

Recipes From Baghdad

Cooking and Shopping

in

Baghdad

While food may be regarded by some as simple an essential of life, to others it is a subject of moment, either because of the pleasure derived from the eating of good food, or the misery sustained from ill treatment of a weak digestion; or, to those more studiously inclined, because of the interest to be found in the study of the customs and traditions of the food of the country. This book lays no claim to be a comprehensive manual of oriental and occidental recipes. It is simply a collection of recipes obtained from Baghdad residents of many nationalities. They are those which the donors regard as the most tasty preparations of their household, and the ingredients, under normal conditions, may all be obtained locally. Many of the oriental dishes are time consuming in preparation, as is natural in a land long blessed with much domestic help, and where there are few modern appliances. No attempt has been made to include the more elaborate recipes such as that for young stuffed roast camel, in which according to tradition the camel is stuffed with sheep, the sheep with turkeys, the turkeys with quail and the quail with larks.

The actual preparation of the food of east and west, while basically the same is traditionally different, which explains much of the friction between an occidental mistress and an oriental cook. In oriental cookery time, providing the dish once cooked, does not matter much, and no harm is done if the pot simmers for another hour or so. In occidental cookery the dietician and modern appliances have influenced the methods of cooking and the demands of the family, and it is well known that overcooking destroys vitamins. Furthermore those who like rare meat must have it brought to the table piping hot yet not completely cooked, and a soufflé which is a culinary triumph after twenty minutes in the oven is probably a tragedy if left for thirty. Such demands on the cook are regarded as reasonable but precision of method and measure are required to ensure success. They are unnecessary in much oriental cookery and are quite incomprehensible to all but the exceptional oriental cook.

"Recipes from Baghdad" does not pretend to be a book of instruction in cookery and household management. It does not recommend that "the store cupboard should be dry and cool". The inhabitants of Baghdad know only too well that while a larder may be dry, and in winter bitterly cold, the housewife

who keeps the indoor temperature of her home as low as 86°F on a summer's day is both skilful and fortunate. There may still be seen in old houses intercommunicating air shafts sunk into the ground below the "serdab" or underground room, which in former times were often used for the storage of perishable foodstuffs. Modern Baghdad, however, has taken to the ice chest and refrigerator with zest, since that which is a convenience and luxury in a temperate climate is a household necessity in the subtropics.

The equipment of a Baghdad kitchen is simple but is somewhat unusual to the newcomer from the west. Pans have no handles and anyone venturing to cook with them will find many a burn is suffered before she is skilled in their use. Tinned copper is still in common use and enormous pots and trays of this metal are to be seen. Large and small mortars are essential items in



a country which from time immemorial has crushed its grains, meat and spices at home. Similarly the custom of years is seen in the baking board which is a round wooden table only a few inches high, accompanied by a low stool and a rolling pin over a yard in length and about three quarters of an inch in diameter. Until recent years cooking was done largely on charcoal and a skewer of "Kababs" was lifted sizzling hot from

the glowing embers at one's side. Now however most food is prepared on kerosene stove, since Iraq's greatest wealth is in her oil deposits and kerosene is plentiful and cheap. An oven goes with the stove and although these are now to be found in white enamel with glass doors and thermometer many a feather weight sponge cake has come out of what is little better than a large tin can.

In Baghdad as in any modern city, one may order household groceries by telephone and they will be delivered at the door, but reputable books on household management always recommend "personal shopping" as the most desirable means of obtaining the best quality of food. Undoubtedly the principle is wise, and many an occidental would give much for the chance of doing the household shopping in the bazaars of Baghdad, but the enjoyment of such an outing, depends largely on temperament, since unpleasant as well as pleasant sights and smells are to be found.

When one turns aside from the glare and rush of Baghdad's main street to enter what might be called the "grocery and hardware" bazaar, one is met with a strong aromatic smell, a mixture of odours from piles of soap, from seeds and spices, sweet smelling oils and perfumes, from fruits and vegetables, from human beings, animals and machinery. On the left bunches of scarlet, blue and yellow catch the eye in the bead shop, on the right vendors sit offering fruits of the season, grapes perhaps, or baskets piled high with oranges or deep red pomegranates. The bazaar is shaded and cool from gaps in the high vaulted roof occasional shafts of brilliant sunlight cut diagonally across the gloom. These shafts are alive with particles of dust

