> In 448AH (1056 AD), religious scholar Mohammed ibn Hasan Al-Tusi, the successor of Al-Sharif Al-Murtaza, moved to the city, thereafter the city became an inspiring beacon of knowledge, and an influx of scholars started to arrive and a large number of schools opened.<sup>47</sup> Najaf is situated 70 meters above sea level, which relates to the origin of its name. In Arabic language the word 'Najaf' means 'valley' bend and raised terrain, and it is also called 'Al-Ghari' which linguistically means perfect and beautiful in Arabic. Another name is 'Mashhad' and refers to the burial place of a holy saint, as it is the burial place of Imam Ali.

### Society and the Environment

Najaf is a sacred religious place for Muslims, especially the Shia'a community. It treasures the shrine of their leading imam Ali bin Abu Talib, in addition to a number of other shrines. During the sixth and seventh century AH, the city witnessed a large construction movement and became an attraction for visitors and the seat of religious knowledge, which explains its hybrid cultural identity. It is a place in which Arabs and Persians live and where multi-national groups migrated from Pakistan and India, forming a distinctive community known for its rich and diverse culture. In addition, Iraqis from all cities migrated to Najaf. In recent decades, the city has seen massive immigration from the central Euphrates, the south, and Baghdad. While hundreds of young men and women migrate to the governorate to learn about the Koran, Sunna and Islamic jurisprudence and return to their cities and countries as representatives of the religious reference authorities or mosque preachers, many of them decide to stay and start a family. Consequently, many families in Najaf at present are originally from the south and central Euphrates region as well as from Iranian origin.

Najaf's population are predominantly farmers and horticulture professionals. Others are engaged in trade, given that the city has become central for hundreds of visitors. In addition, a broad cross-section of the society is specialized in preaching and participating in religious occasions, which has created a distinct identity.

Environmentally, Najaf is characterized by diversity. It is located on the Euphrates River, which supports green farms, abundant with crops and fruit orchards. At the same time, it is in an expansive desert that extends into the Arab Peninsula, exposing it to Bedouin cultural influence. Concerning agriculture, Najaf is famous for wheat, barley, rice, and sesame crops, in addition to different vegetables and fruits. In 2018, the total area of rice cultivated land was 13,561 donums, 2,858 donums for barley, and 2,021,114 donums for wheat. Total production came to 138,000 tons. Total date production in the same year was 31,155 tons.<sup>48</sup>

### The Najaf Kitchen

The food variety of Najaf reflects the nature and culture of the Najafi community and is characterized by diverse and rich dishes. There are dishes that reached Najaf from the south from students, migrants, and visitors. Other dishes arrived from north and west Iraq, apart from the dishes exported by Baghdad to Najaf and other cities. In addition, there are certain dishes that came from the Arab Peninsula, due to Najaf's location on the boundary of the desert that extends into Saudi Arabia. Iranian and Indian food recipes have contributed to enriching the Najafi kitchen. In recent years, thanks to modern communication, many Syrian and Lebanese dishes have also found their way into the Najaf kitchen.

Najaf has purely local dishes, not found outside the governorate, like Fesenjan and Najafi Qeema in addition to tomato potage. Concerning sweets, Halawa Duhniyya which become a distinctive mark of the city, in addition to Thanksgiving Bread and Najaf pickles, bought and carried home by visitors along with Halawa Duhniyya as gifts for their friends and family.

Other dishes include traditional Najaf food varieties which are a combination of Najaf cuisine and the cuisine of central Euphrates cities in general. Najaf, Babel, Diwaniya and Karbala share a similar list of dishes, like rice with broad beans, beans with fat, Kofta broth, in addition to Sabzi broth, turnip with rice, carrot with rice and other rice-based dishes. Preparation of these dishes differs from one town to another.

A third type of national food culture combines Najafi food with other food varieties in Iraqi cities from Basra to Duhok and from Anbar to Diyala. The list contains tens of dishes from grilled to fried meats, rice-based dishes, biryani, fish and tashreeb (Iraqi soup variety). Najafi families also learned how to make Kebbe, Kebab, Pacha, Mutabbaq Samak (rice-based dish with spiced fish), okra broth, beans, Masgouf Fish (seasoned carp grilled in a tandoor oven). They also learned to make dolma (stuffed vegetables), Sheikh El Mahshi, chicken broth, Baba Ghannouj (mashed cooked eggplant with olive oil and lemon) in addition to sweets, salads, pastries and varied cakes, bread and stone baked yeast bread. Najaf is known for producing Thanksgiving bread, which is eaten with tea, and consists of flour, sugar with a little milk, spices, and oil.

### Exclusive Najaf Cuisine

One dish only available in Najaf is called fesenjan. Although the origin of this dish is Iranian or Indian, and is also available in Karbala, its name has been closely linked to the city, just like qeema, halawa duhniyya, and tomato broth. The Najaf fesenjan consists of boneless and skinless chicken cooked with butter, black pepper, pomegranate molasses, onion, turmeric, crushed walnut, sugar and tahini. It is served as broth with white rice or rice and beans. The Najafi people prefer to use good quality elements for preparing this dish, and often ensure that the ingredients are brought from Iran, which indicates that this dish originates in Iran. Among other food varieties that are exclusively cooked in Najaf are tomato broth, for which tomato is cooked with onion, tomato paste, spices and mutton and is eaten with rice, or broth-soaked bread. Halawa duhniyya is another Najaf specialty. It consists of sugar, milk, and sheep fat, carefully mixed with flour added to form a soft dough. The mixture will then be emptied into a mold and baked in the oven with desiccated coconut and walnut.



### INGREDIENTS (serves 6-7)

1	thinly sliced onion
1 Kg	Lamb or beef; cut into thin strips
3	ground dried limes
3	Cloves crushed garlic
¼ cup	Vegetable oil
¼ cup	washed Split chickpeas
1 large	peeled and chopped tomato
½ Tsp.	Turmeric
½ Tsp.	Ground black pepper
1 Tsp.	Ground cardamom
½ Tsp.	Cinnamon
½ Tsp.	Nutmeg
½ Tsp.	Cumin
½ Tsp.	Coriander
1 Tbsp.	Tomato paste
	Pinch of saffron
	Salt to taste



Among the broth-based dishes Najafis are particularly famous for is spinach soup. It is believed that this dish is originally Iranian and reached Najaf during the 19th century. The dish has later spread to other Iraqi cities. The Basra population claims that this dish was already common in their city and was called Shabzi broth or soup. Najafi families prefer to have the spinach broth a green color, as in Iran. They add cowpeas, mutton, dried lime, mint, dill, parsley, and sheep fat. Tomato paste and black lemon are added in other Iraqi towns. This dish is eaten with white rice.<sup>49</sup>

Najafi families are also known for preparing another dish called Hamidh Hilo broth (sour and sweet) or Tarshana as it is known in southern Iraqi cities. The same dish is called Al Qaisy and Qaisy with almond in some other areas. This dish is an example of the traditional food varieties commonly found in all Iraqi towns and cities. It consists of dried apricot, meat, and plums. Sugar is added and the dish is served with rice or rice with vermicelli.

QIEMAH

LAMB AND CHICKPEA STEW

### PREPARATION

Sauté the onions until transparent. Add the garlic, meat, turmeric, spices, lime, salt and pepper and stir occasionally until brown.

Add 2 cups of water. Cover and let it simmer for an hour. Add the tomatoes, tomato paste and saffron and allow to simmer for another hour.

Add the split chickpeas and another cup of water and cook for 20 minutes.

Take a third of the mixture and blend. Add to the original mixture and simmer for another 30 minutes. Serve hot with rice.

Iraqis celebrate numerous holy occasions, and most of these will include the preparation of fresh lamb dishes; such as Zearat Imam Husain – in remembrance of the Prophet Mohammed’s grandson.

Cooking Qiemah (a term which borrows from the Indian word for mince and the Persian for stew) is one such custom. During these periods the heavy aroma of the fatty meat of a fresh whole lamb fills the night sky. Locals showcase their strength and stamina and take turns to share the stirring responsibilities required to combine the chickpea and meat mixture over the huge black cauldrons simmering over low flames. And at dawn the finished dish is ladled into smaller bowls – the spoils to be shared among families in the neighbourhood.

The recipe below can be recreated in your kitchen, with the addition of wedges of fried eggplant and tomato, making it very oven-friendly: this simplifies the laborious process of traditional Qiemah making.



## INGREDIENTS (serves 4-5)

¼ cup	Aloocho/dried golden prunes
	Water as required
500 g	Lamb
1 ½ cups	Dried apricots
1 cup	Pitted prunes
2 Tbsp.	Saffron water
½ Tsp.	Salt
¼ cup	Golden raisins
2-3 Tbsp.	Lemon juice
1 Tbsp.	Date syrup (optional)
3-4 Tbsp.	Sugar
1 Tsp.	Ground cardamom
2 Tbsp.	Corn flour
¼ cup	fried slivered almonds

## PREPARATION

Soak the aloocho in water for 3 hours and drain, soak prunes and dried apricot in water for 1 hour and drain thoroughly. Chop the lamb into 2cm cubes. Heat the vegetable oil and cook meat over high heat till brown. Add 2 cups of water and bring to a boil, then reduce heat (to low) and simmer for 30-45 minutes. Add drained aloocho, drained apricots, prunes, saffron water, salt and ½ cup of water and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes. Add raisins, lemon juice, date syrup, sugar and cardamom. Stir and continue to simmer for 3 minutes. Dissolve corn flour in ½ cup of water and add to the mixture. Stir and continue to simmer until sauce thickens (approximately 3 minutes). Remove from the heat and garnish with fried almonds.

MARGAT TURSHANA

SWEET AND SOUR STEW





# DIWANIYAH

## CHAPTER 9

# GOVERNORATE

**Diwaniyah Governorate** is in the Middle Euphrates Region. It is bound by the governorates of Babel and Wasit to the north, Dhi Qar and Wasit to the east, Al-Muthana to the south and Najaf Governorate to the west. It has an area of about 8,153 square kilometers, accounting for approximately 8.1% of the central Euphrates governorates. It has a population of about 2,200,000 inhabitants, of whom 57% live in urban areas and 47% rural areas.<sup>50</sup>

At present, the governorate consists of 14 administrative units, four districts and ten subdistricts. The Diwaniyah district is comprised of the Diwaniyah district center, and the subdistricts of Sunniya, Shafi'ya, and Daghara, in addition to Afak district which comprises the district center and the subdistricts of Al Budayr and Sumer. It also consists of Al Shamiya and the subdistricts of Ghammas, Al Mahnawiya and Al Salahiya, in addition to Al Hamza district, which consists of the district center and the subdistricts of Al Sudair and Al Shinafiya.

Diwaniyah emerged in its present form in the early 18th century, following the decline of Al Rumahiya city, named after the extinct Rumahiya River. After its decline, its population migrated to Al Hasakah city. The oldest reference to Diwaniyah was made by traveler Edward Eves back in 1754, followed by famous Danish traveler Carsten Niebuhr, who visited the city in 1766. It was also mentioned by Samuel Evers in 1779.<sup>51</sup>

In the early 19th century, which marked the beginning of the contemporary administrative divisions in Iraq, the governorate experienced several administrative changes. In 1858, the governorate was known as Al Diwaniyah district, which was part of the Wilaya Governorate of Al Hilla, which fell under Baghdad Governorate. In 1890 its administrative status was updated to a Liwaa, or governorate and was known as Liwaa Al-Diwaniyah. The first governor was Saeed Pasha, followed by 18 other governors (1893-1912), the last of whom was Shawkat Pasha.<sup>52</sup> Geographically, the area experienced many changes, as some areas were annexed to it and some of its parts were severed at other times. In 1969, the governorate was established as it is today, called the Governorate of Diwaniyah, and late re-named Al Qadisiya, after the Battle of Qadisiya between Muslim Arabs and Persians.

### Society and the Environment

Diwaniyah has been known for centuries for its agricultural background due to the fertility of its soil and large number of fields. It is also characterized by its abundant water resources, including the Euphrates River estuaries of Diwaniyah and Shanafiya, a tributary of Al Hindiya river, in addition to Al Daghara estuary, one of the Al-Hilla tributaries. This explains why agriculture thrives in the governorate, which produces large quantities of wheat, barley, rice, sesame, vegetables, fruits, and dates. Based on official statistics, rice production in 2018 reached 2,050 tons, barley reached 64,554 tons and wheat about 284,000 tons. Date production exceeded 40,000 tons in the same year.<sup>53</sup>

Diwaniyah Governorate was also known for its exclusive cultivation of Hibiscus tea which was introduced to the area by the end of the 20th century. Tea traders included Haj Hassan Al Abdullah, who became familiar with Hibiscus tea through an Iranian farmer. He started cultivating and producing it in Diwaniyah and it has become a landmark of the governorate.

The agricultural nature of the governorate characterized its predominantly rural way of life. Diwaniyah remained a farming community until the fifties, when part of the society became urbanized, reaching its peak in the seventies, only to decline again later on.

Tribally, Diwaniya Governorate districts are predominantly inhabited by tribes of Banu Hujaiym, Al Ghazalat, Al Fatlah, Banu Hasan, Al Al Akra', Al Budair and Khazail, which are Shia' Muslim tribes, with a Sunni minority, in addition to other religious minorities including Christian, Jewish, and Kurdish families.<sup>54</sup>

### Diwaniyah Cuisine

Diwaniyah does not have special dishes like the governorates of Maysan, Basra, Nasiriya and Najaf. The governorate combines many common Iraqi food varieties, with a particular emphasis on the dishes of central Euphrates and southern towns. In recent years, dishes from northern Iraq gained popularity, like the Mosul Kubba (bulgur dough filled with spiced meat) and meat pies. From western Iraq, the well-known Dulaymieh (rice with meat) has found its way onto Diwaniyah dining tables. Euphrates dishes consisting of fish, meat, legumes, and rice are predominant, in addition to sweet dishes and pickles. A dish of rice and legumes is characteristic of Euphrates towns, in which the rice is mixed with fresh legumes, and eaten with yogurt. It is often also mixed with minced meat. Some breakfast dishes include Makhlama, which consists of a mixture of egg, onion, tomato, and meat. There is also a potato and egg dish, in which potato fingers are fried and dried, and re-fried with egg. Additionally, fried animal innards are a popular dish all over Iraq. However, some families eat selected parts of the innards, to which they add onion, spices and dried lime or tomato paste. Since Diwaniyah is a river city, Mutabbaq Samak (rice-based dish with fish) and Chicken Mutabbaq are two popular dishes, in addition to Makloubah, in which rice is mixed with eggplant, tomato, peppers and onion. Regarding soup and broth-based dishes, Diwaniyah families prefer the broth of okra, green beans, zucchini, fish, chicken as well as eggplant and potato. As in Samawa and Nasiriya, truffle broth is a favorite dish among the Diwaniyah population. Because Diwaniyah is bordering Samawa, the same dishes are shared in both cities, including Habeet (stewed lamb on a bed of rice), a favorite of inhabitants in the rural areas of the Euphrates, southern and western governorates.

Famous gravy dishes in Diwaniyah use meat and chicken, in addition to tomato paste gravy, better known as 'red gravy,' as opposed to 'white gravy,' which is prepared without tomato paste. The gravy is usually prepared from mutton to which tomato, chickpeas, onion, and spices are added. In Diwaniyah, as in some other governorates, they cook a special type of gravy to which eggplant is added, called 'eggplant gravy.' It is a unique dish that reflects the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the Mesopotamia population since ancient times.

Unique to Diwaniyah city and Maysan is the popularity of kebab made of camel meat, especially in the plains surrounding the governorate, including the semi-desert areas of Samawa and Dhi Qar. Kebab is usually prepared from a mixture of beef, mutton, and sheep fat. However, some restaurants at Diwaniyah serve camel meat kebab. In recent times, the governorate has learned another kebab recipe, in which chicken meat is used to make kebab. Chicken meat kebab has recently spread all over Iraqi towns and cities. This new kebab variety is perhaps the product of the common dietary culture aimed to reduce the risks associated with red meat consumption, a new concept for most Iraqis.





## INGREDIENTS (serves 4)

1Kg	Lamb shanks
1/4 cup	Oil
1	Sliced onion
2	medium eggplant
2 Tbsp.	Tomato paste
2	washed and pitted dried limes (optional)
2	Baharat spices in
	Salt to taste
2	Iraqi flat breads
	Water as requird

## PREPARATION

Peel the eggplant, cut into quarters lengthwise, soak in water for half an hour and drain. In a deep pot, fry the eggplant lightly take it out from the pot and broil. In the same pot, brown the meat on all sides for about 15 minutes. Add the onions and stir for another 5 minutes. Add the baharat spices and 8 cups of water and boil for 5 minutes. Reduce the heat and let it cook for 1 hour. In a skillet, sauté the tomatoes in 1 tablespoon of oil, add the tomato paste and stir for 3 to 5 minutes. Add it to the meat with the limes (optional), stir and let it cook for another half an hour. Add the eggplant to the meat and let it cook for 10 to 15 more minutes. Meanwhile, break the bread into pieces. Pour the red meat sauce over it and let it soak. Arrange the lamb pieces and eggplant over it and serve.

Sweet dishes in the governorate, which are prevalent in the Euphrates and southern Iraq region, include a type of halwa (sweet dessert) made of rice or wheat flour, mixed with sugar and ghee, and served after meals, especially during Ramadan. There is also a rice-based sweet in which milk is added to cooked rice. Other sweet varieties made for children include Asaliya, Sohan with walnuts, and special versions of Halwa such as Balot and Badim, which are more common in Kut, Samawa, Numaniya, Hilla and Baghdad.<sup>55</sup> Other sweets include Barma, Datli, Baabou, Nouqa, and Karkari.

Most of these sweet dishes, however, have become less common, and other imported sweets like Znoud Al Sit (dough cream rolls) and Basbousa (an Egyptian sweet dish) have been introduced to the area. There are sweet dishes that belong to the Abbasid period and beyond including Zalabiya, Baklava, Louzina (almond dough covered with pine seeds), Rice flour Halva, pudding, and custard, over and above other sweet dough varieties like the famous Kleicha, mentioned in Lille University's list of sweets made by the ancient Babylonians.

Finally, there is a sweet dish prevalent in Diwaniya Governorate known as Zarda with Saffron (rice pudding with saffron). This dish is usually served on religious events like the birth of Prophet Muhammad or the birthdays of well-known imams and renowned devotees. On Fridays, clothes are distributed for the departed souls of relatives and religious figures.

