



VOLUME XXV, NUMBER 1 WINTER 2009

Repast

Quarterly Publication of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

Sweets from the Middle East

(Part 2)

Painting of a
confectioner, or
helvahâneli, in his
official attire from
the Topkapı
imperial kitchens of
Istanbul, Turkey.

Joan Peterson's
article about
Turkish *halvah*
begins on page 3
inside.

Image from *Ottoman
Costume Book: a
Facsimile Edition of
Osmanlı Kiyafetleri* by
Fenerci Melmed, 1986.



حلوانه‌لی
Helvahâneli

MORSELS & TIDBITS

Ann Fowler, a cherished veteran member of the Culinary Historians, passed away on February 14 after a long illness. Ann’s devotion and unflagging service over many years will remain forever in our hearts and memories. She volunteered for a variety of tasks within CHAA, and was a docent at the University of Michigan’s William L. Clements Library, where she labored to help establish and organize the culinary archives. Our deepest condolences go to Ann’s husband and fellow CHAA member, Don Fowler.

Nor is it easy to imagine the UM Clements Library without **Jan Longone**, who has made known her intention to retire there later this year as Curator of American Culinary History. The Clements plans to hire a new curator to fill this position. Visit http://www.h-net.org/jobs/display_job.php?jobID=38366 for the details as to job specifications and qualifications.

The Third Biennial Symposium on American Culinary History, which was scheduled to be held this May at the UM Clements Library with the theme “Chefs, Restaurants and Menus”, has been postponed. However, the library has been very pleased to present a new culinary exhibit, “500 Years of Grapes

and Wine in America: A Remarkable Story”. Curated by CHAA founding members Prof. **Dan Longone** and **Jan Longone**, it opened on February 16 and runs until May 29, 2009. The Longones will present a lecture about the exhibition, co-sponsored by CHAA, on May 10 (see calendar on p. 20 for details).

CHAA member **Ann Larimore**, a professor emerita of geography and women’s studies at the University of Michigan, gave a talk there on March 19, “The Trouble with Tractors: Speaking up for the Ox”. Her presentation, part of the Turkish Studies Colloquium, examined what happened to traditional wheat-based farming villages in Turkey in the 1950’s, when tractors and other equipment was introduced on a large scale to “modernize” the countryside. Ann will be speaking to CHAA in April about the foods of Mali (see calendar on p. 20 for details).

Another CHAA member, **M. Joanne Nesbit**, a writer and senior PR representative for the University of Michigan, was elected in May 2008 to a two-year term on the Board of Directors of the Washtenaw County Historical Society.

The Holmes family of Chelsea, MI, had already been in the flour milling business for five generations when they founded the Chelsea Milling Company there in 1901. “Jiffy Mix”, which would become world famous, was born in 1930 when Mabel White Holmes had the idea of selling packages of pre-mixed biscuit powder, so that even a widower raising children by himself could provide his kids with fine, fluffy biscuits. Mabel became company president in 1936 after her husband Howard was killed in a grain-elevator accident. These and other episodes are chronicled by Ann Arbor author **Cynthia Furlong Reynolds** in her corporate history, *Jiffy: A Family Tradition, Mixing Business and Old-Fashioned Values* (Chelsea, MI: Chelsea Milling Co., 2008; 248 pp., \$24.95 hardback). Current President and CEO **Howard “Howdy” S. Holmes** and his family have been generous supporters of the Biennial Symposium on American Culinary History.

Earlier this year, McGill University in Montreal launched *CuiZine: The Journal of Canadian Food Cultures / Revue des cultures culinaires au Canada*. This peer-reviewed online journal aims to nourish intellectual exchanges on the subject of food in Canada from multicultural perspectives. The Executive Editor is **Nathalie Cooke**, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies at McGill. The home page is www.cuizine.mcgill.ca, and the first issue can be viewed at www.erudit.org/revue/cuizine/2008/v1/n1/index.html.

“From Hardtack to MRE’s: A Military Foodways Symposium” is scheduled to occur on April 15-16, 2009 at Kansas State University, organized by KSU Hale Library’s Center for the Cookbook. The keynote address will be given by Colonel **George A. Dilly**, Ph.D., RD, LD, who is a KSU alumnus and U.S. Army Chief Dietician. Further information can be found at <http://www.lib.ksu.edu/symposium>.