thrown up by the stream of pedlars, small merchants, ready, for a commission to carry one's purchases donkeys heavily laden with tables, an occasional car noisily as it noses its way pressing the pedestrians to the side. The booths which line the way in which one can buy almost anything from a razor to a lemon for the most part small but occasionally one comes to the vaulted stores of the more prosperous merchants. Sacks stand open with the contents neatly for display—lentils, rice of different qualities, examination by the prospective customer of brown, orange and yellow hazelnuts and melon seeds. Into sheets like orange-brown refreshing drink; dried pomegranate to certain meat dishes, and the tomato paste used for fresh tomato juice in the glare of the sun one may even come upon hu their perfume pervading for orange blossom water is distilled perfume the linen cupboard.

Fruits and vegetables are the habitual bazaar shopper the purchase is quickly made also there, and commodities copper vessels finely engraved tempt from the owners who

There is meat—mutton brush aside the ubiquitous fish shop keeper will cheerfully sell in the west would be regarded as a repairer over his vats, his arms of grindstones system of bees wax, five feet long it for stuffing quilts and mattresses restored in recent years. At chickens, and turkeys from copper goes on continuously.

All this is to be seen at the watch for the unfamiliar charm of the bazaar is as e

thrown up by the stream of passers—merchants, pedlars, small boys with baskets, ready, for a consideration to carry one's purchases, donkeys heavily laden with vegetables, an occasional car hooting noisily as it noses its way along, pressing the pedestrians to the side. The booths which line the way and in which one can buy almost anything from a razor to a lemon are for the most part small but occasionally one comes to the large vaulted stores of the more prosperous merchants. Sacks stand folded open with the contents heaped neatly for display—lentils, salt, rice of different qualities, dried



examination by the prospective buyer. Spices are piled in rich shades of brown, orange and yellow green, and in baskets are fresh roasted almonds, hazelnuts and melon seeds. There are apricots packed in boxes or pressed into sheets like orange-brown oil cloth which is used for making a sweet refreshing drink; dried pomegranate seeds which give a sharp astringency to certain meat dishes, and large blue green bowls filled with red "ma'jun", the tomato paste used for flavouring savoury dishes, and made by drying tomato juice in the glare of the summer sun. At certain seasons of the year one may even come upon huge piles of pink rose petals or orange blossom, their perfume pervading for yards around. From these the famous rose and orange blossom water is distilled to be used in flavouring confections and in perfuming the linen cupboard.

Fruits and vegetables are found according to their season. In the case of the habitual bazaar shopper who knows the prices, bargaining is brief and the purchase is quickly made. Cheese, thick sour milk, honey and fat are also there, and commodities are sometimes stored in handsome tinned copper vessels finely engraved in former days, and which money will not tempt from the owners who have inherited them from their forefathers.

There is meat—mutton and beef—but from that one must invariably brush aside the ubiquitous fly to point out the piece one fancies, which the shop keeper will cheerfully slice off irrespective of whether it damages what in the west would be regarded as a good "cut". One can see the dyer bending over his vats, his arms bright stained from fingers to elbow, and the repairer of grindstones systematically chipping. Candles may be had made of bees wax, five feet long if one wants them, and fresh carded white cotton for stuffing quilts and mattresses. Finally one reaches an ancient minaret, restored in recent years. At its base offered for sale are pigeons and chickens, and turkeys from the north, and the sound of the beating of copper goes on continuously in the nearby shops of the ancient craft.

All this is to be seen and much more, and for those who are always on the watch for the unfamiliar, be it in foods, in costumes or in customs, the charm of the bazaar is as endless as its study is informative.

THE MEASURE OF SUCCESS.

The quantities in the majority of the recipes are sufficient for 4 persons.

In compiling recipes there has been much difficulty in obtaining measured quantities of ingredients. In the preparation of the food of one's own country this is not so serious, as one estimates by the taste what is lacking or what has been overdone; but when an unheard of vegetable is flavoured with a spice never before used and one is quite unfamiliar with the dish, it is impossible without reasonably accurate measurements to get anything like the correct result. Should success not be achieved one is none the wiser unless the food is offered to someone familiar with it. For these reasons it was essential to use measurements which would make it possible for an occidental to reproduce an oriental dish with some hope of success and vice versa. It is difficult in Baghdad to obtain the standard measuring cup and measuring spoons which are so generally used in the occident, but it was found that a Players or Gold Flake round "50" cigarette tin, filled level, corresponded to the standard American measuring cup. The recipes have therefore been reduced to such a standard from handfuls, grams, okes, rotls, pints, pounds, hoogias, pigeons' eggs, walnuts, bits, pieces and pinches. If one does not like using a cigarette tin for measuring food it should at least be used to standardise a more attractive vessel. The large spoon used for measuring and referred to throughout as a "table-spoon" is not the very large European tablespoon, but is the American tablespoon which is the same as the European dessert or pudding spoon. Spoonfuls and tinfuls are always measured level, never heaped. The following table will assist in standardising one's utensils.