**TASHREEB AHMAR  
BEL BAITENJAN**

**RED TASHREEB WITH  
EGGPLANT**



## ZARDAT ZA'AFARAN

### SAFFRON PUDDING

#### INGREDIENTS (serves 5)

1 cup	Short grain rice
9 cups	Cold water
1 ½ cups	Sugar
¼ cup	Saffron water
¼ cup	Butter
1 Tbsp.	Ground cardamom, or rose water
½ cup	Silvered almonds

#### Garnish

4 Tbsp.	Cinnamon
4 Tbsp.	Slivered almonds

#### PREPARATION

Soak rice in water for half an hour and drain thoroughly. Place cup of soaked rice and 8 cups of water in a pot and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat and leave to simmer until rice is softened (approximately 30 minutes). Add sugar, saffron water and one additional cup of water and cook over a low heat for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Take ¼ of the mixture and blend it, then mix it back into the original mixture. Remove from the heat and add butter, cardamom and slivered almonds. Mix well.

Serve in four individual dishes and decorate with cinnamon and slivered almonds.



# KARBALA CHAPTER 10

## GOVERNORATE

**The Governorate of Karbala** is situated in the sedimentary basin of Iraq, east of the Euphrates River, on the central and eastern edge of the desert plateau. It is bound to the west by Anbar Governorate, to the east by Babel Governorate and to the southwest by Najaf Governorate. It has an area of 856,52 sq. km, and it is a peninsula, surrounded by orchards from all directions. It is irrigated by the 29 km Al-Huseiniya River, a tributary of the Euphrates.

There are many views regarding the origin of the word ‘Karbala.’ Some believe that it is derived from the Babylon expression ‘Kur Babel,’ indicating a cluster of Babylon villages, including Ninewa, which is situated near the Sidat Al Hindiya and Al Ghadiriya, Al-Husseiniya territories, and Karrablah village, bordering Karbala to the south and the east. There is also Karbala or Akr Babel, which is a small village north of Al-Ghadrhiyat and Al- Nawawiyis, a public cemetery existing before Muslim conquests. There is also a village named ‘Al-Ha’ir, present-day shrine of Hussein bin Ali and others.<sup>56</sup>

Some believe that the origin of the name is Aramaic originating from ‘Karb Elo’ which was a temple. The name consists of the word ‘Karb’ which means temple, prayer area or shrine, and ‘Elo’ in Aramaic, meaning God. Thus, the meaning would be ‘The Shrine of God’ or ‘God Worshiper.’ In any case, the city acquired its holy status due to enshrining the tomb of Husain bin Ali, and his children, brothers and companions, who were killed and buried on Muharram 10th, 61AH, after he had arrived in Kufa in response to letters from residents, who called him there to swear loyalty to him.

During the monarchy era, Karbala was administratively a ‘liwa’ (governorate) comprised of a number of districts, including Najaf district. Later, Najaf became an independent governorate. Karbala consisted of five districts; Karbala, Al Hindiya (Tuwairej), Ain Tamr, Al-Nakhib, and Al-Jadwal Al-Gharbi. Al-Hindiya district belonged to Babel in the past and was later annexed to Karbala.

### Society and the Environment

Present time Karbala city is divided into two parts. The first is old Karbala which was established on the remains of the historical Karbala. In 1326 AD, the city was visited by the famous traveler Ibn Battuta, who described it as ‘a small city, surrounded by palm trees and irrigated by the Euphrates. It contained the holy shrine in which a large school was built in addition to a large home that provided food to the visiting guests’.<sup>57</sup> The second part of the city consists of new Karbala, and was built during the times of Medhat Pasha in 1869 AD. It had modern buildings to which an influx of migrants came for work, studies, and veneration of the holy grave of Hussain and his household. Later in the twentieth century, Karbala became one of Iraq’s most important cities visited by millions of Shia Muslims from across the world, especially during religious events during the month of Muharram and mid-Shaaban.<sup>58</sup>

Karbala is an agricultural city surrounded by orchards and large farms and is considered Iraq’s main basket for fruits and grains. According to official statistics published in 2018, date crops amounted to 87,004 tons in addition to 28,723 tons of wheat and large quantities of barley and fruits.<sup>59</sup> The city is predominantly rural in the outskirts and urban in the center. The urban population has increased to 67% in recent decades, while the rural population dropped to 33%.<sup>60</sup> The urban population is residing in the city, mostly engaged in trade, in view of the city’s religious nature and the frequent influx of visitors, who come from various cities in Iraq and abroad. Karbala is a religious destination for Shia Muslims from the Gulf, Pakistan, and other countries. Iranians account for the largest number of visitors, who have frequently visited the holy shrines for centuries. Most visitors stay in the city to seek the blessing of the holy shrines or to study in religious schools. Karbala had several religious schools, especially in the middle of the 19th century.<sup>61</sup> Many families descended from Iranian origin, which considerably affected the city’s culture, leading the inhabitants to learn Persian to communicate with Iranians.<sup>62</sup> This development has reflected on the city’s food culture, like Najaf. Like the governorates of Maysan and Dhi Qar or Babel and Diwaniya, Karbala and Najaf are twin cities.

### Karbala Cuisine

The Karbala table is characterized by its richness and miscellany. It consists of typically local dishes, in addition to the other food varieties, imported from the different Iraqi areas or those of the neighboring states, especially Iran. Some Karbala dishes are characteristically local in nature, and some belong to central Euphrates region, while others are an assortment of national food varieties available in all Iraqi cities.

In the first category, Karbala and Najaf are particularly famous for dishes Fasanjoun, Kima, Hareesa, and Halawat Al Dahina. The Fasanjoun dish was mentioned in the chapter on Najaf Governorate. Another dish common in Karbala and Najaf is associated with Ashura rituals; namely, Kima. This dish consists of chickpeas and beef or mutton shoulder in addition to red onion and a small amount of chickpea powder. This ancient dish was inherited by the Najafis and is prepared through various steps. First, the meat is cut into thin slices, then onion, fat and meat with turmeric are fried. For the second step, chickpeas and water are added to the mixture, and this is left on the fire for six or seven hours until the mixture is completely mashed. During the third step, the bones are completely stripped off the meat and a special wooden tool is used to crush the remaining meat. Meat and chickpea powder are added, and boiling water is poured on the contents and the final stirring begins. Afterwards, the mixture is left on low heat for many hours until the ingredients are completely mashed into a homogenous mixture. Normally, this is cooked collectively in huge pots and served with white rice.

The Karbala population cooks a variety of rice-based dishes, like rice with cowpeas, Dal rice, Sugar rice, Tomato rice, and Bukhara rice, the same cooked rice known in other cities as Boukhari Rice. This dish consists of basmati rice and sheep meat on the bone cut into cubes in addition to onion, one peeled tomato, carrots, tomato paste, raisins soaked with rosewater for seasoning and a little oil. Chicken meat can be used as another option. Dal rice is simply rice with lentils. The dish consists of rice and Indian lentil (dal) with onion, garlic, cardamom and cumin. Rice must be cooked twice; once with water, without being fully cooked, and the second time with chicken broth, together with lentil, grated onion and garlic, leaving it on a low flame. Another rice-based dish is rice with truffles, traditionally cooked by the older generation, and it is becoming a rarity. Truffle is available in large quantities in the Samawa desert. In Karbala, truffle is cooked with rice in a dish called Timman Chama (rice with truffle). It is prepared in the same way that Carrot Rice and Tajine Shalgham



INGREDIENTS (serves 4-6)

Kubba dough

¼ cup	Small eggplants	2 Tbsp.	chopped parsley (optional)
	Water as required	3 Tbsp.	Slivered almonds (optional)
2 cups	Jireesh (farina)	2 Tbsp.	Currants (optional)
1 Tbsp.	Finely chopped onion	Sauce	
1 Tsp.	Salt	3 Tbsp.	Oil
1 Tsp.	White pepper	2	sliced lengthways onions
1	chopped tomato (optional)	2	Whole nutmeg seeds
	Salt and pepper to taste	1	Cinnamon stick

Kubba filing

3 Tbsp.	Oil	¼ Tsp	Whole peppercorns
1	Finely chopped onion	2 cups	Chicken stock
½ Kg	Ground beef or lamb	2	Dried limes
	Salt and pepper to taste		
½ Tsp.	Baharat (optional)		



(Turnips with Rice) are made. Truffles are cooked like meat, and rice is added. Another popular dish in Karbala is the Iranian Chelo Kebab, which is a complicated recipe famous among Karbala families, both Arabs and residents of Iranian descent. It consists of rice, kebab, butter, saffron, onion, coriander, crushed black pepper and a little oil.

Besides these delicious dishes, the Karbala population is famous for preparing the so-called Tajine Shalgham. Tajine is an Iranian word commonly used in Iraqi homes and has become one of Iraq’s favorite dishes. Tajine Shalgham consists of rice and turnips. Other tajine varieties include rice with meat, rice with carrots and chicken with rice. This dish variety is popular in all Iraqi towns and cities, but in the recipes used in Karbala, Najaf and Babel, turnip is added.

KUBBAT KARBALA

KARBALA KUBBA

Among the holiest cities for Shia Muslims (after Mecca and Medina), Karbala is the site of the shrine of Hussein ibn Ali. As one of the oldest mosques in the world and the site of the grave of the Prophet Mohammed’s second grandson by his daughter Fatimah and Ali, it is visited by millions of pilgrims every year. It is also the birthplace of this recipe – one I formulated to feature the Kubbat Jireesh. The dumplings in this instance, however, are not boiled – left instead to cook in a delicious turmeric, cinnamon and peppercorn-infused broth. Kubbat Jireesh was first made in Mosul, northern Iraq. The cooks of Karbala took these tasty Kubba and added sauce – uniting the north and south in culinary adventure.

PREPARATION

Kubba Dough

Wash the bulgur and jireesh, then soak in water for 20-30 minutes until the water has been absorbed and the ingredients have softened. You may need to add more water, depending on the quality of the bulgur. Add the onion, salt and pepper to the mixture and put through a meat grinder twice, until it forms a smooth dough. Alternately, knead by hand until it’s a doughy consistency.

Filling

Heat oil in a large frying pan and sauté the onion until transparent. Add the ground meat, stirring continuously to break down lumps until the meat browns. Add salt, pepper and Baharat (if desired), cooking for an additional 3-4 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in parsley, almonds and currants if desired. Allow the filing to cool and use to fill kubba shells.

Using the kubba dough, Create a small ball, then flatten the mixture into the palm of your hand. Fill one tablespoon of filling and shape into a disc.

Sauce

Heat the oil in a pot and sauté the onions until golden. Add the nutmeg, cinnamon, turmeric and peppercorn and stir for 3-4 minutes. Add the chicken stock and boil.

Add the Kubba, 4 at a time and boil for 4-5 minutes. Remove the Kubba from the pot and serve hot with the sauce on the side.



## INGREDIENTS (serves 4-5)

2 cups	Plain flour
¾ cup	Oil or ghee
2 cups	Sugar
½ cup	Milk
¼ cup	Butter
1 Tbsp.	Ground cardamom
2 Tbsp.	Date syrup (optional)
3 Tbsp.	Ghee
2 cups	Shredded coconut

## PREPARATION

Pre-heat the oven to 125-150C/250-300F/Gas mark ½-2, bottom element only.

Add the flour, oil or ghee, sugar, milk, cardamom and date syrup (if desired) in a mixing bowl and blend with a beater.

Grease a baking tray with half the quantity of ghee (1 ½ tablespoons) and sprinkle half the quantity of shredded coconut (1 cup) on top.

Pour the mixture into the baking tray and top with the remaining ghee and coconut.

Cook using only the bottom element for 15 minutes. Then, continue to cook the mixture using both the top and bottom element for a further 30 minutes.

Remove from oven and leave to cool.





# BABEL

## CHAPTER 10

# GOVERNORATE

**Babel** has turned into an icon and a landmark of Mesopotamia. It is associated with the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the seven wonders of the world, in addition to the famous Tower of Babel.<sup>63</sup> Babel means ‘Gate of God’ and was the military base of the Babylon Empire after the fall of the Sumerians.<sup>64</sup> It was established by Hammurabi in about 2100 BC and extended from the Arabian Gulf to the south and the Tigris River to the north. It had eight gates, the most magnificent of which is the glorious gate of Ishtar. Babel contains the Morduk, where creation rituals would be held for 12 days from March 21 of each year. After the fall of the Sumerians, it became a base for the Babylonian Empire. It reached its climax during the reign of its sixth king, Hammurabi, who took the throne in 1728 BC, and then during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II between the years 604 - 562 BC.<sup>65</sup> Today’s Babel is the legacy of yesteryear’s Babel and belongs to one of central Iraq’s governorates. It has an area of 5,307 square kilometers, and a population of 2 million inhabitants.<sup>66</sup> It is considered the fifth Iraqi Governorate population-wise.

Babel Governorate is situated in central Iraq and is bordered by Baghdad to the north, Anbar and Karbala to the west, Diyala and Wasit to the east and Najaf and Qadisiya to the south. Administratively it consists of 16 units, comprising the four districts of Hilla, Musayib, Hindiya and Hashimiya.

The best documented historical account indicates that city of Hilla of the present was established in the fifth century AH by Emir Sadaqah Bin Mansour in a place named ‘Al-Jamieen’.<sup>67</sup> According to Yaqut al-Hamwi, Hilla was a jungle inhabited by lions. It flourished as it was situated along the road to Hajj (pilgrimage) when the Euphrates was suitable for transporting goods and passengers. As a result, its population increased, and it was described by explorers Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta in their travels.<sup>68</sup>

### Hilla Society

Although civilian life characterizes the ancient Hilla society, the urban population is still less than that of the rural region. The percentage of the population living in urban areas is 48%, while the rural population is 52%. This discrepancy is attributed to Babel’s fertile soil and the abundant fields that surround the governorate from all sides with plentiful year-round crops. The governorate is well known for its high-quality dates and molasses production industry. Hilla molasses is in great demand in Iraq and some Arab countries. Other crops like wheat, barley, rice and fruits are also produced in abundance. In 2018, area statistics have shown that rice produced reached more than 10,000 tons, wheat 222,000 tons and barley over 10,000 tons. Date crops amounted to about 100,000 tons.<sup>69</sup> Hilla society is characterized by its diversity, including two Muslim sects, in addition to other religious and ethnic minorities. A distinctive feature of Babel is its rich cultural diversity in all domains, including literature, creative musicians and singers, artists, and actors. Hilla has always been a source of inspiration for other central Iraqi cities.

### Babylonian Cuisine

As previously mentioned, Lille University has 35 tablets containing dishes from ancient Babylonian society.<sup>60</sup> Babylonian cuisine is one of the world’s oldest, consisting of many ancient dishes that have been since been reinvented. In addition, there are many dishes imported from Mesopotamian neighbors. Like other governorates, there are common local dishes in Babel, especially those prepared in Hilla, as well as dishes that are common in the other central Euphrates towns. However, the Hillans have their own distinctive specialties, such as broad beans with fat or broad beans with broth-soaked bread, most common in Najaf, Diwaniya, Karbala, Baghdad, and other cities. According to traditional Iraqi culture, this dish is best prepared in Hilla and close-by Najaf. Boiled beans are peeled and placed on soaked bread with fried eggs and onion. Following this, heated ghee is added to the top. Hillans also often cook rice with green beans and delicious kufta gravy, which consists of minced meat made into balls and cooked in gravy.

The most famous dish of Hilla is called Arabic Kaymak (cream) produced from buffalo milk. The Hilla and Sidat Al Hindiya are famous for their high quality kaymak. Rural populations follow the traditional way of producing Kaymak by straining milk and boiling it on a medium-heat fire. The temperature is reduced, and the milk is beaten with a ladle for ten minutes, and then the temperature is raised, and the milk is left to boil for another ten minutes. Next, the temperature is reduced to a low degree and the milk is left for thirty or forty-five minutes, after which the fire is turned off, and the milk is covered by a basket or a metal mesh. The container will then be tightly covered with a thick cloth and left for long hours until a thick cream forms on top. The cover is removed and the cream is left to cool, or it can be put in the fridge for four to six hours, after which the top layer must be carefully cut with a sharp knife so that the milk does not leak from beneath the formed cream. The kaymak will then be carefully removed and served with hot bread. It can also be eaten with honey, tea, or jam. It is enjoyed during holidays and feasts with kahi or traditional Iraqi pastry.

Babylonians have a passion for soups, especially turnip soup, which is called Hamidh Shalgham (sour turnip) in Baghdad and some other regions. This soup consists of chard, turnip, spinach, minced fat-free beef and a small amount of rice. The mixture is spiced with black pepper, chopped onion, powdered coriander, cumin and dried lime. Next, Kibbeh Jareesh (Groats kibbeh) is added to the mixture which is placed on heat and stirred for thirty minutes so that it does not get stuck at the bottom of the pot. This special thick soup is served with bread and characterized by its sour taste. The Babel community, like the rest of the Iraqi population, prefers to eat this dish in winter, just like lentil soup in the morning.

Another popular dish made by residents of Hilla and many other Iraqi towns is also available in several Arab countries like Tunisia, Morocco and the Levant region. This dish, named Madfouna was inherited from the Abbasid period and is mentioned in the “Art of Cookery” by Al-Hasan Al-Baghdadi.<sup>71</sup> It is popular among the populations of Hilla, Baghdad, Basra, Mosul among other areas, called different names in different cities. Some call it Madfouna and others refer to it as Sheik Al Mahshi. Eggplant, zucchini, tomato and other vegetables are cored and stuffed with a mixture of rice, meat, fat and other ingredients and placed inside a pot. Tomato sauce is then poured over the stuffed veggies and left to cook slowly. This is the way Madfouna is prepared in Hilla and the other Babylonian towns as well as towns in central Euphrates, the general central region, the south, and the west. In Mosul, those with less money prepare Madfouna from cucumber only, stuffing the cored cucumber with rice, curry, and black pepper, and leaving it to cook on a low fire. Those with more economic means use a variety of veggies and add meat and fat to the rice.



## INGREDIENTS (serves 7-8)

2 cups	Dried broad beans; soaked in water overnight
3 pieces	Iraqi flat bread or 5 Naan bread
1	Shredded onion
4 Tbsp.	Warm water
¼ cup	Oil or butter
1 Tbsp	Lemon zest (optional)
2 Tbsp.	pomegranate syrup (optional)
	Ground dried wild mint (Butnej) – to garnish
	Salt and pepper to taste
	Cumin (optional)

## PREPARATION

Soak the dried beans in water for 4 hours then drain it. Using a deep pan bring the broad beans and 10 cups of water to the boil for around 12 minutes. Simmer on a low heat for around one hour, or until the beans are tender. When tender, separate 1½ cups of bean water. Add salt and pepper to the beans. Add cumin if desired. Cut the Iraqi flat bread or Naan bread into pieces and arrange round a serving dish. Pour the separated bean water over the bread and allow to soak for a few minutes. Drain any remaining water off the beans and lay them over the soaked bread. In a skillet, heat the butter or oil until very hot. Garnish with onions, butnej (dried wild mint), pomegranate syrup (optional), hot butter/oil, lemon juice and zest (optional). As variations, fry an egg, sunny-side up, and add to the top.