On the Back Burner: We invite ideas and submissions for these planned future theme-issues of *Repast*: Episodes in the History of Breakfast Cereals (Spring 2009); Cultivation and Use of Fruits (Summer 2009); Scandinavian-American Food Traditions (Fall 2009). Suggestions for future themes are also welcome. ■

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HALVAH IN OTTOMAN TURKEY

by Joan Peterson

Dr. Joan B. Peterson of Madison, WI was a founding member of the Culinary History Enthusiasts of Wisconsin (CHEW) in June 2000. Joan's previous article in Repast was "Maize: Mexico's Gift to the World" (Spring 2003). She is a retired biochemist (University of Wisconsin, Madison) and author/publisher of the award-winning Eat Smart series of culinary travel guidebooks to Turkey, Morocco, Mexico, and several other countries. Over the last 35 years, Joan and her husband David have traveled and led tours around the world. She has planned two culinary tours for 2009, to Turkey (Aug. 7-16) and to Sicily (Sep. 29-Aug. 9); for more information, visit <http://eatsmartguides.com/tours.html>.

Halvah (*helva*) is the oldest type of dessert in Turkish cuisine, writes noted Turkish culinary expert, Nevin Halıcı, in her book *Turkish Cookery*; the earliest known recipe for halvah dates to the 11th Century. The name is derived from the Arabic root *hulw*, or *halwa*, meaning sweet, and describes a large family of confections in the Middle East, Central and South Asia, and the Balkans.

Halvah has three basic ingredients: a starch, a fat, and a sweetener. It most commonly is made with semolina, but several other distinct versions of halvah exist. To prepare this sweet, semolina (or equivalent) typically is toasted or fried while constantly stirring it with a wooden spoon, sometimes together with butter, until golden brown. Liquid, scalded milk for example, is then mixed in, along with sugar or reduced grape juice (*pekmez*) and melted butter. Frequently almonds, pine nuts, or pistachios are added for flavor.

The writings of the Islamic mystics, the Sufis, provide considerable insight into the nature of Turkish cuisine in the 13th Century. One of the most renowned mystics and poets was Mevlânâ Celâleddin Rûmî, founder of the Mevlevî (whirling dervish) order. Rûmî's poems record the importance of food in the life of the religious order and contain many references to the foodstuffs available in Selçuk Anatolia, including halvah. The language of food typically was symbolic; allusions to food signified spiritual sustenance, and its processing the purification of the soul. Besides its frequent mention in Sufi literary works, halvah also became an important part of the Sufi religious ceremony. Considered a most delectable mortal food, halvah was equated with the sweetness of spiritual rap-

ture and was eaten at the end of the ritual where a spiritual merging with the divine was sought by repeated invocation of a holy chant.

Halvah's importance grew during the Ottoman period. The fragmentation of the Selçuk empire in Anatolia paved the way for independent Turkish bands to carve up the former Selçuk state into smaller, rival fiefdoms. The Ottomans swept away all challengers over a period of about two centuries and in 1453 they snatched the coveted prize of Constantinople (now Istanbul) from the Byzantines, adding it to their sultanate. Sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror wasted little time erecting the splendid Topkapı Palace in Istanbul shortly after he took over the city. Judging from the huge kitchen it housed, topped with four large domes, it was apparent that culinary arts played a major role in daily affairs. In fact, Turkish cuisine under the tutelage of the Ottoman sultans flourished at the hands of many skilled cooks anxious to please them and gain promotion. These cooks not only had their culinary heritage to draw upon, but had access to just about every existing ingredient in the vast empire of the Ottomans. These exotic foodstuffs and spices became a part of an ever-growing repertoire of dishes that appeared in the sumptuous, multiple-course meals presented to the sultans.