The measures are illustrated inside the covers.

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| 3 teaspoons (tsp.) | = | 1 tablespoon (tbsp.) |
| 16 tablespoons | = | 1 standard American measuring cup, or |
| 2 measuring cups or tins | = | 1 cigarette tin (Players or Gold Flake, round "50") |
| 2 pints (American) | = | 1 pint (American) |
| | | 1 quart (American) or |
| | | 1 litre (approx.) |

As cookery books differ widely in their units of measurement the table of approximate weights and measures may also be useful for reference.

Arabia has for centuries been the actual source of these was recorded in the records of Herodotus. Frankincense was guarded by small, caravans, conjectured, came from Ethiopia. Large birds for making their way to the inaccessible cliffs. The people were cutting off large pieces of the cliffs. The enthusiasm of the people was great and they carried so much of the great, the mud gave way and the expectant inhabitants were

Although Herodotus goes on to say that the country is scented with the spices of Arabia was in actual fact the spices through the country. Some of the spices were brought from southern India to the Persian Gulf taken by caravan across countries.

Herbs and spices have long been used in Europe and Fracastor, an Italian physician, gave an exotic decoction of "odoriferous" cardamom, mace and aloes. In modern days the use of the crude extracts or synthesized for medicinal purposes superseded in the occident. The European has become accustomed to buy herbs and spices in a refined state, neatly put up in tins or bottles, that she is at a loss to find not available in such forms. The herb commonly used in Europe in its crude form in the Bagdad markets. Iraqis are astonished that the whole nutmeg, a stick of vanilla, cinnamon bark something convenient to use a large piece of powder in a mortar and then the days of the great spice trader.

Many herbs such as parsnips grow well in Baghdad and it is their cultivation. It has been known in Arabic or English with considerable knowledge of the names of many of the plants mentioned in this book has been

SPICES AND HERBS

Arabia has for centuries been known as a land of spices. That the actual source of these was uncertain in early times is evident from the records of Herodotus. Frankincense trees, according to the belief of his time, were guarded by small, coloured winged serpents; and cinnamon, it was conjectured, came from Ethiopia. The sticks of cinnamon, were brought by large birds for making their nests, which were attached by mud to the face of inaccessible cliffs. The people of the country used dead animals as bait, cutting off large pieces of the flesh and leaving them near the base of the cliffs. The enthusiasm of the birds then apparently outweighed their judgment and they carried so much up to the nests that the weight became too great, the mud gave way and the nests fell to the ground, where the expectant inhabitants were able to pick up the cinnamon sticks.

Although Herodotus goes on to say concerning spices "The whole country is scented with them, and exhales an odour marvellously sweet." Arabia was in actual fact important rather because of the transport of spices through the country than because of their production there. Many of the spices were brought from the East Indies by way of Ceylon and southern India to the Persian Gulf, whence they were trans-shipped and taken by caravan across country by the most peaceful route of the moment.

Herbs and spices have long been valued for medicinal and culinary purposes and Fracastor, an Italian physician of the 16th century, describes an exotic decoction of "odoriferous cassia, cinnamon with two perfumes, cardamom, mace and aloes wood". In modern days the use of the crude products has been superseded in the occident by concentrated extracts or synthetized forms of the active principles. The European housewife is so accustomed to buy herbs and spices in a dried refined state, neatly put up in sealed packages or bottles, that she is at a loss when they are not available in such forms. Almost every spice and herb commonly used in Europe may be found in its crude form in the Baghdad bazaar, and Iraqis are astonished that Europeans find a whole nutmeg, a stick of vanilla or a piece of cinnamon back something unusual. In Iraqi kitchens of to-day if not convenient to use a large piece, the substance is grated or crushed to a powder in a mortar and then sifted through a fine sieve, as was done in the days of the great spice traders centuries ago.