This dish originated in Iraq, and in the ‘Art of Cookery’ the meat is chopped into small pieces with minced fat and salt, powdered coriander, and cinnamon. When the mixture boils, its broth is thrown away, and red meat is minced, and boiled in salt water. Crushed chickpeas, which have been soaked in water for one hour, are added. Large eggplants are then cored and stuffed with meat and placed in the pot with some chopped onion.

The Hillans, like most Iraqis, prefer gravy-based dishes such as green beans, zucchini, chicken broth, truffle broth and okra broth. The okra broth prepared in the Babel kitchen is unparalleled. Okra is grown in large quantities in the towns in the south, west and the Euphrates, with quality varying from one town to another. Some people believe that the okra cultivated in the central Euphrates region is the best. Preparation of the tasty Okra broth is similar in all Iraqi towns, and the main components of this dish are sheep meat, okra, tomato paste, fresh crushed tomato, garlic, black pepper and spices. Some prefer to use chopped onion, while others keep the garlic only. The dish is usually served with white rice or with soaked bread.

## TASHREEB BAGELLA

## BROAD BEAN STEW





INGREDIENTS (serves 4)

500 G	Lamb with bones
1 KG	fresh or frozen okra
1	unpeeled whole garlic
1	chopped tomato
2 Tbsp.	tomato paste
2 Tbsp.	lemon juice (optional)
4 Tbsp.	Oil
	Salt and pepper to taste

PREPARATION

In a deep pot, fry the lamb in a 2 tbsp of oil until the meat is seared all over, then add 2-3 cups of water and let it boil. Reduce the heat and cook for another 45 minutes.

In a separate pot, fry the garlic, tomatoes and the tomato paste in the remaining oil, then add the mixture to the meat and cook for another 30 minutes.

Add the okra, salt and pepper and lemon juice i(f used), cook uncovered until the okra is tender.

Serve as a stew with rice on the side, or just pour it over freshly cut Iraqi bread and serve as tashreeb.

MARGAT BAMYAH  
OKRA STEW

A dish that has risen to prominence in modern times and now ranks among the most popular meals in Iraq, Okra tashreeb is strangely absent from medieval cookbooks. So modern connoisseurs should count themselves lucky!



# BAGHDAD

## CHAPTER 11

# GOVERNORATE

**Baghdad** is the capital of Iraq and the second largest Arab city in terms of population after Cairo. It has a population of 8.5 million and is considered the economic, administrative, and educational center of Iraq since 1921. The city was built by Caliph Abu Jaafar Al-Mansour in the 8th century AD. He called it Dar As-Salam (City of Peace) and chose it because it is situated in the middle of important Islamic cities including Basra, Kufa and Damascus. Historically, its name was mentioned in many Assyrian and Babylonian manuscripts. During Al-Mansour's time, the city had many villages, including Baghdad or Baghdan, the Aramaic Sonia, Al-Khatibiya, Sharfaniya, Banawra, Bratha, Qatghata and Al-Wardaniya.<sup>71</sup>

During its construction, the city was round and about 2,615 meters in diameter. It was surrounded by a trench and two walls with a spacious square in the middle. In modern times, Baghdad became a large city with an area of 5,169 square kilometers. It has 32 administrative subdistricts, comprising 10 districts. It bordered by Diyala to the east, Wasit and Babel to the south, Anbar to the west, and Salah al-Din to the north. Its districts include Al-Karakh, Al-Resafa, Al-Kadhimiya, Al-Adhmiya, Al-Sadr, Al-Madain, Al-Mahmoudiya and others.<sup>72</sup> The history of Baghdad is divided into three stages; the first is the period in which the city reached its cultural zenith during the Abbasid period. It became the most important city in the world in terms of scientific and cultural position. This period lasted five centuries, ending with the Mongol invasion in 1258.

The second stage of Baghdad's history started after the Mongol invasion, and was much darker, as the past position of the city declined, resulting in illiteracy, cultural decline, and diseases. It fell victim to colonialists and invaders. The city was controlled by the Safavids and Ottomans and was the scene of many civil sectarian battles between the Sunnis and Shiites, in addition to disasters and epidemics, including floods, plague, cholera, and other diseases. This stage continued for many centuries and ended with the British occupation in 1917, during which the city's modern history began. During the 20th century, hundreds of thousands of people migrated into the city from the south, west, north and east, making it a gathering place for Iraqis, home to multi-social groups.

### Society and the Environment

Since its establishment, Baghdad has enjoyed a unique social status, manifested in its ability to accommodate all people. During the Abbasid period, Arabs, Persians, Kurds, Turkmens, Jews, Christians, and Sabeans lived side by side. Waves of human migrants arrived in the city for work or study at its schools, and it has maintained this reputation to this day. Baghdad is a haven for the vulnerable, the hungry, and hardworking individuals. It has received waves of immigrants from western and southern Iraq, and Kurds have also chosen it as their home. Thus, Baghdad showcases all races, ethnicities, and sects, in which citizens from Basra and Mosul live side by side, and Kurds live among other citizens from the south and west of the country. There are markets for those from Tikrit and Jewish people, and you may easily come across an alley inhabited by Sabeans, and others with Assyrians from Kirkuk and Mosul. Baghdad is also home to a neighborhood for Armenians. It is therefore not surprising for visitors to write about Baghdad, which has been done by

Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Battuta, Ameen Al-Rihani and Ali Al-Tantawi. Baghdad is a modern-day melting pot, allowing residents to retain their racial backgrounds and distinctive cultural heritage. Says Ameen Al-Rihani, "The majority of the population or mixed racial groups are still, as in the past, far from complete integration and alignment, and intermarriages have not essentially changed their ethnic status or original nationality. Despite their intermarriages, Iranians, Turks and Kurds are still like their ancestors a hundred years ago".<sup>72</sup> According to Al-Rihani, Baghdad has always been hospitable towards the immigrants without compromising their cultures, which has reflected on the prevailing customs, traditions and social heritage including the folklore and food culture.

### Baghdad Cuisine

Given that Baghdad is home to many cultures, sects, and ethnicities, it has indeed become a large, unmatched showcase of Iraqi dishes. One can find a Kurdish dish alongside an Arab dish, and the cooking habits of the south are similar to that of the Baghdadi or Euphrates region population. In addition, there are Turkmen, Armenian and Assyrian food varieties, as well as other dishes prepared by Christians and those from Basra. In other words, the modern Baghdadi way of cooking now comprises all of these cooking styles, especially in the restaurants that serve dishes from other Iraqi cities. The famous Falluja Kebab can be found in Baghdad alongside the Sulaymaniyah Kebab; the Najafi qeema, the Mosul Kibbeh, southern dishes and Assyrian salads can all be found in one place.

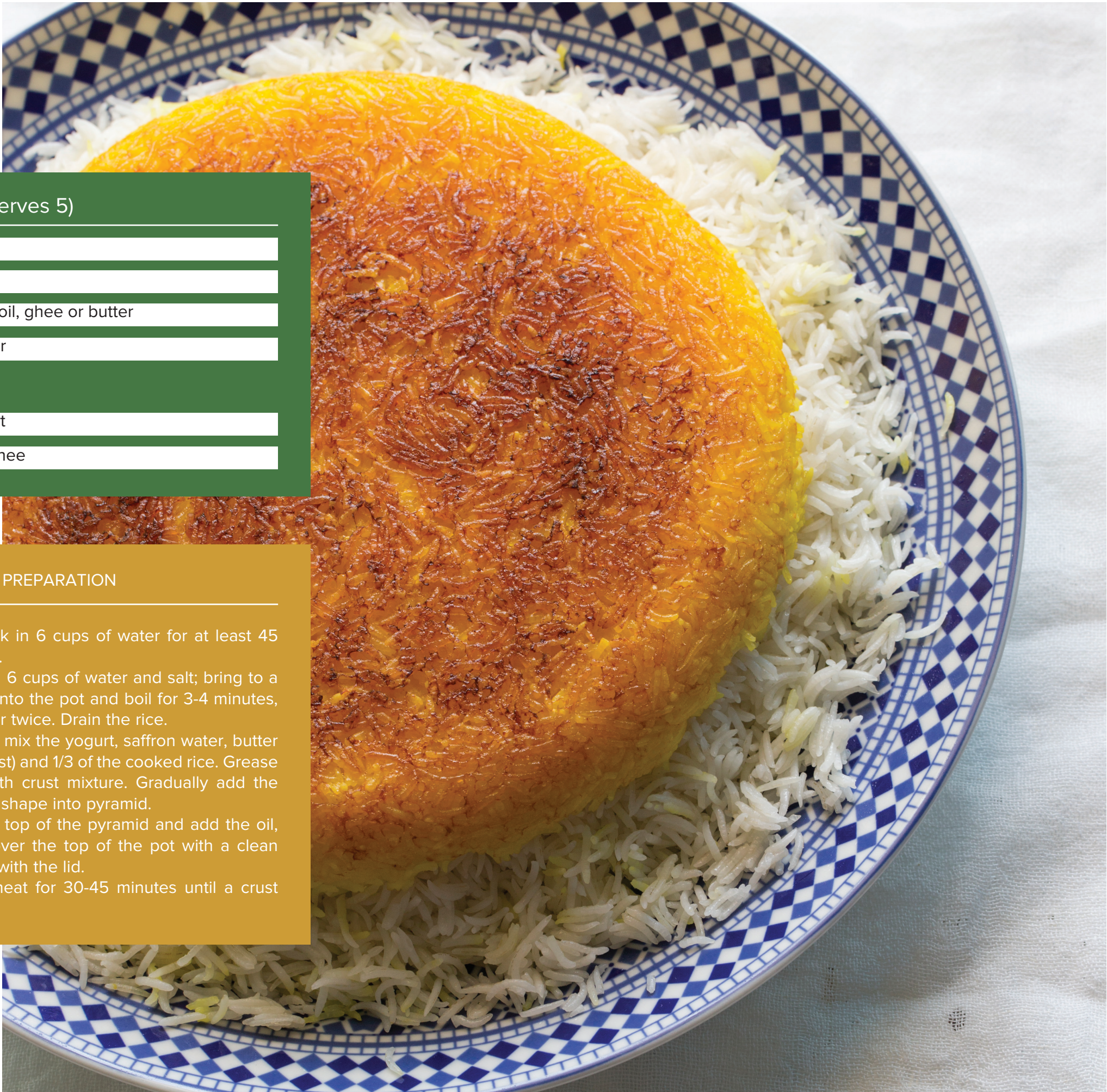
This eclectic food diversity, however, does not mean that there are no special Baghdadi dishes. One famous Baghdadi dish is masgouf fish, which has long been associated with Abu Nawas Avenue. This dish is prepared in a special way, in which the large fish is cut at the back, cleaned, and grilled on metal racks. It is recommended that dry wood like eucalyptus or oak is used for a genuine grilling experience. The Baghdadis prefer the freshwater barbus or common carp. However, in recent years, carp fish grown in special fishponds is becoming more popular.

At breakfast, a favorite dish among Baghdadis is kahi and kaymak, an exclusive Baghdad dish unmatched in any other city. Kahi is made of wheat flour in three thin rectangular layers. It is kneaded well and a small amount of ghee is added. The dough is then greased with a mixture of ghee and egg and placed in the oven to bake and become crispy and thin. A special syrup called shira is then prepared from water, sugar and lemon juice. After the kahi dough is ready, it is soaked in the syrup and is eaten alone or with kaymak (cream). Some families prepare the kahi with soft cheese. Baghdadis usually have kahi and kaymak during feasts and on Fridays. It is customary to see people flocking to the kahi shops during these times.

Among the dishes that Baghdad has contested with Mosul is pacha. Although many believe that this dish originated in Mosul, one can hardly refer to Baghdadi cuisine and leave out the famous pacha. Even after many centuries, pacha is still prepared in the traditional way. The dish consists of the head of a sheep or calf, along with other parts, including the animal's stomach and guts. It takes long hours to carefully clean and cook them. It is eaten as tashreeb meaning with soaked bread on the bottom, usually in the morning. One pacha variety includes filling parts of the stomach lining and guts with rice and serving them boiled or fried.

Baghdad has been famous for hundreds of years for barbecue dishes, including Iraqi kebab, tikka and grilled liver, in addition to sheep ribs and spiced chicken. Baghdad residents have learned how to prepare shawarma, which is often served in special fast-food restaurants.





INGREDIENTS (serves 5)

2 cups	Rice
12 cups	Water
1 Tbsp	Vegetable oil, ghee or butter
2-3 Tbsp.	Warm water
Crust	
2-3 Tbsp	Plain yogurt
¼ cup	Butter or ghee

PREPARATION

Wash rice and soak in 6 cups of water for at least 45 minutes. Drain well.  
Fill a large pot with 6 cups of water and salt; bring to a boil. Pour the rice into the pot and boil for 3-4 minutes, only stirring once or twice. Drain the rice.  
In a separate bowl, mix the yogurt, saffron water, butter or ghee (for the crust) and 1/3 of the cooked rice. Grease a pot and fill it with crust mixture. Gradually add the remaining rice and shape into pyramid.  
Make a well at the top of the pyramid and add the oil, ghee or butter. Cover the top of the pot with a clean dishcloth and seal with the lid.  
Cook over a low heat for 30-45 minutes until a crust forms.

Another popular Iraqi dish is dolma, prepared the Iraqi way. Although this dish is Turkish, it is prepared and cooked with a distinctive Iraqi flavor in all Iraqi cities. There is, for example, the Mosul dolma, which be discussed in a future chapter. There is also the Kurdish white dolma, which is cooked with yogurt, in addition to the south Iraq dolma, characterized by its sweet taste. The Baghdad dolma has an unmatched taste. A mixture of meat, rice and fat with other lemon-flavored ingredients are combined to fill onion, tomato, zucchini, eggplant, and chard. A similar dish called Sheikh Al-Mahshi is also a favorite, in addition to stuffed vine leaf rolls, maqluba (rice, meat and fried eggplant, placed in a pot and flipped upside down when served), fava beans in fat, okra broth, bean, tepsi (casserole) dishes and other broth-based varieties.

TEMMAN WA HIKAKA

RICE WITH A CRUST





### INGREDIENTS (serves 4-5)

1	Chopped onions
750 g	Meat lamb or beef cut into pieces
2 cups	Dried white beans
3 Tbsp.	Oil
1 ½ Tsp.	Salt
½ Tsp.	Ground black pepper
1 Tbsp.	Lemon juice
3 Tbsp.	Tomato paste
1	Peeled and chopped tomato
1/2	Chopped red capsicum (optional)

### PREPARATION

Soak the dry beans into cold water for about six hours or overnight.

In a deep, non-stick pan, brown the onions and meat with three tablespoons of oil. Add the tomato, tomato paste, salt and pepper and stir for 10 minutes. Add two cups of water and simmer for two hours. Meanwhile, rinse the beans and boil in a separate pan until they are tender.

When cooked, mix the beans with the meat mixture, add the lemon juice and the capsicum/red bell pepper (optional).

Simmer uncovered for 10-15 minutes over low heat. Serve hot with rice.



MARGAT FASOLIA YABSAH

## WHITE BEAN STEW

Brush up on your conversational Iraqi and request some Yabsah (dry) bi temman (rice) – you’ll end up with the same thing! The alternate name by which this dish is also identified, refers to the uncooked form the beans initially take and the side of rice it is usually served with. Cheap and filling, this is the meal of choice for many an Iraqi labourer. However the hearty combination of simmered beans and tender meat is so rich it would be equally fit for a king!



INGREDIENTS (makes 50 pcs)

Dough		Walnut filling	
5 cups	Plain flour	1 cup	Walnuts
1 cup	Vegetable oil	4 Tbsp.	Icing sugar
¾ cup	Butter	1 Tsp.	Ground cardamom or rose water
1 cup	Water		
3 Tbsp.	Powdered milk	1 Tbsp.	Water
2	Eggs	Coconut filling	
2 Tbsp.	Active dry yeast	1 cup	Finely shredded coconut
1 Tbsp.	Sugar		
1 Tsp.	Salt	½ cup	Icing sugar
1 Tsp.	Ground cardamom	1 Tsp.	Ground cardamom
Pinch of nutmeg		1 Tbsp.	Water
½ Tsp.	Ground cardamom	2 Tbsp.	Butter
½ Tsp.	Ground cardamom	½ cup	Condensed milk
Date filling		Sesame filling	
1 cup	Pitted dates	1 cup	toasted sesame seeds
1 Tsp.	Ground cardamom	½ cup	Icing sugar
1 Tbsp.	Melted butter	1 Tsp.	Ground cardamom
		1 Tsp.	Water
		2	Eggs; beaten, for glaze

PREPARATION

**Dough**  
Combine all the dough ingredients in a mixing bowl and knead with your hands to a smooth, firm consistency. Cover the dough and leave to rest until slightly risen (approximately 30 minutes).

**Fillings**  
For the date filling finely chop dates. Add cardamom and butter and mix by hand to form a coarse paste.  
For the walnut filling, use a mortar and pestle to crush walnuts, icing sugar and cardamom together until mixed well. Add water to form a coarse paste, rose water can replace the cardamom. In this instance, mix the rosewater into the crushed walnut and icing sugar, and omit the water.)  
For the coconut filling, soak the coconut in condensed milk for one hour, then drain. Mix the coconut, icing sugar, butter and cardamom until well combined. Add water to form a coarse paste.  
For the sesame filling, use a mortar and pestle to crush sesame, icing sugar and cardamom until well combined. Add water to form a coarse paste.

**To make the Kleicha:**  
Pre-heat the oven to 200C/400F/Gas mark 6.  
Take a tablespoon-sized piece of dough and using your fingers knead it to a medium thickness. Place a teaspoon-sized filling of your choice in the middle of the disc and reshape dough into a ball around the filling.  
Place dough into the wooden mould of your choice and tap out. Alternatively, if you do not have access to a mould, roll dough into disc-shapes, place your choice of filling in the middle of each disc, then fold the disc in half and seal by pressing. Decorate by pinching along the edges, marking a print with a fork, or using a design technique of your choice.  
After filling and shaping your kleichas, grease and lightly dust a baking tray with oil and flour. Brush the Kleicha with the egg using 2 beaten eggs and bake for approximately 20 minutes on a medium heat, or until golden.