All the while, the size and complexity of the kitchen staff increased to feed the growing number of people living on the palace grounds. At the end of the 16th Century, according to the imperial records, a staff of 200 live-in cooks toiled in the kitchen. In a mere 50 years, this number rose to about 1,400. They fed up to 10,000 people in a single day, including those meals destined for diners outside the palace as a token of the sultan's favor. To accommodate this flurry of culinary activity, the kitchen was enlarged during the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent (1520–1566). The imperial architect, Sinan, added the six-domed Has Mutfak and Helvahâne (literally, the "house of halvah"). Sweets, especially halvah, fruit preserves, syrups, and *macun*, jelly-like pastes claimed to have healing effects, were made in the Helvahâne.

Some years later, the kitchen underwent a doubling in size with the addition of 10 more sections. The organization required for a culinary operation of this size to run smoothly was staggering. Every imaginable food category had not one, but an entire staff of cooks devoted to the art of preparing and perfecting it. For halvah, six versions were made, each requiring a chef and a hundred apprentices. All food personnel were part of a complex infrastructure. At the top was the *matbah emini*, the trustee of the royal kitchens. The hierarchy also included a prodigious administrative

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TURKISH HALVAH *continued from p. 3*

staff that oversaw the purchase, storage, preparation, and serving of tons of foodstuffs arriving at the palace kitchen each year.

By royal decree of Sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror, all civilian and military people wore outer garments and turbans of a specific style and color to facilitate recognition of their vocation and position within the hierarchy on sight. The culinary staff of the palace was not immune to this edict, and a rich variety of garments and styles characterized these jobs.

The abundance of food and the quality of dining outside the palace grounds was in the hands of special guilds, about 43 of them, which regulated the cost and quality of the food. At the hub of this effort was the indoor Egyptian Market, still in existence today, which housed a vast selection of foodstuffs in addition to spices and herbs, and provided for the whole city of Istanbul.

The trade guilds were instrumental in establishing the important social gatherings called *helva sohbeti* (halvah conversations). Family and friends would get together during the Winter months for conversation, games, and dining. At the end of the evening, after the meal was finished, halvah would be served, which explains why the name became associated with these events. Usually those gathered would eat either veteran's halvah (*gaziler helvası*) made with flour and flavored with almonds, semolina halvah (*irmik helvası*), or *keten helvası* (floss halvah), whose texture is similar to cotton candy. Guests worked together to make the cotton candy, pulling and kneading the cooked syrup until it acquired a floss-like consistency. To cut its sweetness, this halvah was eaten with pickles! The tradition of the *helva sohbeti* all but ended in the nineteenth century when the trade guilds went out of existence.

Halvah has long been associated with commemorative occasions, both happy and sorrowful, and this tradition still remains strong in Turkish culture. It is served wherever people gather to recognize births, circumcisions and weddings, among others, and to mourn deaths. This sweet is also an important component of religious ceremonies and feast days.

In Turkey, circumcision is a significant event that traditionally occurs when boys are between five and seven years old. Even today, celebrations of this ritual include entertainment and a feast. Those for the Ottoman princes were characterized by extravagance and profusion. A vast number of guests was invited to the festivities, which went on for days, even weeks.



حلوانه‌لی
Helvahâneli

Painting of a confectioner, or *helvahâneli*, in official attire. He cooked in the Helvahâne, the section of the Topkapı imperial kitchens devoted to making halvah and other sweets, including jams and jellies. Image from *Ottoman Costume Book: a Facsimile Edition of Osmanlı Kiyafetleri* by Fenerci Melmed, 1986.

The enormousness of a royal circumcision party from a food perspective can be appreciated from the palace kitchen records of the celebration in 1539 for Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent's sons, Cihangir and Bayezid, which provided posterity a rarely so detailed description of the menu for such a grandiose event. According to the register, 20 tables— each with 27 serving dishes, six pans, and 14 trays— were necessary to showcase just the sweets. Eight varieties of halvah were named among the confections: halvah with pistachio nuts (*fistik helvası*), two almond halvahs presumably made with whole nuts (*badem helvası* and *levzîne helva*), an almond halvah made with crushed nuts (*kirma badem helvası*), cotton candy-like halvah (*peşmine*; known today as *pişmaniye*), halvah flavored with saffron (*sarı helva*), wheat-flour halvah possibly flavored with rosewater and cinnamon (*residiye*), and red halvah (*kızıl helva*). The Sultan's largesse for a royal circumcision commemoration extended far beyond his family and guests. As a part of the celebra-

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A NOTE ON THE EVOLUTION OF HINDUSTANI SWEETMEATS

by Tim Mackintosh-Smith

Tim Mackintosh-Smith is a British travel writer based for the past 20 years in San'a, Yemen. His books include Travels With a Tangerine: A Journey in the Footnotes of Ibn Battutah (2001) and The Hall of a Thousand Columns: Hindustan to Malabar with Ibn Battutah (2005). He has adapted this article from the latter book.