Many herbs such as parsley, fennel, marjoram, thyme, sage and mint grow well in Baghdad and it is worth devoting a corner of the garden to their cultivation. It has been found however, that even those who speak Arabic or English with considerable fluency as a foreign language, do not know the names of many of these substances. For reference a list of those mentioned in this book has been compiled in English and Arabic.

| | | | |
|-----------|-------------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| Aniseed | يانسون | Mixed spice | بهارات مخلوطة |
| Bay leaf | ورق الغار | Mustard | خردل |
| Capers | كبار | Nutmeg | لب جوز الطيب |
| Caraway | كراويا | Paprika | فلفل أحمر حلو |
| Cardamom | هيل | Parsley | بقدنوس |
| Cassia | قرفة صينية | Pepper— | |
| Cayenne | فلفل أحمر حار | black | فلفل أسود |
| Celery | كرفس | red | فلفل أحمر |
| Cinnamon | دارجين | long | فلفل دراز |
| Cloves | قرنفل | sweet | فلفل حلو |
| Coriander | كزبرة | white | فلفل أسمر |
| Cubeb | كبابة | Pimento | نوع من الفلفل الاحمر الحلو |
| Cumin | كمون | Purslane | بربين |
| Curry | كاري | Rue | سداب |
| Dill* | شبينت أو حبة حلوة | Saffron | زعفران |
| Fennel* | شبينت | Sage | سمسم برى |
| Fenugreek | حلبة | Salt | ملح |
| Garlic | ثوم | Sesame | سمسم |
| Ginger | عرق حار - زنجبيل | Sugar | سكر |
| Mace | قشر جوز الطيب | Summac | سماق |
| Marjoram | بره قوش | Turmeric | كر كم |
| Mastic | المستكي | Thyme | زعتر |
| Mint | نعناع | Vanilla | فانيلا |

*There is considerable confusion between dill and fennel. These are closely related plants, and probably because of this the same name "sbint" is applied locally to them both. The seed of dill is known as "habat helwa" and another member of the fennel family grown in the north and used in flavouring is "raznäij".

Hospitality all o guests, and while it is entertainment value from "Antiquitates C which must have tak mutton (1000 sheep) 'entrement' of 2000 For anybody who w parties and 13,000 f

With the preser wish to spend her ent for the hundred and dreamed of by her g above all, if she has habit of offering lar wealthy, is dying ou is customary and ea evening after the la are offered about 1 extra work and whil food quite obviousl ostentatious and wa

In the orient, dinner parties with particularly among to the guest and ar royal guest there is mous tinned copper ed by as many as 1 This is heaped with kilos or more of ric such a way that remains separate, are seven or eight roast sheep, stuffe almonds and raisi oured and tinted . A few chickens are scattered b sheep and around ot round Arab bre served. In some p of guest the anim

When the gu their places round

HOSPITALITY.

Hospitality all over the world involves the offering of food and drink to guests, and while it is appreciated in the present age it has not quite as much entertainment value as it had in the time of our ancestors, when but few amusements were available to the public. Stephen Leacock, drawing his facts from "Antiquitates Culinariae", describes a feast held by Edward IV in 1647, which must have taken considerable preparation. "The menu included roast mutton (1000 sheep), a veal entrée (304 calves), a side dish of 304 hogs, an 'entrement' of 2000 geese and 1000 capons, along a trifle of 13,500 birds. For anybody who wanted 'another helping' there were 1500 hot vension parties and 13,000 fancy tarts and jellies".

With the present day emancipation of woman, the housewife does not wish to spend her entire life in the organisation of her home. She wants time for the hundred and one activities now open to her but which were never dreamed of by her grandmothers. Her aim is to have attractive, tasty and above all, if she has little or no domestic help, quickly prepared dishes. The habit of offering large, formal meals to friends, except in the case of the wealthy, is dying out. In America where servants are few and expensive it is customary and easier in one's own home to entertain to tea or in the evening after the last meal of the day. Sandwiches, cakes and coffee or tea are offered about ten o'clock. Even this involves the housewife in much extra work and while a lack of food would never be condoned, a display of food quite obviously beyond the capacity of the guests is considered ostentatious and wasteful.