KLEITCHA

IRAQI COOKIES

Iraqis of all faiths mark their feasts with these delicious buttery biscuits. For Muslims the sweet scent wafting through the house, just begging to be consumed with an Istikan of sweet tea, signifies the arrival of Eid, while many Iraqi Christians celebrate Easter with the same treat. Although the ingredients for kleicha are generally the same, there is something magical about these biscuits, which allows the cook to impart a bit of her identity into each one. In Iraq a housewives' status is judged by the strength of her kleicha – and my version, will be sure to impress your guests!

Although these domed cookies were originally shaped using small bowls as moulds, today, wooden casts are often used. While the unique patterns of each mould are meant to hint at the contents inside and make it easy to identify the filling of each kleicha cookie, I suggest you taste them all – just to be sure there are no mistakes.

Alternately, for a quicker – and easier – (but equally appetising) option, date kleichas can be made by rolling the dough out onto a flat surface, placing the date mixture (about ½ a centimetre thick) on top, rolling the dough into a tube, cutting into two-centimetre diagonal pieces, brushing with egg, sprinkling with sesame seeds, and baking as usual.



# DIYALA CHAPTER 12

## GOVERNORATE

**Diyala Governorate** is situated in the eastern part of Iraq. It is bound by Baghdad and Salah al-Din to the west, Al-Sulaymaniyah to the north, Wasit to the south and international borders with Iran to the east. It has an area of 16505 square kilometers and a population of about 1,200,000 inhabitants, most of whom live in Baquba, Al-Miqdadiya, Al-Khalis and Khanaqin. Diyala consists of 21 administrative units (sub-districts) that form the districts of Baquba, Al-Mikdadiya, Mendeley, Kifri and Khanaqin. Historically, the city of Baquba is the capital of Diyala Governorate. It surrounded by orchards on all sides and is famous for its citrus fruits such as oranges and lemons, as well as grapes and grains. Al-Baqoobi society is predominated by clans, as they constitute about 80% of the population.<sup>74</sup> It was mentioned by Yaqut Al-Hamawi in seventh century AH as a large village located on Khurasan Road 207 with plentiful fruits and unmatched orchards (thick palm groves, quality dates, and citrus trees). According to Syriac inscriptions, the word Baquba means the House of Aquba (Jacob), a route indicator, as it is situated on the caravan route to Iran.

In addition to Baquba, Mikdadiya city is commonly known as Shahrban, a compound Persian name consisting of Shahr (town) and Ban, which refers to a Persian man in whose name a village was built, and this name has since referred to the entire district. Mikdadiya or Shahrban is famous for citrus groves, especially oranges, to the extent that most Iraqis refer to it as the city of oranges.<sup>75</sup> Mendeley is situated to the east of Baquba, a few kilometers from the Iranian Pishet Kuh mountain. At the periphery of the city there are orchards of pomegranates, oranges, lemons, and grapes, in addition to palm trees. Abdul Razzaq Al-Husseini recounts that the Mendeley population speaks different languages, based on their area of residence<sup>76</sup>, and some areas are populated by Iranian families who speak Persian. Similarly, others living in Kurdish neighborhoods speak Kurdish, in addition to those who speak Arabic or Turkish. The name Mendeley is a variation of the word 'Bindnijin,' which is referred to by Yaqut Al-Hamawi in his book titled 'Glossary of Countries,' as having a subdistrict called Balad Ruz, which was also surrounded by orchards.

Khanaqin district is situated to the northeast of Baquba and is the last Iraqi town bordering Iran. The Al-Wand River, which rises in Iran, flows into the city and divides Khanaqin into two parts. It was home to a Jewish community that ran the city's businesses before leaving Iraq in the 1950s. Finally, another important district of Diyala Governorate is Al-Khalis, which was previously called 'Diltawa' or 'Tiltawa.' This district is surrounded by many citrus and palm tree groves and is considered a recreation area for many Iraqi families.

### Society and the Environment

Diyala Governorate is characterized by its fertile land and moderate weather. It is considered the main source of citrus fruits in Iraq, and Iraqis favor the area's zesty citrus fruits, especially orange and lemon, as well as wheat, barley, and rice. According to 2018 statistics, Diyala produced 28,723 tons wheat, 656 tons barley and 2,532 tons rice. It also produced 85,439 tons dates in the same year. Most of these products cover the needs of Baghdad markets and Kurdistan region cities, due to the geographic proximity to these areas, as Diyala is nearly 57 kilometers from the capital.<sup>77</sup>

Socially, Diyala Governorate is considered a mini-Iraq, as it consists of a multi-ethnic, multi-faith and multi-sect society, in which Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen and a Persian minority live. There are also other minority groups including Jews and Bahais. The Kurdish and Turkmen ethnicity population are concentrated to the north of the governorate, in the cities of Mendeley, Khanaqin and Kifri. The Arabs live in areas south and west of the governorate in the city of Baquba and its suburbs. The Baquba population is majority Sunni Muslims, while Al-Khalis, Jdaiyat Al-Shatt, and the villages of Kharnabat, Huayder, Shifta, Khan Al-Walwa and Al-Ankabiya are predominately Shia. The population of Mendeley and Qara Tapa are predominately Shia Turkmen.

The Arab society is predominately ruled by tribal values. There is a marked presence of tribes including the al-Majma', Dafafa', Jubur, Azza, Ubaid, Dulaim, Tamim, Anazza, Bani Saad and others. There are also several Turkmen and Kurdish tribes, including Qara Los, Talibaniya, Sourmeley, Al-Jaf, Arikwaziya, Al-Sharaf Bayanah, Zangana, Bazrinjeh, Kakais and others. These diverse sub-identities have given the social culture of Diyala a tremendous richness in all aspects, including values, heritage, languages, social customs, and food culture. This explains the large food varieties in Diyala Governorate. There are Arab dishes that come from Salah al-Din, Wasit and Baghdad, in addition to dishes that arrived from central Euphrates region and the south, besides Kurdish and Turkmen recipes.

The Diyala kitchen has also been influenced by neighboring Iran. Diyala cuisine has copied many dishes from northern Iraq, which has been influenced by Middle Eastern cuisine, especially salads. Diyala cuisine has also maintained a link with Najaf and Karbala food varieties.

### Diyala Cuisine

Like other Iraqi governorates such as Basra, Amara, Mosul, and Najaf, Diyala cuisine has similar dishes. However, it should be noted that Diyala's kitchen includes many Iraqi dishes from different milieus. Influenced by Tikrit and neighboring Anbar, the Diyala population often cooks dishes like tashreeb, habeet, tandoor chicken, and fish. There are traditional dishes common among rural families and reflective of the existing social class distinction, often with ingredients including broth-soaked bread and meat. While wealthy families use plenty of lamb meat and bread, the less wealthy in the countryside use dry bread, ghee, fried onion, and spices. Water is poured on the bread and the dish is served as a main meal. This simple dish is available in all Iraqi cities, although it has various names depending on the area. In Baghdad and the southern and central Euphrates cities, it is referred to as air broth.

Among the dishes eaten by less wealthy families in the rural areas of Diyala, Anbar and Salah al-Din is a dish called Khami'a which consists of milk, bread, and animal ghee. Boiled milk is poured on bread with ghee until the ghee melts. This dish is eaten in the morning as a breakfast or in the afternoon between lunch and dinner. Many families prefer to eat it without sugar, while some eat it with sugar. Khami'a is popular in Iraq, Syria and the Arab Peninsula. The dish has nomadic origin, as it consists of ingredients derived from sheep and cattle, on which nomads depend. Interestingly, there is a Kurdish dish called chilk more common in Sulaymaniya, Erbil and parts of Diyala, which is similar to Khami'a, but served without milk. According to traditional Kurdish culture, this dish is eaten by the more disadvantaged, and as the Kurds proverbially say: "If you have enough resources go for chilk, but if you don't, lament and bewail!" It is prepared by baking leavened dough on a saj oven. When baked, the round loaves are put on a deep tray on top of one another, and then they are cut into pieces. ghee, sugar, or jam are added, and the dish is served at breakfast.

Among the dishes which Diyala has in common with the cities of Iraq's west, south and central Euphrates is the Hnayni sweet dish, which consists of wheat or barley flour made into soft dough and mixed with dates. The mixture is then placed in a pot and served when ready.



## INGREDIENTS (serves 5-7)

3 cups	Long grain rice
4 cloves	chopped garlic
2 cups	Fresh shelled broad beans
¾ cup	Fresh chopped dill
2 cups	Chicken or beef broth
¼ cup	Oil
2 Tbsp.	Salt
1 Tsp.	Black pepper
1 Tsp.	ground Coriander

## PREPARATION

Soak the rice in water for 30 minutes, then drain. In half the amount of oil, brown the garlic and add the broad beans, 1 tsp salt, coriander, half of the chopped dill and stir. Add enough water to cover, cook for 5 minutes or until the Fava beans are tender. Cook the rice in the remaining oil, add 1 tsp salt and hot chicken or meat broth. Boil for 5 minutes, stir, reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the broad beans and the remaining dill to the rice, stir and cook over low heat for another 10-15 minutes. Serve with yogurt and cooked lamb or kebab.

In addition to these dishes that bring together Diyala cuisine with that of west Iraq, there are other dishes that are derived from the kitchens of Kirkuk, Sulaymaniya, Erbil, and Mosul. Diyala is socially intertwined with the Kurdistan region's environment, in which Kurds and Turkmens live and have widely shared their dishes. The Arab population in Diyala has learned to cook these dishes just as the Kurds and Turkmens enjoy the Arab dishes.

There are certain dishes that are widely celebrated within the Kirkuk community like the Tugma, a Turkmen dish consisting of meat, zucchini, green pepper, celery, tomato, cucumber, and eggplant. Another popular Diyala dish is sholat sawar which consists of fine bulger (crushed wheat), a soup-like dish cooked with roasted onion, water and meat and enjoyed with yogurt. In addition to these varied dishes, Diyala serves other popular dishes like kibbeh, kebab, rice-based broth varieties, dolma, the traditional pacha, and fried liver and lung, cooked with onion and dried lime, in addition to masgouf and a large variety of bread, including oroog or farafeer. In summary, a visitor to Diyala should expect to see and taste most of Iraqi dishes in one place, as Diyala is often considered a miniature version of Iraq.

## TEMMAN BAGELLA

## BROAD BEAN RICE

The dill is the star spice that brings the drama to this dish. Like a true performer it makes its presence felt, even before you spot it - filling the house with an aroma so unmistakably delicious it makes perfect sense to watch this pot, until dinner is served.



INGREDIENTS (Makes one 24cm/9.5-inch cake)

1 cup	Butter
1 cups	Sugar
5	Eggs
1/4 cup	Date syrup
2 cups	Self-raising flour
3 Tbsp.	Orange juice
1 Tbsp.	ground cinnamon
¼ Tsp.	ground cloves
1/2 Tsp.	ground cardamom
¼ Tsp.	Grated nutmeg
1/4 cup	Plain flour
1 ½ cups	Pitted dates
¼ cup	Walnuts
1/3 cup	Golden raisins
1 Tsp.	Grated lemon rind
1 Tsp.	Grated orange rind

PREPARATION

Pre-heat the oven to 150C/300F/Gas mark 2.  
Using an electric beater, cream together the butter and sugar on a medium speed. Add the eggs, one at a time, and continue beating with a medium speed, until well combined.  
Add the date syrup, self-raising flour, orange juice, cinnamon, cloves, cardamom and nutmeg and continue beating with a medium speed until well combined (approximately 5 minutes).  
Pour the plain flour into a separate bowl. Using pitted dates, form small thumb-nail sized balls and place in the bowl of flour.  
Add the walnuts and raisins and mix gently. Carefully fold the contents of the bowl into the batter. Add grated lemon and orange rinds. Preheat the oven and pour batter into a greased and dusted baking tin and cook for 45 minutes.  
In a pan separately heat 5 table spoons of sugar, stirring well until caramelized.

KEKAT TAMUR

DATE CAKE





# ANBAR CHAPTER 13

## GOVERNORATE

**Anbar Governorate** is in the west of Iraq. It is the largest Iraqi governorate in terms of area, at 138,500 square kilometers. It has a population of more than two million.<sup>78</sup> It is bordered to the north by the governorates of Salah al-Din and Ninewa, to the northwest by Syria, to the west by Jordan, to the east by Baghdad, to the south by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and to the southeast by Karbala and Najaf governorates.

Administratively, Anbar is divided into eight districts, including Qa'im, Anah, Rawa, Al- Hiditha, Heet, Al-Ramadi, Falluja and Rutba. Main cities of the governorate are Ramadi, Falluja, Al-Qa'im, Haditha, Al-Baghdadi, Kubaysa, Heet and Rawa. During the monarchy era, the governorate was known as Al-Dulaim Governorate, after the Dulaim tribes that inhabited that area for centuries. In 1961, it was administratively named Al-Anbar Governorate. The word Anbar is Persian and means “store” or “depot,” and the al-Manadhira (an ancient Arab kingdom in southern Iraq) used this term because the area was a storage place for military equipment, as well as wheat, barley and hay.<sup>79</sup> This name was also frequently mentioned throughout history, including in a speech by Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib. In 134AH, during the Abbasid period, Caliph Abu Al- Abbas Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Abbasi named the governorate the second capital of the Abbasid State, after Kufa. He has palaces built, in which Abu Jaafar Al-Mansour lived until Baghdad was established in 145 AH.<sup>80</sup>

Al-Ramadi is the provincial capital and Anbar Governorate’s major city. It was established by Medhat Pasha during his reign, but for half a century it remained a neglected city until 1923, when the Baghdad-Damascus route passing through the city was opened. Following this, the city prospered, and many bazaars, buildings and new roads were built (82). One significant city in Anbar is the city of Anah, which dates back to the Assyrian state, and was mentioned during the reign of King Tawaklti Ninurta (889-884 BC). It extends longitudinally on the Euphrates shore for a distance of twenty kilometers. The hawthorn is a tool used for irrigation and scooping water from the river to transport it through small channels to orchards and farms (83). On the other side is the twin city of Rawa, a district that was separated administratively from Anah in 2002. Rawa is characterized by the fertility of its lands, just like the city of Hit, which is no less fertile and green than the rest of Anbar’s cities.

### Society and the Environment

The climate in Anbar is semi-desert, with little rainfall throughout the year, and the temperature varies between day and night. However, agriculture is possible due to the Euphrates River, which passes through the governorate as a vital part of some cities such as Heet, Rawa and Anah, which is referred to as the waterwheel city. Farms and palm and fruit groves are prevalent in Anbar, where there are more than 2.5 million palm trees. Official figures published in 2018 refer to many yields, including wheat, barley and rice, in addition to other crops, including vegetables, grains, potato and maize.

Socially, the Anbar community consists of a single component, which is the Muslim Arab element, with a Kurdish minority. Most of Anbar’s population belong to the four main tribes of Dulaim, Zouba’, Anazzah, and Al-Uqaydat. The biggest of these tribes is the Dulaim, which exists on either bank of the Euphrates, between Falluja and Al-Qa’im. They are two groups; the first are engaged in agriculture and are called ‘Nazzalah’, meaning those who are associated with land cultivation, and the other part of the tribe, who are called ‘Jawallah’, are desert nomads, engaged in herding sheep and camels (92). The first group inhabits the fertile land, as opposed to the ‘Jawallah’ who maintain their nomadic life in the headland between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (84).

### Anbar Cuisine

Anbar cuisine has the same food variety of western Iraqi cities, including red and white meats, rice-based and wheat flour dishes. They prefer broth dishes and biryani varieties and have their own ancient traditions of serving food to their guests, like the rural communities in the south, and central Euphrates communities. They are known for exaggerated food quantities, with large and deep handle-held trays, reflective of their generous hospitality and entertainment for guests. Despite these typical nomadic values, many of them have shifted to a more modern agricultural life, especially in the cities close to the desert and rural areas. Nevertheless, Anbar towns remained for many years without hotels, which they considered a repugnant phenomenon, and their homes a more suitable place for providing hospitality to strangers. This tendency has reflected on the food culture of the Anbar community, which still contains local dishes such as broth dishes, fries, kibbeh varieties, kebab, and rice. Anbar cuisine is generally characterized by prevalent desert dishes, not only from Iraq but also Syrian, Jordanian and Saudi varieties.

The most famous dish celebrated in Anbar Governorate cities is Dulaimiya which is also called Habeet in other cities. Dulaimiya is associated with and named after the Dulaim tribe. It has made its way south and north onto Iraqi tables, just like Dolma, Sheikh Mahshi, Masgouf Fish and Mosul Kibbeh varieties. However, Dulaimiya is slightly different from one city to another. It consists of soaked bread at the bottom of the dish, with a large quantity of rice, vermicelli, currants, almonds and topped with large chunks of lamb meat.

Cooked the Anbar way, Dulaimiya starts with soaking the bread with tomato or yellow broth, topped with rice and mutton, ensuring that the food is served on a large common tray. The traditional way to eat in Anbar is for people to gather around the tray together. In other Iraqi cities, they don’t necessarily use the same ingredients. In Baghdad for example, the Dulaimiya is cooked with okra broth, in which loaves of round bread are soaked, and white rice and meat are added. In Anbar and some other cities, chicken broth is used. Dulaimiya is a common feature of Iraqi cuisine regardless of the components.

Another Anbar dish is the Farafir, which is so popular in Rawa that it is named Rawa Farafir. The dish is like the uroug pastry, common in the central and southern governorates of Iraq and central Euphrates region. It consists of a wheat flour dough filled with minced meat, and finely chopped onion and parsley. The ingredients are mixed and made into small and thick round loaves that are usually baked in a clay oven.





## INGREDIENTS

2 Tbsp.	Vegetable oil
2	sliced onions
1 ½ Kg	Cut lamb portions; shoulder or leg
1 Tsp.	whole Cardamom
1 Tsp.	whole black peppercorns
1 Tsp.	whole white peppercorns
2	Bay leaves
2	Turmeric roots

## PREPARATION

Sauté the onions until soft. Add lamb and cook until the outside is browned, and the juices are sealed in (approximately 5 minutes). Add the cardamom, black peppercorns, white peppercorns, bay leaves, turmeric root, salt and pepper, and cook over medium heat stirring occasionally, until meat is brown (approximately 15 minutes). Add water to cover the meat and bring to boil. Reduce the heat and cook for another 1-2 hours covered, or until the meat is tender.