Over the past 13 years or so, I have been retracing the journeys of the great 14th-Century Moroccan traveler, Ibn Battutah of Tangier. My intention is to explore his world on the ground today and to look for the remains of his age: not just physical survivals such as buildings, but also human, spiritual and— not least, as Ibn Battutah's capacious memory often recalled in detail what he ate and drank— culinary remains. The field of research is hemispheric in extent. Ibn Battutah's wanderings took him, between 1325 and 1354, across a huge slice of the Old World between West Africa and China and from the Volga to the Swahili coast. He may well have seen more of the globe than any other individual traveler of the pre-mechanical age. But the centerpiece of this wandering life, and of his book that records it, usually known as the *Rihlah* or *Travels*, is the narrative of his relatively static decade in India.

Ibn Battutah, like most people, went abroad for a mixture of reasons. For him, however, one of the most important incentives to travel was the need to make a living appropriate to his position as a member of the learned classes. As an Arab (linguistically and culturally, if not ethnically— he came from Berber stock) and a *faqih*, a scholar of Islamic law, the prestige-hungry princely courts in the further and more recently Islamized parts of the Muslim world offered rich pickings to him. The richest pickings of all were to be had at the court of Muhammad Shah ibn Tughluq, Sultan of Delhi and ruler, if somewhat precariously, of most of India.

Ibn Battutah arrived in Delhi in 1334 sporting a résumé that included higher legal studies in Damascus and Mecca and spells at the courts of a string of lesser potentates. Also, curious though it seems, he brought a costly present for the man he hoped would employ him. Muhammad Shah may have been one of the wealthiest

men in the world, but the custom for job-seekers was first to ingratiate oneself with him by giving him a gift; if all went well, the sultan would give the new arrival a return gift worth far more and, perhaps, a lucrative position at court.

For Ibn Battutah this courtly clockwork ran perfectly, and he ended up as one of the four Sunni *qadis*, or judges, of Delhi. In his case the post was a well-paid sinecure; his main role, as a scholar from the central sphere of Islamic culture, was to be an ornament at court. For this he was to receive a 12,000-*dinar* salary— some 200 times the income of an average Hindu Delhiite— and a starting bonus of the same amount. There was only one hitch: he was deep in debt. It was a problem of cashflow. His present to the sultan— of horses, camels, arrows and slaves— had been paid for on credit. Together with other expenses he owed a whopping 55,000 *dinars*, and the speculators who had lent him the money at the border of the sultan's domain were kicking their heels in Delhi and getting impatient. Ibn Battutah, whose adventurous spirit was matched only by his cheek, came up with a solution— the sultan could pay his debt.

The brazenness of it is astounding: you give someone a present with the sole aim of getting a bigger one back, and then you ask the recipient to foot the bill for the original gift. But Ibn Battutah had charm as well as cheek. He wooed his new employer with a particularly sickly Arabic ode of his own composition, and Muhammad Shah immediately signed an order on the treasury for the full amount. If the clockwork of protocol had run smoothly and swiftly, however, the bureaucratic cogs of Delhi were— then as now— infuriatingly creaky. The order languished; Ibn Battutah stalled; his creditors became ever more importunate. In the end, he realized that only one person— again, of course, Muhammad Shah— could get the money paid, and that there was only one sure way to get the present-loving ruler's attention. But what novel gift could he possibly give to the sultan who had everything?