In the orient, however, servants are still plentiful and luncheon and dinner parties with elaborate and numerous dishes are frequent. In Iraq, particularly among the tribes, the amount of food offered is a compliment to the guest and an indication of his importance. For a highly honoured or royal guest there is an enormous tinned copper tray, carried by as many as twelve men.

This is heaped with a hundred kilos or more of rice, boiled in such a way that every grain remains separate, and on it are seven or eight "Kuzi" or roast sheep, stuffed with rice, almonds and raisins, and flavoured and tinted with saffron. A few chickens and turkeys are scattered between the sheep and around the tray are dishes of dolma and other dainties with piles of round Arab bread for use as plates. Occasionally a whole young camel is served. In some places while one or more camels may be killed in honour of a guest the animal is not necessarily eaten.

When the guests and their hosts have eaten, the men of the tribe take their places round the tray, pulling off pieces of meat and forming the rice



into little balls which are skilfully flicked into the month by means of the thumb. The old men come first, followed by the young men and boys, the women and children and finally the dogs, until no grain of rice remains.

In less elaborate Arab hospitality guests are offered fresh khubz, butter or cheese and date syrup. The butter is made by shaking sour milk in a "shishwa" or sheep skin churn, and a man of importance does not sell such a product, but retains it for use in the tribe.

Hospitality takes a high place in the Arab world, and in the absence of the host, his son, his servant or his wife must offer food and drink to a guest. Failure to do so indicates a dislike of visitors and brings the man into disrepute with his neighbours. In the event of no food being available, if this is stated frankly, there can be no criticism, and the unfortunate host is excused from his obligations. Should a guest partake of food and then criticise adversely what has been offered him, he is insulting his host and sowing the seeds of future trouble.

A stranger may remain for three days without presence being questioned, but after that time an explanation is expected. Such passing guests bring news to isolated parts of the desert and the rate at which information is spread from one place to another is quite remarkable.

Among the residents of modern Baghdad the tribal customs of the Arabs have left their influence. There is still to be seen the traditionally lavish display of food, but such a cosmopolitan city has drawn its customs from the west as well as the east in recent years. Kuzi remains the main dish of any large meal but if the number of sheep offered is reduced this is offset by the increase in the variety of other dishes. A purdah pilau may be seen side by side with a potato salad garnished with mayonnaise, and a plate of cocktail sausages pierced with toothpicks may prove as popular as a dish of dolma. Indeed it is impossible to spend an evening in an Iraqi house without seeing the influence of west as well as east on the refreshments offered.

BREAKFAST.

The amount and variety of food, and the hours at which meals are eaten, vary with the inclinations and demands of every family. In former times the breakfast of the well-to-do Iraqi was often as it is to-day, preceded by tea or coffee in bed or on rising. The meal was taken before work and consisted of tea, savoury dishes, khubz, cream and date syrup or honey. Recently the European breakfast has invaded the east and eggs, butter, meat dishes, cream, jam and other delicacies are now enjoyed. Among the poorer classes tea and khubz are the staple fare. In Syria and the Lebanon olive oil, drained leban and summac or thyme with salt are offered. The bread is dipped in the oil and then in the herbs. Tea or milk is drunk.

In continental Europe breakfast may be a light meal but in England it is frequently more substantial than lunch. The American habit of eating fruit with breakfast has also been adopted in Europe and is generally followed by a cereal. Toast, marmalade or honey and coffee or tea complete the meal.

There is a pleasant custom in one wants from the sideboard foods being kept warm by a small fast dish, or on a hot plate. what is known as a "breakfast benches in one corner of the kitchen a quick breakfast may be had than when everything must be kitchen of such a house is a bit tidy. It is painted in gay colours fittings and equipment are as

In the east as in the west also be eaten at other meals; but familiar with each others customs the meal at which they would

1. 'Ajo.

- 4 tbsp. olive oil
- 8 eggs

Oil individual cake tins. cook in individual tins. When cold.

This makes a good picnic

2. 'Ajjat el Qarnabit.

- 1 cauliflower
- 1 tomato
- 1 onion
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tbsp. chopped parsley

Clean the cauliflower, cut in water till tender. Chop the tomato mix it with the beaten eggs, mixture and the remaining 1 spoonful of cauliflower into the until golden brown on both sides

This may be made with

3. Basturma.

- 4 large intestines
- 7 k. mutton from the leg
- 1 k. mutton breast fat
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tin cloves

Clean the intestines thoroughly and salt. Dry with a clean cloth