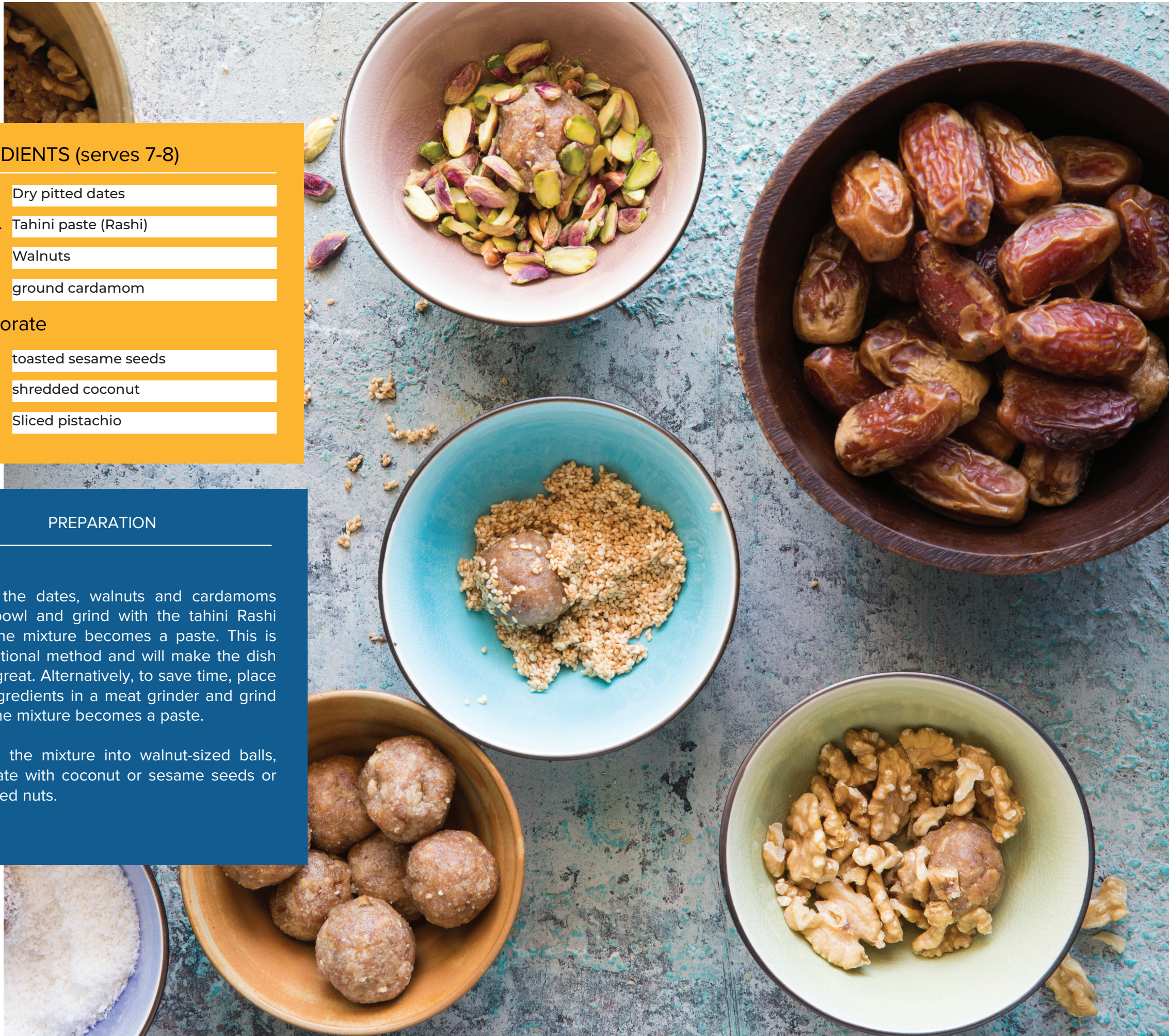
Moving to sweet dishes, the most famous sweet variety is available in west Iraq, especially in Anbar, and is called madgouga, made of date and roasted sesame. The dish is prepared in stages, where the dry dates are pounded with a wooden mortar, and then sesame is mixed with the pounded dates and is added again every ten minutes until it is blended with the pounded date. The final mixture is then cut into pieces and made into balls. This sweet mixture is usually prepared collectively by young men through beautiful rituals in which songs are sung in step with the pounding sound. Sweets are common in the south and central Euphrates region and are often distributed during the fasting month of Ramadan as well as in meetings related to condolences.

# HABEET

## SPICED LAMB

The simplicity of preparing this dish is compensated for by the depth of its flavours – a fusion of cardamom, peppercorns, bay leaves and turmeric with fatty lamb meat. It's perfect served with Iraqi anbar rice. While most prefer the dish simmered till succulent, others – like my son Haitham – anticipate the crispy finish. In those instances, fry the lamb for a bit after it's completely cooked.





INGREDIENTS (serves 7-8)

- 1 ½ cup Dry pitted dates
- 2-3 Tbsp. Tahini paste (Rashi)
- 1 cup Walnuts
- 1 Tbsp. ground cardamom

To decorate

- 2 Tbsp. toasted sesame seeds
- 2 Tbsp. shredded coconut
- 2 Tbsp. Sliced pistachio

PREPARATION

Place the dates, walnuts and cardamoms in a bowl and grind with the tahini Rashi until the mixture becomes a paste. This is a traditional method and will make the dish taste great. Alternatively, to save time, place the ingredients in a meat grinder and grind until the mixture becomes a paste.

Round the mixture into walnut-sized balls, decorate with coconut or sesame seeds or chopped nuts.



MADGOUGA

DATE AND WALNUT BALLS

The effort and ingredients required in this recipe appear incongruent to the final result. How can such a simple collaboration of dried dates (I like the dried Ashrasi varieties), a touch of tahini and a selection of simple spices and nuts combine to create this delicious dessert?

Although a food processor is an option, I believe that perhaps the real magic lies in using a mortar and madak (pestle) to pound to a paste. When made this way, each crush seems to deliver a secret, silent ingredient – one likely to remain concealed for as long as it’s overpowered by the heavy beating commotion.



# SALAH AL-DIN

## CHAPTER 14

### GOVERNORATE

The history of **Salah al-Din Governorate** extends back thousands of years, passing through all civilization periods of Mesopotamia. The name ‘Tikrit’ was first mentioned in Assyrian texts of the manuscripts of the Assyrian King Tukulti-Ninurta (890-884 BC). This mention came in a clay tablet discovered at the city of Asshur dating back to the 6th year of the reign of the king.<sup>84</sup> Among the other cities of Salah al-Din Governorate are Samarra, Balad, Dujail, Baiji, and Al-Shirqat, which was called ‘Shurqat’ in ancient manuscripts. Some of these cities had administratively belonged to Baghdad before the governorate separated and was named after the commander and ruler Salah ad-Din Al-Ayyubi, a Kurd who was born in Tikrit.

Salah al-Din is situated in the central part of Iraq and is bound by Ninewa to the north, Erbil to the east, Baghdad to the south and Anbar to the west. It has an area of 23,398 sq. kilometers and is comprised of 17 administrative units that constitute 10 districts, including Tikrit, Aldor, Baiji, Samarra and Balad. The population of Salah al-Din Governorate is about 1.5 million inhabitants, of which the urban population is 45% and the rural population is 55%.<sup>85</sup> Salah al-Din is rich in sacred shrines and ancient monuments, including the famous Malwiya Mosque, the Abbasid Mosque, Qasr al-Ashiq, Qasr al-Khilafa and Abu Dulaf Mosque. Among the ancient monuments is the city of Assur, situated on the banks of Tigris River opposite Shirqat city, in addition to the Tikrit wall and the nunnery that is part of the churches located on either side of the Tigris River in Tikrit and the al-Qubba al-Sulaybiyya to the north of Samarra, near Qasr al-Ashiq. There are also holy places in the ancient city of Samarra, which the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mu’tasim Billah made capital of the Arab Islamic State. It is located on the eastern bank of the Tigris in Salah al-Din Governorate. It is bound to the north by Tikrit, to the west by al-Ramadi, and to the east by Baquba. It is considered one of the most important cities in Iraq because it contains the tombs of Imams Ali Al-Hadi and Al-Hasan Al-Askari, in addition to the holy shrine of Sayed Muhammad, known as ‘the Lion of Dujail,’ and Ibrahim bin Malik Al-Ashtar.<sup>86</sup>

#### Society and the Environment

The Tigris River runs through the cities of Tikrit, Samarra, Balad and Dujail, which explains the governorate’s fertile land, prosperous agriculture, and abundant palm trees. Salah al-Din is home to many kinds of fruit, including grapes, pomegranate, orange, apricot, lemon, in addition to wheat, barley, vegetable and cereal farms. The governorate and Samarra in particular are famous for growing melon and watermelon. Similar to Diyala’s quality orange growing, Samarra is famous for melon, and Iraqis consider them a distinctive trademark of Samarra, and describe them as ‘Samarra melons’ just as they speak of Al-Zubair tomato, Erbil yogurt or Shahrban orange. Salah al-Din Governorate is also famous for growing wheat and barley, and Tuz Khurmatu is especially famous for growing maize, sunflower, sesame, and cotton, particularly in the areas situated on the irrigation project and Aqsu River.

Regarding the social environment, Salah al-Din society exists in harmony despite its diverse religious, sectarian, and ethnic background. The Muslim Arab population is the majority and the inhabitants are divided into a Sunni majority and a Shia minority, living in Balad and Dujail and some in Samarra suburbs. Kurds also inhabit most of Salah al-Din’s cities, but live in large numbers in Tuz Khurmatu and Baiji, along with a minority Turkmen and Assyrian population.

This diversity has contributed to a rich social culture and values and the ability to understand others regardless of existing differences. The governorate’s gastronomy is perhaps the most prominent evidence of this harmony. In any kitchen you can find Kurdish, Arab and Turkmen dishes together. And, due to the proximity of Samarra and Kadhimiya to Baghdad, the cuisines of these two cities has intertwined, assisted by intermarriages and frequent visits to the holy places in these areas. Consequently, food prepared in one city can be seen in the kitchen of the other city and so on and so forth. This tendency has been reflected on the food culture and customs. In addition, the proximity of Tikrit to the semi-desert that extends to Anbar has contributed to the proliferation of desert dishes. Salah al-Din therefore, shares the same dishes with the other western Iraqi cities, like Madgouga, Khamee’a, Habeet, and Dulaimiya. There are tens of other traditional dishes that no longer exist or have been reproduced and entered Iraqi kitchens with new names.

The most important food tradition characterizing Salah al-Din Governorate is a concentration on food quantity and dishes that have no compound elements. This feature is common in all desert region cities, contrary to the central Euphrates, Baghdad and Mosul. Salah al-Din dishes are simple and less inclined to complexity, like southern Iraq dishes, excluding Basra and the areas near the desert in Najaf, Diwaniya and Muthanna. In other words, the nomadic life is a predominant feature of the population. Like the population in the south, salads and appetizers were recently introduced and only onion, tomato, cucumber, and vegetables are used. For the common dishes like Quzi and Tashreeb they prefer to have big chunks of meat on the rice with currant, almonds, and vermicelli. And in a traditional dish which is called Mufattah in the south and Habeet or Quzi in the west, guests are served with a full roasted sheep, stuffed with rice. Low-income families often use a lamb leg or a big chunk of the sheep and put it on top of the cooked rice.

#### Salah al-Din Dishes

Cuisine in Tikrit, Samarra, and other Salah al-Din regions consists of all the food varieties available in the towns surrounding the governorate. It is considered an all-inclusive cuisine in which all west, north and central Iraqi dishes are included. There are also dishes from Central Euphrates region and the south, although they are less common, but include the same prominent river basin fish food varieties, and dishes with fried and grilled fish, in addition to fish Biriyani, Tandoor fish and the famous Baghdad Masgouf. Common in cities of Salah al-Din and the south and central Euphrates are milk-based dishes, like Kaymak, butter and some sweet dishes made from wheat or rice flour, honey, or sugar. This includes Ragheeda, which consists of wheat flour and boiled milk, where the wheat or rice flour and sugar are added to the milk and mixed. This sweet dish is like Baht, prepared in the southern city of Tikrit, in two different ways; the first is prepared with expensive ingredients, where flour, sheep ghee and pure honey are mixed to make the sweet dish called Wadhia. The second method is more economical, where flour, milk, ghee and sugar are used to prepare a sweet dish called Ragheeda. Among the dishes that are common in Tikrit, Samarra and Balad is a type of bread found all over Iraq, called in Tikrit and Samarra Taftoon bread. This bread is a small and thick loaf, which the Baghdad inhabitants call Hanouna or Hanoun. Mothers usually bake this special bread for their children at the end of the bread-making time.

Tikritis are also fond of making another bread variety called Musabba, a long loaf on which the baker’s fingers are printed to provide an attractive pattern. Likewise, these bread varieties common in Tikrit, Samarra, Balad, Mosul. It is also available in central Euphrates cities, printed with other patterns such as tree leaves. Qalmadan bread, which is like Taftoun is also baked in Tikrit with different patterns printed on the loaves. Another variety called Ghaneed is made from maize flour and baked on the fire. It is called Al-Fursah when soaked with yogurt and served fresh. In addition, Salah al-Din families also bake other bread varieties like Sesame and Rogag bread, which is widely consumed in the Kurdistan region, and was also made during the pre-Islam Heera Civilization and mentioned in the book titled ‘Kitab Al-Tabeeh’ (Cookery Book) as a bread variety that was popular in Baghdad.



INGREDIENTS (serves 10)

Stuffing		Lamb	
1/4 cup	Vegetable oil	1	Whole lamb (approximately 10 kilograms)
3	chopped onion		
1 Kg	cubed lamb	1/4 cup	oil
10 cups	Water		Salt and pepper to taste
5 cups	Rice	10	whole cloves
1 cup	Raisins	10	whole Cardamom pods
1 cup	Shelled peas	1/4 cup	Baharat spices
1/4 cup	Baharat spices	1/4	You will also need a trussing needle and twine.
1 cup	Pistachios		
1 Tsp.	Salt and pepper to taste		

PREPARATION

**Stuffing**  
In 2 tablespoons oil, lightly sauté the onions until soft and set them aside.  
In a new frying pan, heat 2 tablespoons oil and fry cubed lamb until cooked then set aside.  
Boil the water, add the rice and salt. Bring to the boil for 2-3 minutes (until rice is tender), drain and set aside.  
Mix raisins, peas, Baharat spices and pistachios, with the onion, lamb and rice.

**Preparing the Lamb**  
Rub the lamb with salt (inside and out) and wash well. Once the lamb is cleaned rub with salt, pepper and oil. Make small incisions throughout the flesh and stud with the whole cardamoms and cloves.  
Stuff the lamb with the prepared stuffing and stitch it shut with the trussing needle and twine. Rub the spices over the outside of the lamb and cook on high heat for 1 hour. Then reduce heat to low and continue cooking for 6 hours, turning halfway through.

**Prepare the Presentation Ingredients**  
Cook 10 cups of perfect plain rice .  
For the kofta, Sauté the onion until soft. Remove from the heat and leave to cool. Mix cooled onions with ground lamb (uncooked), breadcrumbs, salt and pepper to reach a doughy consistency. Form into small balls and fry in 1/4 cup oil until brown. Remove and set aside.  
Fry almonds until golden (approximately 3-5 minutes). Remove and set aside.  
Fry raisins until golden. Remove and set aside.  
Fry vermicelli noodles in 1/2 cup fresh oil. Add 1 cup water and simmer till soft (approximately 5 minutes).  
Fry the peas in hot oil for 3-4 minutes. Set aside.

**To Assemble**  
Spread rice out in a serving dish.

The residents of Tikrit and Samarra are famous for a sweet dish known as Sareet, which is similar to Ragheeda, and consists of rice flour, ghee, syrup, pistachio and walnut. When it is ready, the sweetmeat is cut and served as a dessert after meals or in the afternoon.

QOUZI

STUFFED LAMB ON RICEBULGUR

When it comes to cooking Qouzi, the preparation itself is an extravagant one; a process requiring planning, precision and patience. It is the feast prepared for the first day of Eid, the meal cooked at engagements to mark impending marriages and the symbol to signify that someone is a very special – and welcome – guest in your home.

Whether it’s wrapped in banana leaves and pulled from a traditional tanoor oven to be placed on to a heaving table, or a more modest rack of lamb filling your suburban kitchen with the unmistakable scent of cooking meat fused with pistachios, raisins, turmeric and saffron; nothing sings celebrations more than a freshly prepared Qouzi.

Abundant and spectacular – if there ever was a meal that encapsulated the Iraqi approach of using food to nourish both your body and your spirit this lamb dish is it.



INGREDIENTS (serves 6)	
1	chopped Onion
2 cups	Dried lentils
¼ cup	Short grain rice
3 Tbsp.	Cumin
1 Tbsp.	Rice
1 Tbsp.	Black pepper
1 Tbsp.	Salt
1 Tsp.	Turmeric
2 Tbsp.	Lemon juice (optional)
8 Cups	Water
	Garnish
	Sliced fried onions
	Sliced lemon

PREPARATION
<p>In a deep pan, brown the onions, add the rice and lentils and stir for 5 minutes.</p> <p>Add salt and spices and 8 cups of water, let it boil; reduce the heat and simmer for 40 minutes, stirring well.</p> <p>Take 2 cups of the soup and blend in a food processor, then add to the rest of the soup and stir well over low heat for another 10 minutes.</p> <p>Garnish with fried onions and lemon, add lemon juice before serving (if desired).</p> <p>Blend the soup to a greater extent if required.</p>



# SHORBAT ADDAS

## LENTIL SOUP

When life give you lemons.... Make this meal! Their sour goodness, coupled with generous doses of cumin and turmeric, add an exotic and aromatic edge to this otherwise earthy basic. While the golden yellow shade of this dish will bring a figurative ‘ray of sunshine’ to a cold winter’s day, those who do not require symbolism to consume their soup, may prefer to cook the Baghdadi version – adding two chopped tomatoes and a spoonful of tomato paste while sautéing the onions, then garnishing the finished meal with mint. Regardless, whether you prefer mellow yellow or you cross the red line, the final result is a wonderfully warming broth that easily earns main meal status.