Ibn Battutah had known long before he reached India that Muhammad Shah was an ardent Arabophile. Since his arrival, he had discovered a lesser-known fact— that the sultan was an equally ardent lover of sweets. (Muhammad Shah had once, it was said, given 3000 gold *dinars* to a man who brought him 22 crystallized melons of Bukhara.) By sheer luck, Ibn Battutah was in a position to pander to both passions. Somehow he had come by a veritable icon of Arabness, a thoroughbred south Arabian camel. He had an Arab-style saddle made from a wax model, and sent the camel to the sultan, gorgeously caparisoned. The gift was accompanied by a themed addition— an assortment of Arabian sweetmeats made by a Yemeni confectioner Ibn Battutah had picked up during his wanderings.

The sweetmeats stole the show. Muhammad Shah said

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HINDUSTANI*continued from p. 5*

he had never eaten or even seen anything like them... and so the first tray of sweets was followed by 11 more. The sultan, Ibn Battutah, and a few of the more intimate courtiers gathered for a tasting session in a private sitting-room beside the Hall of a Thousand Columns, the great reception room of Muhammad Shah's palace. That evening the traveler got home to find three bags of gold coins waiting for him.

My investigations among the ruins of the palace, situated in what is now the Begumpur area of suburban south Delhi, had led me to wonder whether Muhammad Shah's private parlor might be an extant colonnaded chamber to the south of the site of the Thousand-Column Hall. It is now a dank and unlovely place, filled with graffiti and the tang of human urine; but excavations there in the 1930's uncovered two large cavities in the floor, which the archaeologists described as "treasure wells". Their only contents of note were a few fragments of crockery of a type supposed to reveal or neutralize poisons— an essential part of any sultan's tea-service.

Today, the teatime treats of kings are to be found some seven miles to the north on Chandni Chowk, the main shopping street of the Mughal city of Delhi, which post-dates Muhammad Shah by over two centuries. I asked my regular and food-loving autorickshaw driver, Titoo, if he knew the most famous confectioner of all, Ghanewala, "the Man with the Bell". "Ooh yes!" he exclaimed. "*Shahi halwai*." The shah's sweet-maker. The old sweetmeat-men of Delhi, like the muffin-men of London, rang their wares around the streets with a bell; Ghanewala was the bellman *par excellence*. The prospect of a visit to the tooth-rotter by appointment to several reigns of Mughals— and, he added, to the late Mrs Indira Gandhi— had Titoo almost drooling in anticipation.

We parked in the Bicycle Market. As we walked the short distance to Chandni Chowk, I reviewed my hypothesis. The other night, discussing possible relics of Ibn Battutah's sojourn in their city with some learned Delhiite friends, I'd had an idea. It was a long shot, but I wondered if any of Ibn Battutah's Arabian sweets, three of which he mentions by name, were still to be found. The first two names, which rang no bells for my friends, were *muqarrasah* (which would mean perhaps either "cut up", "formed into discs" or "soured", as of milk; a possible alternative reading, *muqarradah*, is the name of a type of sweet known in Tunisia and regions of North Africa) and *jild al-faras* ("mare's hide", mentioned by Ibn Battutah earlier in his travels as a product of Ba'lbak, in modern Lebanon, and explained as a kind of fruit jelly with pistachios and almonds; today the term is applied to a kind of apricot paste more commonly known as *qamar al-din*). The third name was *luqaymat al-qadi*. "*Qadi* is what you

call *qazi*", I explained— a judge. "And *luqaymah* is the diminutive of *luqmah*, which is—"

"The great Delhi sweet!" they said together.

Luqmah is the Arabic ancestor of an international family. Lane's Arabic-English lexicon gives the meaning as "a gobbet"; *laqam*, the verb, is "to gobble a gobbet". *Luqaymat al-qadi* is rendered with customary elegance by Sir Hamilton Gibb, Ibn Battutah's English translator, as *bouchées du juge*. They are still to be found in the Arab world. An itinerant Iraqi confectioner used to sell these delicacies— little balls of dough, supersaturated with syrup— outside the door of my house in Yemen, at night in the month of Ramadan. But *luqmah*, or its plural *luqam*, seems also to have migrated long ago to Istanbul and mutated into *lokum*— what we would call Turkish delight— and thence with the Ottomans to Greece to be reborn as *loukoumi*. (And since my Iraqi confectioner has himself migrated to Australia, the *luqmah* family may well have made it there, too, if it hadn't done so before.)