# KIRKUK

## CHAPTER 15

# GOVERNORATE

**Kirkuk Governorate** is situated in the northern part of Iraq. It is bound to the north by Erbil Governorate, to the south and west by Salah al-Din Governorate, and to the east by Sulaymaniyah Governorate. It has an area of 10,359 sq. km. and a population of about 1.5 million inhabitants and is made up of four districts consisting of 16 sub-districts. Kirkuk district is home to the provincial capital Kirkuk, and other districts include Dibis, Makhmur and Daquouq.<sup>87</sup>

Kirkuk is the oldest city in the governorate and has been mentioned in two important manuscripts in Chaldean language, one of which was translated into Turkish by Bishop Addai Scher in 1898. The other manuscript titled ‘the News of Saints and Martyrs’ was published in Leipzig by Father Boulos Beckham in seven volumes<sup>88</sup>. In these two books it was mentioned that Kirkuk was founded by the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II. After the death of Alexander and sharing of his dominions, Kirkuk devolved to Seleucus, who destroyed its buildings and built new ones instead. Later Kirkuk was controlled by the Persians until the Arab conquest of Iraq. It was named Kora Kora, and it has been mentioned in Arab sources by the name of ‘Karkhin.’ It had a reputation as an invincible fortress situated between Daquqa and Erbil.<sup>89</sup> Daquqa refers to Tawuq or modern time Daquq. It was also mentioned by Yaqut al-Hamawi, who described the city as a city situated between Baghdad and Erbil and in which a Kharijites battle took place. Daquq has two sub-districts; namely, Qadir Karam and Tuzxurmatu.<sup>90</sup>

Dibis district started as a small village in 1953 and later became a district with an area of 100,000 donums, comprising about 65 villages.<sup>91</sup> Kirkuk Governorate includes Al-Hawija or Hawijat Al-Ubaid after the predominant Ubaid tribes, in addition to other tribes of Shammar, Jubour, and Dulaym. Previously, the district belonged to Salah al-Din Governorate before it was annexed to Kirkuk. In modern history, the city of Kirkuk has become the capital of the Governorate of Shahrazour. According to the most likely oral accounts, it dates to 1729. Some years later, the governorate was the scene of a bloody massacre at the hands of Tahmasp Khan, with whom the population clashed in a battle, forcing him to flee to a village named Al-Quriyah in which he committed another massacre. He then went to Al-Bashir village. When Tahmasp Khan left, the governorate recovered and started to expand until it developed a large city and became a link between south and north Iraq.<sup>92</sup>

### Social Background

As previously mentioned, the cities of Diyala, Baghdad and Kirkuk each represent a miniature Iraq. In fact, Kirkuk is a Mesopotamian icon of Iraq’s ethnic, religious and sectarian diversity. It was inhabited in ancient times by Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs and Armenians, in addition to a Jewish minority. Regardless of the problems Kirkuk caused in modern times because of conflict over its identity and affiliation to nearby governorates like Salah al-Din and Diyala, Kirkuk society has remained coherent, resilient, and harmonious. For example, in Kirkuk, Muslims, Assyrians, Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs live together in the same locality, although they speak different languages and have different customs and culture. They have always lived in harmony and recognized one another. This is particularly evident in Kirkuk cuisine. The Turkmen have their own food habits and way of preparing dishes, as do the Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians and Armenians.

The dishes of Kirkuk include local Turkmen food varieties, which are difficult to find outside of the governorate. Dishes prepared by the Kurds combine the kitchens of Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Duhok and Zakho. These dishes are very special and are discussed in more detail in the chapters dedicated to the Kurdistan Region. A third variety is considered an extension of the Arab food culture in Kirkuk. The Arab foods in the governorate are similar to those of Salah al-Din, Mosul and Diyala. These include Habeet (meat and rice with vermicelli), Tashreeb (broth-soaked dishes), and other rice-based dishes, in addition to grains and typical sweet dishes. Assyrian and Armenian dishes contribute an essential element to rich Kirkuk cuisine, including Dolma, Iraqi Kebab, and Biriyani varieties, Maqlooba (meat, rice, and fried vegetables, flipped upside down when served), soups, fish, chicken, broth-soaked dishes.

### Turkmen and Assyrian Dishes

Turkmen in both Iraq and Syria share the same cuisine, which is originally Turkish, although it has been markedly influenced by regional cuisine variety. In Iraq, the Turkmen are distributed in Kirkuk, Ninewa, Diyala and Erbil, with smaller numbers in Baghdad and other cities. Their kitchen primarily depends on red meat, with Assyrians and the Arabs. In addition, Turkmen cuisine uses grains, like rice and sesame, dairy products, fish, and chicken.

The most popular local Turkmen dish is Dogma, which consists of mutton cut into small cubes, and cooked with onion and tomato and a mixture of spices. Another popular Turkmen dish is Pilaf, which consists of chunks of sheep meat, carrot, and rice, all cooked together in one pot. Turkmen are also fond of grills called Shashlik. The grills consist of chunks of mutton, chicken or fish barbecued on a charcoal stove with chopped onion and a special vegetable sauce. A dish called Dawood Pasha is borrowed from Levant cuisine and prepared with hot sauce. They are also fond of Dolma, which is prepared in different ways and varieties. They prepare it the traditional Baghdadi or normal Kurdish way called White Dolma, in which yogurt is added. Turkmen are also known for the Cabbage Dolma, in which cabbage leaves are used.

Another special Turkmen dish is Meat Tishreeb or broth, popular all over Iraq, which they call Solo Kebab, in addition to eggplant-based dishes and a mixture of rice with meat and cabbage, originally a Turkish dish. Turkmen also have a dish called Kai Beesh which consists of macaroni mixed with meat, potato, white and green onion or fresh dill. This dish is usually served with meat gravy. Additionally, Manti pies consist of cooked meat and are served with yogurt or sometimes with a hot sauce called Ajika. Like all Iraqis, the Turkmen are fond of baking bread, which they bake in a clay oven, which was common in all houses before the development of commercial bakeries. The Turkmen call their traditional wheat flour bread Chorek, a Turkish word from which the Iraqis also derived the word Choreg.

Similarly, Assyrian dishes are plentiful and varied in Kirkuk. They were influenced by the food varieties of neighboring Turkmen, Kurds and Arabs, owing to coexistence within the same geographic environment. Assyrian cuisine is not much different from other neighboring dishes and largely depends on meat, poultry and dairy products. However, Assyrians have their distinctive imprint with salads and appetizers, which are similar to typical Levant dishes. Typical salads in Iraq are basically Assyrian, and often Assyrians have borrowed from Turkish or Greek cuisine. Delicious Hajik salad is one of the most popular Arab salad dishes and is common in many Arab kitchens, featuring cucumber with yogurt. In Kirkuk it consists of cucumber, garlic, salt, mint, olive oil and yogurt. It is eaten as an appetizer, used as so-called ‘mezza’ or appetizing dishes eaten with liquors, after becoming common in the other Iraqi cities.



## INGREDIENTS (serves 5-7)

### Dough

2 ½ cups Flour ½kg Ground beef or lamb

1 Tsp. Salt 1 Tbsp. Salt

1 ½ cups Water ½ Tsp. Pepper

5 Tbsp. Oil Yogurt sauce

### Meat filling

2 cups Greek yogurt

½ finely chopped onion 2 cloves Garlic

3 Tbsp. Vegetable oil 2 tbsp chopped coriander

½kg Ground beef or lamb

## PREPARATION

### Dough

Combine all the ingredients in a bowl and mix for 5 minutes or until smooth. Divide the dough into small round pieces (approximately 25-30).

### Meat Filling

Sauté onions, add the meat and season with salt and pepper. Stir occasionally until it browns.

Roll the dough pieces flat and cut into circles of 10-12cm/3-4 inches, spoon meat into the centre of each circle and fold into a crescent shape.

Fill a large pan ¾ full with water, add 1 tablespoon of salt, ½ teaspoon of black pepper and bring to a boil.

Drop the stuffed dough parcels one at a time into the boiling water with a slotted spoon and boil until they float.

Remove the cooked pieces with a slotted spoon, taking care not to splash any hot water and place individually in a flat dish (don't stack them).

Sauté the 2 cloves of garlic in olive oil, mix into the yogurt, drizzle the mixture over the qulaghi and top with chopped coriander.

## TATAR QULAGHI

## MEAT-STUFFED PASTA IN YOGURT SAUCE

Most places commemorate important historical events with inscribed plaques and large monuments featuring triumphant bronze horseman. In Iraq, they cook.

This dish (popular as an appetiser or light dinner) is specifically said to pay tribute to the 1258 Siege of Baghdad – when Tatar forces (led by Mongol ruler Hulaku Khan) invaded and destroyed mosques, hospitals, palaces and libraries in the then capital of Islam. Tatar Qulaghi means 'Ear of the Tatar'. And while you may have to squint your eyes to see the similarities between the meat-filled dumplings and the large lobes they are meant to resemble, your sense of taste will know no confusion – this dish is absolutely delicious.



INGREDIENTS (serves 6)

Rice

1.5 cups	Long grain rice	3 Tbsp.	Pistachio nuts
4 Tbsp.	Saffron water	2	diced Potatoes
1/2 Cup	oil	1/2 cup	Frozen peas or half-boiled fresh peas
1	Chopped small onion		
500 g	Minced Lamb, beef or chicken breast	1 Tbsp.	Baharat spices
2 Tbsp.	Oat bran	1 Tbsp.	Melted butter or vegetable oil
3 Tbsp.	Salt and pepper to taste	6	hard-boiled and peeled eggs
2 cups	Water as required	500 g	Filo pastry

PREPARATION

Preheat the oven to 200C/400F/Gas Mark 6.

Prepare the rice according to the instructions for perfect plain rice in (see page # 1)

Add the saffron water and mix well then let it cool.

Heat 2-3 teaspoon of oil, chop the onion and sauté until the chopped onion soft (3-4 minutes). In a separate bowl, combine the onions, meat, oat bran, salt and pepper and enough water to form a dough. Mix by hand and shape into small balls, fry in hot oil and set aside.

Heat the remaining oil, fry the cubed potatoes and set aside. In a separate pan, fry the pistachios and set aside. In a separate pan, fry the meatballs and set aside.

In a separate bowl, stir the prepared rice, meatballs, potatoes, pistachios and peas and baharat spices (see page #1) until well mixed.

Brush the sides and bottom of an ovenproof deep pot with some oil or butter and add the first layer of filo pastry leaving some hanging over the sides of the pot. Brush the pastry with oil or butter and repeat the process for four layers.

Add half the rice mixture and layer with the eggs (evenly distributed). Add the remaining rice mixture and fold the overhanging pastry on top. Spray with oil or butter and bake for 30 minutes or until golden.

To serve, carefully turn dish upside down and slice into thick wedges.



PARDAPELAW

IRAQI MEAT AND RICE PIE

This dish translates to ‘curtained rice’ and it is certainly comfortable in the spotlight; and why not? After all, the delicious combination of rice, eggs and meatballs hidden behind the drapes of filo pastry revealed when sliced definitely put in a star performance.





# NINEWA

## CHAPTER 16

# GOVERNORATE

**Ninewa Governorate** is situated north of Iraq. It is bound by the governorates of Erbil to the east, Salah al-Din and Anbar to the south, Duhok to the north and international borders with Syria to the west. It is considered the second largest city in Iraq population-wise, with a population of more than five million. It has a total area of 33,000 sq. kilometers and 10 districts, including Mosul, Tal Afar, Sinjar, Al-Shaikhan, Al-Shirqat, Al-Hamdaniya, Taklif and Bashiqa.

Manuscripts and archeological sites indicate that settlement in Ninewa dates to the beginning of 6,000 B.C. Historians mention that it was founded by Ninus, and the city was named after him. It later turned into a place of worship for Ishtar. Ninewa was also mentioned during the reign of the Assyrian King Shamshi-Adad I as a center for worshiping Goddess Ishtar.<sup>93</sup> It has an ancient archeological site called the Ishtar Castle, 96km to the south of Mosul.<sup>94</sup> The Hebraic disseminated the name of Ninewa to cover the entire area around the upper Zab zone of the Tigris, where king Sennacherib (705-681 BC) made Ninewa his capital, although it did not last long and fell to the Medes in 612 BC <sup>95</sup>.

Regarding Mosul, there are different opinions about the origin of its name and founder. Ibin Al Faqih Al Hamadani indicated that it was named Mosul because it connected the Arab Peninsula with Greater Syria, and because it linked the Euphrates to Tigris. Yaqut Al Hamawi stated that it was called Mosul because it linked the Arab Peninsula with Iraq. Others also said it connected the Euphrates with Tigris, and Sinjar and Al Haditha. It was also said that the king who founded it was called ‘Mosul’.<sup>96</sup> It was said that the first to create it was Rawand bin Burasef Al Zahdaq, and the first to establish it as an independent diwan (official Ruling House) was Marwan bin Muhammad bin Al Hakam (123-127 AH / 744-749 AD).<sup>97</sup>

Mosul is situated opposite Ninewa, on the other side of Tigris River. A large number of travelers/geographers have visited the city and noted their observations, including Ibin Jubayr, who described it as, “a large and ancient city that is prepared against the strokes of adversity.”<sup>98</sup> He did not only give an account of its buildings and monuments but also of its inhabitants. He said, “They are benevolent and kind, and they receive their guests with a smile and soft words.” <sup>99</sup>

In addition to Mosul, Ninewa Governorate has other important cities including Sinjar, Tal Afar and Tal Kayf. Sinjar, which is also named Shingal, is in the west of the governorate on Sinjar Mountain. It is predominantly populated by Yazidis with minority Turkmen and Arabs. It has boundaries with Syria. Ninewa also includes the city of Tal Kayf or Tarkayf, 18 kms from Mosul. Tal Kayf is an Aramean word which means Tel Keppe or stone hill, in Arabic.

### Society and the Environment

The social and cultural background of Ninewa community is not much different from Kirkuk, Baghdad and Diyala in terms of multi-ethnic, religious, and sectarian communities. There is a mosaic of peacefully coexisting groups in the cities and towns of Ninewa. You can find Arabs living side by side with Kurds; a Turkman near Assyrians; Muslims living next to Christians and Shabaks next to Sunnis, as well as Yazidis in Sinjar and Kakai’s in other areas. In his account of Mosul, Historian Abdul Razzak Al Hassani says, “Mosul has a distinctive nature with regard to the different ethnicities

that have their own coffee shops and bazaars, frequented by the Kurds from the mountains, the Arabs from the desert, in addition to Nestorians and Yazidis as well as other communities from the neighboring areas with their special loose costumes and colorful clothing.’ <sup>100</sup>

This diversity has directly reflected on the city’s culture leading to a plethora of cultural values and ideas, enriched by coexistence. The geographic location of the governorate and the city of Mosul has led to the area becoming a melting-point in which many cultures including Kurdish, Arab, Turkish and Syrian, have provided a distinctive character. This is evident in the area’s food culture, which is a combination of various cooking methods, ranging from desert to mountainous cuisine, in addition to Turkish and Syrian food varieties.

### Ninewa Cuisine

One can hardly talk about Iraqi dishes without dwelling on the rich Mosul cuisine, one of the most renowned and rich Middle Eastern varieties. Although some governorates have a limited number of dishes that distinguish them from other areas of Iraq, Mosul has a large number of traditional dishes which are not served in other kitchens, like the Mosul kibbeh variety, the Mosul Qaliya (meat stew), Summaq Al Rabi’e, Tarkhineh, Barma, and more.<sup>101</sup>

In the cities of Ninewa and Kurdistan there are both rural and desert food varieties. These dishes have been passed from one generation to another, while others no longer exist or have been reinvented. With the expansion of social media in Iraqi cities in the second half of the twentieth century, many traditional Mosul-based dishes have circulated in other towns and cities, becoming essential dishes to Iraq’s modern cuisine. The famous Mosul Kibbeh varieties have found their way into the kitchens of Iraqi cities and have become an essential element on tables. This has not happened so much for the Mosul qaliya or pacha (sheep innards stew) prepared the Mosul way. Mosul cuisine has special age-old traditions in which a Mosul family joins in preparing the ingredients used in cooking. For example, there were the bread-baking meetings, where people gather to prepare large quantities of bread, bulger, and dried meat, most notably to cope with sieges imposed on the city in ancient history. The food provisions are prepared before winter months and kept in special containers for up to six months.<sup>102</sup> On certain occasions the families would prepare the ingredients used for making traditional Regag bread (wafer-thin bread), which is still common in Ninewa and Kurdistan towns. They would spend long hours in the evening to prepare bulger to make kibbeh. Among the bread varieties that require collective work is the so-called Jaghdaga bread, a relatively thick round bread, 25cm in diameter, eaten for breakfast with sheep ghee.

Kibbeh is often prepared collectively, starting with preparing meat and fine water-soaked bulger. It is then mixed and crushed in a mortar and made into round-shaped pieces ready to be boiled in seasoned water, with chickpeas added to the gravy. A good quality Mosul Kibbeh maintains its consistency and does not break inside the pot. In addition to this Kibbeh variety, Kibbeh Yakhani is composed of small-size dumplings with chickpeas and onion, and Tomato Kibbeh is cooked in tomato gravy. Another kind of Kibbeh, popular among the Christian community, is Qara Zinki, which is cooked for holidays such as Christmas and the New Year. It is small and cooked in large quantities with molasses gravy, raisins and dry dates. Another special Kibbeh variety is the famous Kishik Kibbeh (kibbeh with dried yogurt). This dish consists mainly of turnip leaves. Maalak Kibbeh is made with sheep meat, and Kibbeh Labaniya uses yogurt for gravy.

taste. Mosul is particularly famous for another unique dish named Al Rashta, which consists of a wheat dough, placed in a perforated metal container. By pressing the dough, it comes out through the holes at the bottom as small-shaped threads, which are picked out and placed in the sun to dry. They then are cooked or added to rice.



INGREDIENTS (maks 2 larg discs)

Kubba

1 1/2 cups	Jireesh (farina)
1 1/2 cup	Bulgur
125g	Ground beef
¼	Cinnamon
1 Tsp.	Chopped onion
	Salt and pepper to taste

Filling

1	chopped small onion
500 g	Ground lamb or beef
1 Tbsp.	Golden sultanas (optional)
2 Tbsp.	Sliced almonds (optional)
	Salt and pepper

When preparing the filling for this version of Kubba sauté onions until transparent. However, mince and spices are added raw and do not require additional frying, as they will cook in the boiling process. Mix all the ingredients together.

PREPARATION

Wash the bulgur and jireesh well. Soak in water for half an hour and drain. Combine the ground beef, onion, bulgur and jireesh in the meat grinder. Add salt and pepper and leave to rest for half an hour. Split the Kubba mixture into 4 equal parts, wrapping each quarter with a piece of plastic wrap. Roll each piece out into a flat, circular shape. Remove both pieces of Kubba from the plastic and layer the filling (prepared as instructed above) on one piece of the Kubba. Ensure most of the filling is centred in the middle, before covering with the second piece of flattened Kubba to make a sandwich. Cover the Kubba with a round, flat dining plate and use as guide to cut a neat circle. Seal the ends of the Kubba sandwich with your hands to avoid the Kubba spilling during the cooking process. Fill a medium-sized saucepan (that fits the diameter of the Kubba circle) with water and a teaspoon of salt and bring to boil. Add the Kubba to the pan immediately when the water boils for 2-3 minutes. If you would like you Kubba cooked in this method, continue to boil for a further 5 minutes, otherwise, remove the Kubba from pan and fry till golden. You can also freeze the Kubba to be boiled or fried at a later date.