At Ghanewala I drew blanks again with the first two names on my list of Ibn Battutah's sweets; *luqmah*, though, was greeted with immediate head-wiggles of recognition. As it had to be ordered, Titoo and I decided to do some preliminary fieldwork. We began with the standard fare, Punjabi *gulab jamun* followed by samosas both savory and sweet (an item mentioned by Ibn Battutah as served at Muhammad Shah's court, but clearly predating the traveler's arrival) and *gachak*, made from jaggery (palm-sap sugar) and sesame. We then moved on to *habashi*— literally meaning "Abyssinian", these were dark brown balls that tasted of ginger biscuits mashed up in malted milk— and to confections of carrots and milk and of cashews and saffron. "Oh dear," said Titoo at this point, "I forget my doctor tell me to reduce eight kay-gees..." I too was flagging, having eaten my way around to the very last cabinet. But the sight of its contents— "Khoya Fancies"— refreshed my appetite. Apart from the named varieties, Ibn Battutah's confectioner had prepared sweetmeats "in the shape of dates and other fruits". And here they were— no dates; but apples, pears and mangoes, artfully recreated in a heavy paste of condensed milk and— this really was gilding the lily— covered in silver leaf. A maternal voice sounded in my memory— "You'll make yourself sick..." I ate one of each.

A couple of days later, when my order was ready, the lady at Ghanewala went through the ingredients of Delhi *luqmah*. For me, accustomed to the tiny doughnuts of Arab confectionery, they were surprising: milk, reduced by boiling; *misri*, sugar candy; pistachios and almonds (as in Ibn Battutah's "mare's hide" sweets); and that same rococo layer of silver leaf. A wizened one-eyed man in a loincloth, who looked as if he might have been on the staff of Ghanewala since its establishment in 1790, appeared with a big box decorated with Hindu swastikas and a jolly

pink Ganesh, a Hindu god having an elephant's head. The contents were decidedly gobbets rather than *bouchées*—each weighed in at getting on for a quarter of a pound. I bit into one. There was a ghost of cardamom, a hint of rosewater. The flavor was Indian and intricate, the texture cloyingly unctuous, and the whole experience far removed from the miniature syrup-explosions of crisp, deep-fried batter which are the joy of Arab *luqmah*.

I still cling to a conviction that the name at least—and perhaps also the fruit-shaped sweetmeats—might just date back to that afternoon in the sultan's sitting room. The terms for many Indian sweets—*habashi* for example, and the generic *halwa*—are Arabic in origin; *misri*, the Hindi word for refined cane sugar, is the Arabic adjective for Egypt, where the refining process was invented. Exactly when and how these names arrived in Hindustan is impossible to tell. But I like to think that in the case of *luqmah* we may be witnessing, in Ibn Battutah's book, the actual disembarkation of a word:

And then the sultan took another kind of sweet and said, "What is the name of these?", and I said to him, "These are *luqaymat al-qadi*." Now one of those present was a merchant of Baghdad, a well-to-do man whom the sultan always addressed as "my father". This man was envious of me and wished to pique me, so he said, "Those are not *luqaymat al-qadi*, but these are", and he took a piece of the kind which is called *jild al-faras*. The doyen of the intimate courtiers, who would often make fun of this merchant in the sultan's presence, happened to be sitting opposite him. He said to the merchant, "Sir, you lie and it is the *qadi* who tells the truth." The sultan said to him, "And how is this so?" He replied, "O Master of the World, he is the *qadi* and these are his *luqaymat*, for he brought them." And the sultan laughed and said, "Well spoken!"

Arab *luqmah/luqaymah*, Delhi *luqmah*, Turkish *lokum*—they all seem, nominally, to belong to the same family. But how different they are from each other. If my silvered Indian *luqmah* truly is a collateral cousin of the Arab sweet, then it has undergone a drastic transformation over the centuries (indeed, perhaps *both* cousins have transformed—Ibn Battutah, sadly, gives no recipe for his *luqaymah*). But we shouldn't be surprised. The curry-houses of post-imperial Britain, to take an example that has traveled in the opposite direction, bear witness to the way in which food adapts itself to a new environment, to the persistence of the name versus the mutability of the substance (we will not speak of *curry powder*...) Again, while the breakfast *kichri*—rice, ghee and pulses—that Ibn Battutah ate in India made it, at some stage, intact to Egypt (as *kushari*), only the rice survived the journey to the far north-west: who in Britain has heard of kedgeree without smoked fish (preferably the quintessentially Scottish Finnan haddie) and hard-boiled eggs?

Sweetmeats, it seems—no less than curries, kedgerees, or Darwin's Galapagos finches—are subject to laws of evolution. ■

TURKISH HALVAH *continued from p. 4*
tion, up to 10,000 boys from poor families were circumcised and given gifts of food and clothing. ■

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Imported pişmaniye, a cotton candy-like halvah studded with bits of pistachio, as made by the Turkish firm Inci and purchased at an Arab-owned grocery in Ann Arbor. Photo: Randy Schwartz, 2007.

A Note on *Kleicha*

A reader of *Repast* asked us about the pronunciation of the word *kleicha*, the name of an Iraqi cookie that was the subject of Nawal Nasrallah's article in our last issue. Nawal clarified for us that it is pronounced "KLAY-chah", where the "ch" indicates a sound similar to the first consonant in "chair", and the "ah" is similar to the neutral vowel sound or 'schwa'. Significantly, that "ch" sound doesn't exist in standard Arabic phonetics, suggesting that this word must have been borrowed from another language. This lends further support to the link made by Prof. Nasrallah between *kleicha* and the Eastern European terms *kulich* and *kolach*.

LUQMAT AL-QĀDĪ: THE MORSEL THAT WENT TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

by Randy K. Schwartz

The “judge’s morsel”, *luqmat al-qādī*, is one of the most famous sweets bestowed to us by the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian peoples of the Middle East. From its origins in medieval Baghdad as a deep-fried cake, or fritter, it made its way in the world, adapting a bewildering variety of ingredients, shapes, and names in the regions where it found a home.

Before Columbus set sail in 1492, this sweet fritter had been integrated into local foodways from one end of the hemisphere to the other— from Spain in the far west to Indonesia in the far east. In later times it was brought to the New World, where its wafer version was folded onto itself to create the modern American ice-cream cone.

When we trace the evolution of this sweet, we are surveying not just one item, but a whole complex of items from the Middle Eastern confectionery. The metamorphoses undergone by the “judge’s morsel”, and the lands and peoples that it reached over the centuries, are truly impressive.

The Ur-Morsel in Baghdad

As far as we know, the earliest mention of “judge’s morsels” by that name occurs in a cookery manuscript copied by a scribe named Muhammad of Baghdad in 1226, when that city was the wealthy seat of the ‘Abbasid dynasty. The tenth and final chapter, “On Making *Kushkanānaj*, *Mutbaq*, Crêpes, and Things Mixed with Flour That are Analogous with Those”, included a recipe for *luqam al-qadi* (“the judge’s morsels”, *luqam* being a plural form of *luqmat*). It was to be made with dough that has been kneaded and then left for a while to ferment and rise:

There should be strength in the dough of this variety. When it ferments, take pieces the size of hazelnuts and fry them in sesame oil. Then dip them in syrup and sprinkle finely pounded sugar on them.¹

The name “judge’s morsel” suggests a delectable worthy of a judge, a highly esteemed official in traditional Muslim societies. In ‘Abbasid palace

kitchens, the dough used for this and other pastries would have been made with *samīd*, the finest wheat flour available, high in starch, low in gluten, and free of bran. The fat used to fry these little balls of dough was not olive oil but sesame oil, ideal for deep frying since it imparts a golden-brown color and nutty taste. The oil would have been flame-heated in a copper vessel, either a *tājin* (frying pan, the source of the word *tagine*) or a *dist* (a flat-bottomed cauldron several inches high with inward-sloping sides).