Mosul residents also prepare Kishk or Kishka which is made of durum wheat with the husk removed from the pulp and is then called Madgouga. This ingredient is different from the Madgouga made in west and south Iraq cities, which consists of dates. Mosul families cook the Kishk with meat and ghee and add turmeric to give it a yellow color. This dish is eaten in winter and is favored by Mosul families. One Mosul dishes of Turkish origin is Yabragh, also known in other cities as Yabr’a or vine leaves. Another is Tarkhina, eaten by mainly farmers. It is like Kishk, but without bulgar kibbeh. It has a sour In addition to these traditional dishes, one can also find the same dishes available in the kitchens of Basra, Baghdad, Anbar, Diyala and Najaf, like okra, beans, tipsi, gravy-soaked dishes, grills, rice-based dishes, fried meats, over and above a large assortment of sweet dishes like baklava, zalabiya, tati, znoud al sit, and many more.

KUBBAT MOSUL

MOSUL KUBBA

Mosul, in the north of Iraq, has long been the seat of muslin cloth manufacturing, throughout the country and, indeed, the region. It’s also known as the burial place of the prophet Jonah (he of whale eating notoriety), and is Iraq’s third largest city after Baghdad and Basra. The abundance of wheat surrounding the city has made this large, flat version of Kubba – boiled or fried and served sliced into triangles like a pie – a true Mosul speciality. It also holds special recollections for me. Each piece transports me back to my childhood, marked by a family home full of the chatter of cousins exiting and entering a forever-revolving door, visiting friends close enough to also be considered blood and the monthly visit of Em Saleh, our cook from the city of Mosul. The wonderful cook would visit our house, place herself on her wooden stool, pull her hair back with a scarf and prepare hundreds of the Kubbat Mosul to fill our stomachs as well as our freezer.



INGREDIENTS (serves 4-5)			
Marinade		Bulgur	
1 Kg.	Chicken	1	chopped onion
3 cloves	chopped garlic	2	chopped Garlic cloves
½ cup	Yogurt	1	chopped tomato
¼ cup	Lemon juice	1 ½ cups	Coarse bulgur
¼ cup	chopped Coriander	2 Tbsp.	Tomato paste
1 Tsp.	Turmeric	2 ½ cups	Chicken stock
1 Tsp.	Black pepper	1 Tsp.	Baharat spices
1 Tbsp.	Salt	¼ cup	Vermicelli noodles
1 Tsp.	Cumin	¼ cup	Oil
1 Tsp.	Nutmeg	1 Tsp.	Salt to taste
½ Tsp.	Ground cardamom		
2 Tbsp	Oil		
	Pinch of ground cloves		

PREPARATION

In a bowl, mix together (all ingredients except the chicken). Whisk until thoroughly mixed. Put the chicken in a plastic food bag and pour the marinade over it, covering the meat. Seal the bag and shake well so that the marinade coats the chicken completely. Refrigerate for 5 hours.

**Bulgur**

Meanwhile, soak the bulgur in water for one hour, then drain.

In a pot, heat the oil and fry the vermicelli noodles until light brown; then set aside. Sauté the onion for 3 minutes and add the chopped garlic. Sauté for another 2 minutes. Add the tomato and stir, then add the tomato paste, fried noodles, spices and salt and stir.

Add the bulgur to the mixture and stir for 3 minutes. Then, add the chicken stock and bring to boil, covered, for 3 minutes. Reduce the heat and simmer with the pot loosely covered for 10-15 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Pre-heat an oven to 200C/400F/Gas Mark 6.

Place the chicken in a roasting tin and roast until crispy (around 50 minutes), when roasting chicken, keep the legs and wings close to the body, so it remains presentable and does not dry out.

To serve, spread out the bulgur on a plate and place the roast chicken on top.



# BURGHUL AHMAR WA DAJAJ MASHWI

## ROAST CHICKEN WITH BULGUR

This dish is red by name and even redder by nature. However, although ruby is its signature hue, ironically, an equally tasty adaptation of this dish omits the tomatoes entirely and replaces them with turmeric and saffron water (see page #1). Tonal technicalities aside, either version is just as tasty when accompanied by a succulent side of chicken. (Or as a variation, equal amounts of lamb).





# ERBIL

## CHAPTER 17

# GOVERNORATE

**Erbil** the Kurdistan Region's capital city. It is bound to the north by Turkey, to the northeast by Iran, by Mosul to the south and Sulaymaniyah to the west. The ancient Arabs called it Arbil or Irbil, and the Kurds call it Hawler. The area of the governorate is 16,000 Sq. kms with a population of 1.5 million.<sup>103</sup>

The history of Erbil dates to 5,000 BC, which marks the time during which settlements were established in the hilly areas around the famous citadel of Erbil. According to Babylonian cuneiform tablets, it was called Arbela, which means city of the four goddesses. Persian manuscripts referred to it as Arbela. It has been mentioned in historical manuscripts dating back to 900 BC, and its importance lies in the existence of a reputed sacred ancient relic named after Goddess Ishtar. It is where Assyrian kings used to visit for pilgrimage before starting military expeditions <sup>104</sup>

History says that Erbil converted to Christianity in 300 AD and had the Aramean name Adiabene. It became an important centre of Nestorian Christianity in Mesopotamia. During the reign of Caliph Umar bin Al Khattab, Muslims conquered the Erbil Citadel and its surroundings, as mentioned by Ibn Al Nadim in his book titled the 'Fihrist' and Yqut Al Hamawi's book titled 'Mu'jam ul-Buldān'. <sup>105</sup> In addition to sacred importance, Erbil was and remains a converging point for caravans. It was a very important destination during the reign of the Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal III and his successors, as well as during the Abbasid period. Throughout its history it was a battleground at first between the Persians and the Greeks, and later between the Abbasids and the Umayyads. <sup>106</sup>

The city of Erbil and capital of the governorate is divided into two parts; the first is located near the citadel, and the second includes the plain that has been converted into a large city, like the city of Kirkuk. Administratively, the governorate consists of 11 subdistricts, belonging to several districts including Makhmur, Al Kuwayr, Qarraji, Shaqlawa, Harir and Salah al-Din.

Social and Cultural Background

### Society and the Environment

Erbil is predominantly populated by Kurds, along with Assyrian, Turkmen, Arab and Armenian minorities. The tribes of the governorate are divided into many Kurdish tribes in addition to Arab minority tribes. Among the most prominent Kurdish tribes are Thazda, Kurdi, Mamond, Shekh Mamond, Sheikhani, Sheikh Bizini, Khoushnaw, Zarari, Harki, Khaylani, Balki and others. The Arab tribes include Al-Jubour, Tayy and Sunbus, which extend into Kirkuk, Mosul and Diyala (107). Erbil is famous for abundant agricultural and animal products, especially grapes and figs grown in Shaqlawa and Makhmur, in addition to good quality honey and famous yogurt. Just as Diyala is famous for oranges, Fallujah for Kebab, Mosul for kibbeh and Sulaymaniyah for Manna and Salwa, Erbil is famous for sheep yogurt.

Erbil society is tribal and ruled by traditional values. It is generally a conservative society. However, due to its geographic proximity to other cultures, including Iran, Turkey and Arab, Erbil society is now more inclined to accept others, although the population maintains their local values. In addition, a large part of Erbil economic resources comes from tourism, as a major tourist attraction in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region and the city receives hundreds of thousands of tourists every year

from different cities of Iraq, looking to enjoy its beautiful resorts and the scenery of Shaqlawa, Salah al-Din and other towns. This cultural interaction has made Erbil society tolerant and inclusive to other communities, despite the difference of language. Tourism has encouraged the locals to learn Arabic.

### Erbil Cuisine

The cuisine of Erbil is similar to other governorates of the Kurdistan Region. They have many dishes that represent northern Iraq, including Arab and mixed dishes from areas like Mosul, Kirkuk and Diyala. However, it is interesting to note that Erbil cuisine has been influenced by nearby Turkey as well as Iranian cuisine. It has also been influenced by the Mosul kitchen, which reflects Levant food culture. Moving from local to national dishes, the Erbil kitchen is replete with tens of dishes it shares with all Iraqi cities, from the middle, west, east and south of the country. Broth-soaked rice dishes are essential on Erbil tables, in addition to the famous kibbeh varieties of Mosul and other cities. Erbil even has a special kibbeh variety of its own.

The Erbil kitchen uses meat, fish, vegetables, and rice, which is common across Iraq. The famous Baghdad Masgouf (fish) dish, for example, reached Erbil decades ago as did other Mosul dishes like Qalia, Simmaq Al-Rabee (vegetable soup with sumac) and the Aleppo Kibbeh variety, in addition to the famous Iraqi Kebab. A special kind of Kebab called White Kebab is only found in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. It consists of sheep tail fat, contrary to the usual Kebab in which meat is the main element.

Some traditional Iraqi food habits that existed in many Iraqi cities in the past, most of which are no longer used, still occur in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. An example is the tradition of hunting a certain bird species that migrate from Europe's cold winter season to Iraq seeking warm weather. The locally called Baaji bird, a medium-sized bird, is hunted, grilled, and served on spits on mobile food carts. These carts were previously available in Baghdad but are now inexistent. However, they are still available, albeit in small numbers, in Erbil. Bread varieties preferred by Erbil households include the stone-baked samoon bread and the home-made clay tandoor bread. These two breads are common all over Iraq. Another bread type specific to Kurdistan towns include a type of bread called Rogag, which consists of thin round loaves, baked on a flat metal sheet. This kind of bread can be stored for long periods without getting moldy.

### Old Kurdish Dishes

The Erbil kitchen is replete with tens of dishes that have been passed from one generation to the other over thousands of years. The ancient society has a long cultural history, including many dishes inspired by the city's history, environment and local animal and agricultural products. Although many centuries have passed, these dishes are still prepared in remote villages, where residents maintain their culture and have not been greatly affected by the development of technology. The Erbil population considers these dishes an indispensable part of their local identity.

Among these old dishes is a traditional dish like Duwaina (wheat and yogurt dish). In this region, a hole is made in the middle of the dish and filled with sheep ghee. Another dish is Farick, which consists of soft onion chopped with bulger. The residents also mix crushed chickpeas with molasses or sugar to prepare a sweet dish named Yukhin. Awar is another old dish that consists of flour and sugar mixed and boiled with water to be taken as a soup with the main course. Another is Zir Vajak, a delicious dish which is still prepared in the Erbil kitchen today during spring. It is prepared by melting a special kind of cheese with sheep ghee and adding a small number of dates.



## INGREDIENTS (serves 4-5)

750gm	shredded Beef or lamb
2 cups	Rice
½ cup	chopped Spring onions
5 cloves	chopped garlic
½ cup	chopped parsley
½ cup	Lemon juice
1 Tbsp.	Salt
1 Tsp.	Black pepper
¼ cup	Oil

## PREPARATION

Soak the rice in water for half an hour.

In a deep pot, sauté the garlic and meat cubes until brown, then add ¼ cup of lemon juice and enough water to cover the meat. Cook on a low heat until the meat is tender.

Add the rest of the lemon juice, parsley, spring onion, salt and pepper and cook for an extra 20 minutes.

Add 3 cups of water and the rice to the mixture, bring to a boil then simmer on a low heat for 20 minutes or until the rice is cooked, stirring occasionally.

Serve hot to fully enjoy this exotic lemony rice.

Among the nearly nonexistent dishes is a dish called Nan Tih Hainak, which is quick to prepare, and usually taken by the hunters, woodcutters, or herdsman on their daily missions. It is also carried by picnicking families visiting resorts and gardens. It is prepared by using a bread called Dourak and adding molasses and tahini. The bread loaves are folded four times and can be eaten alone without tea.

## TEMMAAN KURDEE

### KURDISH SOUR RICE

This recipe relies heavily on lemon juice (half a cup to be precise!), to give it its signature sour taste. However, convention suggests that because of the historical scarcity of citrus fruits in the Northern region of Iraq, the lovely acidic flavour was provided through the substitute use of sumac – a sprinkling of the coarse velvety red spice imparting a similarly tart taste.



STUFFED VEGETABLES  
WITH TOMATO SAUCE

INGREDIENTS (serves 4-6)

Vegetable Shells

12	small eggplants	1 Tsp.	chopped mint
12	Courgettes	1 Tsp.	chopped parsley

Filling

3 Tbsp.	Vegetable oil	1/2 Tsp.	Allspice
1	chopped onion		Pinch of saffron
500 g	Ground beef or Lamb		Pinch of cinnamon
2	Crushed garlic cloves (optional)		Salt and pepper to taste
1	chopped tomato (optional)	1/2 Tsp.	Chicken or vegetable broth

Garnish

	Salt and pepper to taste	1/2 cup	Labneh (thick yogurt)
		1 Tbsp.	Olive oil
		1 Tbsp.	Fresh lemon juice
			Salt and pepper to taste
			Toasted Pine nuts (optional)

Cooking Sauce

2 Tbsp.	Fresh lemon juice	1 Tbsp.	Fresh lemon juice
4 Tbsp.	Vegetable oil		Salt and pepper to taste
3 Tbsp.	Tomato paste		Toasted Pine nuts (optional)

PREPARATION

Wash the eggplants and courgette then core them (they will form the vegetable shells). Place the vegetables in a bowl of cold water to ensure they do not brown and set aside. Prepare the filling by heating the oil and sauté the onions until translucent. Add the meat and continue stirring until brown. Add the garlic and tomato (if required) along with the spices and continue stirring for 2-3 minutes. Set aside to cool. Drain the eggplant and courgette shells and fill with the meat mixture. Sauté all sides in hot oil and arrange in a deep pot. Prepare the cooking sauce by combining all ingredients. Pour over the stuffed courgette and eggplants and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and leave to simmer for 20-25 minutes. Prepare garnish by combining labneh, olive oil, lemon juice and salt and pepper. Toast the pine nuts. Remove vegetables from pot and serve garnished with labneh dip and pine nuts if required.



# SULAYMANIYAH

## CHAPTER 18

# GOVERNORATE

**Sulaymaniyah Governorate** is situated northeast in Iraq, within the Kurdistan Region. It has an area of more than 17,000 square kilometers and a population of more than two million inhabitants. It lies at 2,895 feet above sea level with a hilly landscape, that rises further when we move eastward toward Iran.<sup>108</sup> Sulaymaniyah is bounded by Iran to the east, Kirkuk Governorate to the west, Erbil to the north and Iran and part of Diyala Governorate to the south. Administratively, Sulaymaniyah Governorate consists of a number of districts, including Sulaymaniyah, Qara Bagh, Shara Zor, Sayed Sadiq, and Halabja, which is in process of becoming a Governorate, in addition to Penjwen, Ranya, Dokan, Darbandikhan, Klara and Chamchamal.

Historically, the city of Sulaymaniyah is relatively new, compared to other major Iraqi cities, including Erbil, Mosul, Baghdad, or Basra. It is nearly 250 years old. It was built after the establishment of the Baban Princedom in the 12th century AH.<sup>109</sup> The princedom selected the Castle of Jawalan, which had many mosques, hospices and religious schools, to be its capital. In 1778, Prince Mahmoud Pasha Baban consolidated his rule and built a fortified fortress in the village called Malkanidy, which is now one of the main localities of Sulaymaniyah. Three years later, Ibrahim Pasha Baban ruled the area and decided to improve and modernize the princedom. He built houses around the castle, including public baths and shops and laid down the foundations for its grand mosque. He then wrote to his friend Suleiman Pasha, the Governor of Baghdad, about that achievement. It is said that he named the city after him and it was thereafter known as Sulaymaniyah. Some others say that he named it after his grandfather Suleiman Pasha.<sup>110</sup> The city remained unchanged until 1924, when it was under the Iraqi government's authority, and expanded into a modern city. New broad roads were built along with large residential buildings, big stores, bazaars, and entertainment and recreational centers. A maternity and childcare center, telephone and postal service establishment, and army and police barracks were established.<sup>111</sup>

### Society and the Environment

Sulaymaniyah Governorate is famous for an abundant production of tobacco, grains, walnuts, almonds, peanuts, acorns, and other nuts. It is also known for producing top quality honey. The governorate is an indispensable border crossing between Iraq and Iran, which contributed to the emergence of a prosperous business community, engaged in the exchange of goods between the two countries. Penjwen district is an important area because in addition to being a border city with Iran, it has large amounts of natural resources like iron and alabaster. It also has many archeological sites that date back thousands of years, like Kaji castle. The district is also rich in fruits, like figs and grapes and has a large amount of pastureland for livestock. Sulaymaniyah and its districts are renowned for their summer resorts, which helps support the governorate's economy in the summer. From a social perspective, the population of Sulaymaniyah and its districts are divided into three main tribes; namely, Jaff, Bashdar and Hamawand, in addition to sub-tribes like Ismael Azizi, Jankni, and Hourami. According to the statistics of the Central Statistical Directorate of Iraq for 2019, the urban population of Sulaymaniyah is about one million and eight hundred thousand people, while the rural population is about three hundred and thirty thousand.<sup>112</sup> The values of these clans are generally rural, but since the 1950s, the society has become more modern, and many old-time values and traditions have changed. Youth have played a big role in modernizing the area.

### Sulaymaniyah Cuisine

The diversity that characterizes the Iraqi kitchen is evident in Sulymaniyah. The governorate's borders with Iran, Ninewa and Diyala, and proximity to Duhok, in which Turkish cuisine is common, influence the cuisine. Sulaymaniyah has been influenced by diverse cultural trends, especially from neighboring Arab cuisine in Diyala and Mosul.

The cuisine has also been influenced by the cold weather that characterizes the area. Therefore, the population prefers hot dishes that suit their cold climate, especially in winter, like Duwina, Kishk, Tarkhineh, and other dishes.

There are two major kinds of dishes; the first are local food varieties known in the Kurdistan Region in general and in Sulaymaniyah in particular. The other dishes include traditional cuisine available in the rest of Iraq.

National dishes include the same as those found in other Iraqi cities, the most famous of which is Brinj and Shilleh, or rice and gravy in Kurdish. This dish is the basic food in most Kurdish kitchens. One of the favorite dishes in Sulaymaniyah is dolma, including the white variety, which is common in the Kurdistan region, and the traditional one, known in the rest of Iraq. Sulymaniyah is known for kebab, which competes with kebab prepared in Fallujah, Erbil, Al Kadhimiya and Baghdad. The dish depends on the Mirishki Qalawa or the home-grown chickens, found in villages. The Sulaymaniyah population prefer roosters, and professional restaurants serve grilled or fried roosters, and some as gravy-based or rice-based dishes.

Among the national dishes that reflect a unified food culture is Arook or Tawa Kebab, which is prepared by Sulaymaniyah Kurds in the same way prepared by Iraqis in other cities. They also eat the fried liver of sheep or chicken, which are sometimes mixed with other animal meat in addition to onion and dried lime. Some families add tomato and green pepper.

As far as local dishes are concerned, one finds tens of old and modern dishes, some of which no longer exist, while others are still available, either in their original or new forms. One of the traditional dishes still remembered by the older generations and most of Kurdistan Region's cities is Asida (porridge), which is prepared by cooking barley or flour dough with date syrup. It is reminiscent of rural dishes in the southern and Euphrates countryside and in Iraq's western areas. Another dish is called Hiverishk, which consists of toasted bread with sheep ghee, like another dish prepared in southern Iraq and the central Euphrates region called Al Mareeth, which is similar to a much-favored dish in the rural areas called Ar Khafik, which they sometimes use to fill Kibbeh Labanieh (Kibbeh cooked in yogurt). It is less costly and more economical. A dish popular in the mountains is Al Duwaina, which is prepared at the end of the wheat harvest and cooked in winter. The wheat is left to soak for days, and then it is placed in the sun to dry. The dry wheat is mixed with yogurt and cooked at high temperature and is then left in the sun to thicken and become a paste. Finally, the thick mixture is made into balls and placed in the sun to dry and become ready for storing. When needed for cooking, the dry balls are cooked in hot water, and onion, oil or sheep ghee are added. This becomes a delicious soup eaten at breakfast, especially on cold days. Some families cook Duwaina in molasses and call it Galoul. Finally, Sulaymaniyah is well known for various kinds of sweets, like Turkish delight, sweet Sujuk (grape jelly stuffed with walnuts), mastic flavored Turkish delight and Manna and Salwa (Gaz), which has become a famous dish. This nougat-like sweet is usually prepared in the shape of oval balls covered with flour and stuffed with almonds and nuts.



## INGREDIENTS (serves 4-6)

2 cups	Long grain rice
1	finely chopped onion
2 cloves	crushed garlic
4 Tbsp.	Oil
1 Tbsp.	Tomato paste
2	chopped tomatoes
¼ cup	Yellow split peas (soaked for 2 hours)
½ Tsp.	Cinnamon
1 Tbsp.	Salt
1 Tsp.	Paprika
1 Tsp.	Black pepper

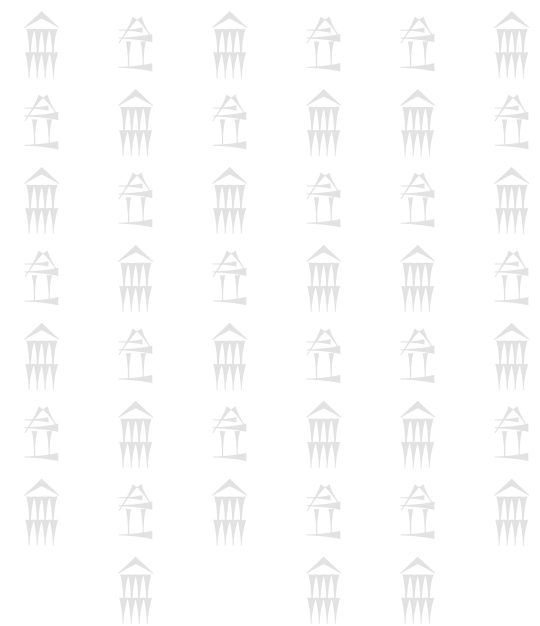
## PREPARATION

Soak the rice in water for 30 minutes, then drain. In a pan, brown the onion and garlic in hot oil. Add ¾ of the chopped tomatoes (leaving some aside for the topping), tomato paste, spices, salt and stir. Add the split peas and stir. Add the drained rice, pomegranate syrup and stir. Add enough boiling water to cover the rice. Cook on high heat for around 5 minutes, covered. Reduce the heat, stir and simmer for 15 minutes or until the rice is cooked. Decorate with braised chopped tomatoes.

The main ingredient is collected by farmers from certain trees in the mountains available along the border strip with Iran in Penjwen district. The sticky and greenish syrup is produced on the trees. The raw product is sold to the sweet shops in Sulaymaniyah, where it is cleaned and placed in a large pot with water to boil for several hours to get rid of any impurities. Then egg and bay leaves are added in addition to walnuts or pistachio and the mixture is left to cool. It is cut into pieces and is sold to customers in small wooden boxes.

## TEMMAAN BI DIBIS

### RICE WITH POMEGRANATE SYRUP





## INGREDIENTS (makes 24 pcs)

1 cup	Water
3 cups	Sugar
1/3 cup	Corn syrup
¼ cup	Honey
4	Egg whites
1 Tsp.	Cardamom
¼ Tsp.	Ground nutmeg
½ cup	whole pistachios or walnuts
½ Tsp.	Fresh lemon juice
	Butter as required
	Flour as required

## PREPARATION

Bring water, sugar, corn syrup and honey to the boil, and stir until the sugar has dissolved and the syrup is a medium thickness.

Whip the egg whites with an electric beater on a high speed until stiff and glossy.

Return the syrup to the heat and continue cooking until thick (approximately 4 minutes).

Pour the remainder of the syrup over the egg whites, while continuously whipping (use a wooden spoon if required), until mixture is thick.

Fold in cardamom, nutmeg, pistachios or walnuts and lemon juice and mix well.

Use butter and flour to grease a baking tray and spread out the mixture. Leave for 12 hours, until it has formed a sticky dough.

Form the mixture into golf sized balls and sprinkle with flour, then allow to harden for 1-2 days.

## MANN EL SAMMA

## HEAVENLY PERSIAN NOUGAT





# DOHUK

## CHAPTER 19

# GOVERNORATE

**Duhok Governorate** is comparatively one of the most recently established in the Kurdistan Region. It was established in the 1970s. During the 20th century it remained part of Ninewa Governorate, and was, according to the description of Abdulrazak Al Hasani, ‘a large village situated in a deep valley surrounded by orchards and bushes, with a river consisting of many springs flows.’<sup>113</sup> About 2,573,500 inhabitants lived in Duhok, one-third of whom were Muslim Kurds, with the remaining Christians. In 1947 the population who identified as ancestors of previous inhabitants was about 40,000.<sup>114</sup>

Historically, the cities of Dohuk passed through many eras and kingdoms. Continuous fighting occurred in the region<sup>115</sup> and Duhok, Zakho and the cities of Kurdistan were conquered and became part of Iraq.<sup>116</sup> Starting in 1446, Dohuk and Zakho fell under the emirate of Bahdinan, following this Zakho became an emirate called the Emirate of Sindyan, until Zakho and Dohuk were administratively attached to the Sanjaks, or the states of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>117</sup>

The Governorate of Duhok is bound by Sulaymaniyah, Ninewa, Erbil and Turkey. It is famous for its abundant fig orchards. It has ancient ruins that date back to the Assyrians in a site called ‘Ashkafta Halamat’ on Shandoukha Mountain, opposite Kafarki village. In addition to the Assyrian ruins, excavations have shown evidence of ancient human existence in Duhok in Garsten. Duhok consists of six districts, including Duhok, Amedi, Semel, Zakho, Akre and Shekhan. Most well-known is Zakho, whose center is the ancient city of Zakho, which is documented as ‘Beit Nohadra’ and Arabs called it ‘Bandhathira.’ According to European historians, it is known by the name ‘Azo Khayz’ while others use the Aramean name ‘Zakhota’. Abdulrazak Al Hasani has mentioned that the population of the city according to the 1947 census was 36,000 inhabitants. It was important as a trade road, linking Iraq with Turkey in ancient and modern times. It was known as the ‘King’s Route.’

### Society and the Environment

Duhok Governorate is predominantly populated by Kurds alongside Armenian and Turkmen minorities, in addition to Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs and Yazidis. Duhok’s border with Turkey has influenced its culture and turbulent political history, which was evident during the large exodus of emigrants between Kurdistan and Turkey. The region has experienced many massacres, such as the infamous Semel massacre of 1933 in which more than 6,000 Armenians were killed. Socially, the Duhok social fabric is like the Kurdish community in general, in Iraq or Turkey. Tribal values are predominant, although a large section of the population is engaged in trade and transport of goods between Iraq and Turkey, especially in recent decades. It should also be noted that Zakho and Duhok are two important tourist cities, and many believe they will be major tourist destinations in years to come.

In addition, the Kurdistan Region in general experienced a massive economic boom after 2003, which has influenced an increase in construction development. Splendid tourist villages and modern tower blocks that attract investors are seen in all cities, including Duhok Governorate. Thanks to its beautiful landscape, the governorate has become a major attraction of tourists and investors alike,

which has increased over the past years. Like Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, this has been reflected in Duhok’s cultural and social values. Duhok communities are also familiar with the cultural values of Mosul, Baghdad, the South, the West and Central Euphrates cities, including cuisine.

### Duhok Cuisine

The Duhok kitchen is characterized by its rich and varied dishes. These include national dishes that combine local tastes with the food varieties available in various Iraqi cities. There are also certain local dishes that are specifically prepared by the Kurdish community. Although the local dishes are predominant, Duhok families are not much different from other families in Mosul, Baghdad, Central Euphrates, or southern areas. They have a similar food culture, whether about the type of dishes, the ingredients used or cooking method. They share similar national food habits and extensive hospitality traditions. For example, a guest visiting Duhok or Zakho from southern Iraq will be comfortable and can eat the same dishes from home, including gravy-based food. Sweet dishes are generally the same, and even the traditional Masgouf (fish) dish is readily available, illustrating that food culture is an integral feature of the Iraqi identity, be it among Arabs, Kurds, Muslims or Christians.

An explorer of Duhok food varieties will come across tens of old and new dishes, some of which no longer exist while others are either available in their old or reinvented form. The oldest dish still enjoyed by elderly people in Duhok and Kurdistan towns is Asida (porridge), which is prepared by boiling barley or bulger with date molasses. The use of molasses in Duhok reflects an ancient relationship among Iraq’s hot and cold climate cities. This dish is reminiscent of similar dishes in Iraq’s southern, western, and central rural areas. Lentil soup is also widespread in Duhok and its villages. This dish is enjoyed during the cold days and the fasting month of Ramadan. Yellow pumpkin and chilies are used during preparation. Another local dish is Sheer Berinj (Rice Pudding), prepared by boiling rice with milk. This dish is similar to Baht, another dish that originates in southern Iraq and is still consumed today. Duhok and Zakho households, and all Kurdish families, are good at preparing a common dish named Qeh Luk -Kotekit (nightly fried kibbeh), an ancient variety of small ball-shaped kibbeh, usually prepared at night and placed on a low fire until the morning and eaten at breakfast.

Kibbeh with yogurt is another common dish, which is usually eaten in spring when sheep yogurt and fresh vegetables are available. In winter, Kishk or dried yogurt is eaten. Jareesh, or coarsely ground wheat and dried yogurt, are used to prepare this kibbeh variety. Among the traditional springtime Kurdish dishes is Kutlik Curry (bulgar kibbeh with curry), which consists of bulgar, onion and Jareesh. When the kibbeh is ready, vermicelli, curry and tahini are added. This kibbeh variety is prepared without meat filling and is typically eaten cold.

Another traditional dish is Qo Rao, which consists of sheep yogurt, meat, and onion (preferably spring onion), to which thyme is added. The dish is consumed as a broth-soaked dish, like Jordanian Mansaf, eaten with rice. The Kurds have their own way of rice cooking, where rice is mixed with an equal quantity of coarsely ground chickpeas, soaked with meat broth, onion cubes and sheep ghee. They also have the so-called Qaliat Say’ar, or meat fries prepared on a flat metal griddle (saj) and consisting of beef, onion, tomato, and chili pepper, similar to Hamees or Chelfray in Baghdad and other cities.

One famous bread variety in Duhok is that in which bulgar is mixed with onion, tomato, celery, sheep ghee and chili pepper, and is similar to Arook or Farafeer (bread with meat), common in Anbar Governorate.



INGREDIENTS (serves 5)

1 cup	Barley
4 Tbsp.	Salt
¼ Cup	oil
½ cup	Black lentils
3	Eggplants
¼ cup	diced capsicum (different colors)
2 Tbsp.	Raisins or dried cranberries
3 Tbsp.	Walnut halves
3 Tbsp.	Olive oil
2 Tbsp.	Pomegranate syrup
¼ teaspoon	Salt
¼ teaspoon	Pepper
¼ teaspoon	Cinnamon
¼ teaspoon	Cumin
One bunch	Rucola leaves
¼ cup	chopped Parsley
¼ cup	chopped Coriander
¼ cup	Oil (for frying eggplants)
	Water as required



ZALATAT HABBYA  
WA BAITENJAN

EGGPLANT SALAD

When preparing eggplant for any recipe, I soak the peeled and cut vegetable in salted water (weighed down with a plate to apply pressure and keep them submerged) for about half an hour. This draws the bitterness out. I like the method of cooking the eggplant used in this dish, because it absorbs less oil but still leaves it crispy. Tossing the eggplant in the sauce as a final step, as opposed to mixing it throughout, helps avoid a soggy finish.

PREPARATION

Pre-heat an oven to 150C/300F/Gas Mark 3.  
Soak the barley for 8-10 hours and drain well. Place in a pan with 1 tablespoon of salt, 2 tablespoons of coconut oil and cover with 1-2 centimetres of water. Bring to a boil then reduce heat and allow to simmer for 5-10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat, spread over a shallow dish and allow to cool.  
In a separate bowl, soak the black lentils overnight and drain well. Place in a pan with 1 tablespoon of salt, 2 tablespoons coconut oil and add boiling water – enough to cover the lentils. Bring to boil then reduce the heat and allow to simmer for 10-15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from the heat and let it stand for 5-10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Spread out in a shallow dish and allow to cool.  
Peel the eggplants lengthwise and cut into medium-sized cubes. Heat the remaining oil in a frying pan and fry for 2 minutes, then roast in the oven over a mesh grill (or similar instrument to drain oil) for approximately 15 minutes.  
In a bowl, combine the barley and lentils. Add the capsicum, spring onions, raisins or cranberries, walnuts, olive oil and pomegranate syrup. Mix well to combine and season with salt, pepper, cinnamon and cumin. Add the parsley and coriander. To serve, line a bowl with the rucola leaves, spoon the mixture in and toss the eggplant in just before serving.



INGREDIENTS (serves 6-7)

Vegetable Shells		Filling			
3	medium onions	1 cup	Short grain rice	1 Tbsp.	Tamarind or pomegranate syrup
6	small eggplant	1 Kg	Ground meat (beef or lamb)	½ cup	Vegetable oil
6	small courgettes	1	chopped onion		Salt and pepper to taste
5	small capsicums (different colours)	2	chopped garlic cloves	½ Tsp.	Cumin (optional)
3-4	small tomatoes	1	chopped small carrot	½ Tsp.	Turmeric (optional)
15	Vine leaves	2	chopped tomatoes	1 Tbsp.	Tomato paste
1 Tsp.	Black pepper	2	chopped courgette filling	1 Tbsp.	Tamarind or pomegranate syrup
15	chard leaves	3 Tbsp.	chopped parsley	3 Tbsp.	Lemon juice
Cooking Sauce		1 Tbsp.	Tomato paste	¼ cup	oil
500 g	Lamb chops (for lining the pot)	1 cube	Chicken stock, dissolved in 2 tbsp. hot water		Salt and pepper to taste
1 cup	Chicken stock or one cube chicken stock, dissolved in hot water	2 Tbsp.	Lemon juice		



DOLMA

STUFFED VEGETABLES

I often joke that Dolma takes two days to make: one day to shop and prepare and one day to stuff the vegetables and cook them. I also find that after preparing these vegetable parcels, it's best to refrigerate them for a day, and then cook them on the second day to let the juices really seep in and settle. You can even half cook them on day one.

This recipe features ground beef or lamb, but to create a vegetarian version, simply substitute meat for ½ a cup of fava beans, replace the chicken stock with equal quantities of a vegetable-based one and add one tablespoon of chopped fresh dill and an additional ¼ cup of oil (I also prefer to use olive oil in the meat-free version) to the rice mixture. I have suggested the spices for the stuffing as an optional extra, because I prefer to let the vegetables take centre stage, but feel free to personalise their use to your tastes.



PREPARATION

Separately prepare your vegetables shells.  
Peel each onion and cut halfway through. Boil in water and soften, then peel layers one by one to make the shells.  
Cut each eggplant in half and hollow out each (a melon baller is a suitable tool) working from bottom end and leaving about a small amount of aubergine flesh along interior walls. Cut each courgette top and use a courgette corer to scoop out the flesh from each slice. Save the contents for use in the stuffing. Cut thin slice from stem end of each capsicum to remove top. Remove seeds and membranes; rinse thoroughly. Cut a thin slice off the top of each tomato. Scoop out the pulp, leaving a shell. Invert onto paper towels to drain. Save the contents for use in the stuffing. Wash and cut the stems of vine leaves in preparation. Cut off the stems of the chard and cut the leaf into two equal parts. (When cooking vegetarian dolma save the stems to line the pot.) Soak the rice for an hour and drain. Mix the meat, rice, onion, garlic, carrot, tomatoes, courgette stuffing, parsley, tomato paste, chicken stock and lemon juice together. Add the tamarind or pomegranate syrup and mix well then add the vegetable oil.  
Stuff the vegetable shells with the rice filling. Ensure there is no rice mixture on the outside of the shells, and that they are not overflowing. (Fill to about 90 percent to allow the rice to expand when cooking.) Prepare the pot by lining the bottom layer with a layer of lamb chops (Or, for vegetarian dolma, a ¼ cup of olive oil and the silverbeet/chard leaves). Fill the pot with the stuffed vegetable shells based on the cooking time, placing those that require the most cooking at the bottom. Start with onions, followed by a layer of courgettes and aubergines; followed by a layer of capsicums, followed by a layer of tomatoes and finished with a layer of silver beets and vine leaves. Once all the vegetables have been layered into the pot, prepare the cooking sauce by combining the stock, tomato paste, tamarind or pomegranate syrup, oil, lemon juice and salt and pepper and pour over the vegetables. Fill pot with enough water to cover the vegetables, place a flat plate on top to apply downward pressure to the vegetables and seal with a lid.



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