Some of the paths that would later be taken by this sweet can be seen from an interesting variant called *barad* (“hail”), which appeared in Chapter Nine (“Mentioning Sweetmeats and Their Varieties of That Sort”) of the same Baghdad cookery book. Here, a thinner version of the same kneaded and fermented dough was used, and the same vessel of boiling oil:

When it boils, scoop some of the dough in a plaited [i.e., reticulated] ladle and move it with a tremor over the oil, so that whenever a drop of the dough drips into the sesame oil, it hardens.²

These puffed, crispy morsels would then be tossed, like hailstones, into another *dist* filled with honey that had previously been boiled with rosewater and beaten to a milky white. The hailstones were removed from this sweet bath to a greased tile. There they were mounded together into any desired shape, which was then sliced for serving. Iraqi-born Nawal Nasrallah points out that these are reminiscent of modern Rice Crispy Treats.³

As I interpret it, these two ancient relatives represent what became “high” and “low” traditions of Islamic confectionery, one found in palaces, the other in shops, street-stalls, and fairgrounds. The original *luqmat al-qādī*, made with a thicker batter, evolved into types of fritters that were yet more extravagant, filled with ground almond, Oriental spices, and other expensive ingredients. These versions are much harder to find today. On the other hand, *barad* (“hail”), which was prepared using a thinner drip-fried batter, became part of a custom in which very plain ingredients went into the fritters themselves, but the latter were given interesting, sometimes garish, shapes and colors, and usually a sticky sweet syrup. If not for a confusing overlap in the various names applied to them, the kinship of these two traditions would be hard to recognize today.

Definitely to be avoided is any confusion with *lokum* (known widely as “Turkish delight”), which is not actually related to *luqmat al-qādī* at all. *Lokum*, a more recent invention by Ottoman confectioners, is a gummy sweet made with fruit or other syrups that are simmered and then poured into a tray to gel. The jelly is sliced into cubes and rolled in sugar. The gelling agent was traditionally mastic resin, and now usually cornstarch.

Lokum is short for *rahat lokum* (originally *rahat-i hulkum*), a Turkish phrase meaning “comfort to the throat”.

The High Tradition

To see what became of the more luxurious version of *luqmat al-qādī*, we turn to a later Arabic cookery manuscript, *The Description of Familiar Foods*, the oldest surviving copy of which was written out in Cairo in 1373. It contains most of the 100 or so recipes of the earlier Baghdad book, along with over 300 recipes collected from various other sources, mostly unknown today.

In this 14th-Century recipe for *luqmat*, the batter is used to lightly coat a filling consisting of a 2:1 mixture of finely pounded sugar and nuts (almonds or pistachios) kneaded with rosewater, musk, and/or syrup. These coated morsels are then deep-fried in sesame oil, dipped in more syrup, and finally sprinkled with “spiced sugar”.⁴

The book also includes a ring-shaped variant called *qāhirriya*, named, like Cairo itself, for al-Qāhir bil-lāh, a caliph who ruled over the Fatimid dynasty in North Africa in 932-4. For this ring version, the filling is stiffened with a little flour and formed into good-sized rings that are dried overnight; an additional optional ingredient in the filling is camphor, an expensive aromatic from East Asia. The rings are then dipped in a batter made from fermented dough (further lightened with the addition of saltpeter and eggwhite), fried in sesame oil, glazed with hot syrup and/or honey, and sprinkled with spiced sugar and, optionally, more pounded nuts, rosewater, and musk.⁵

The Low Tradition

The same *Description of Familiar Foods* that had such luxurious versions of *luqmat al-qādī* also included three recipes for fritters that were plainer, made of batter that was thinned with water and then dripped into the hot oil.

One of the three recipes, *barad* (“hail”), was copied faithfully from that in the Baghdad cookbook noted earlier, except that the drops of batter were to be drizzled from a bare hand rather than from a reticulated ladle.⁶

The second recipe, *zulābiyā*, called for a more highly leavened dough that could optionally be colored yellow with saffron or red with wine lees. These *zulābiyā* fritters were gobbets eaten individually; in contrast to *barad*, they were not mounded together like Rice Crispy Treats.⁷



Zalābiyya in a latticed form. Image used with permission from Nawal Nasrallah, *Delights from the Garden of Eden: A Cookbook and a History of the Iraqi Cuisine*.

Cooks who preferred their *zulābiyā* in a more lattice-like form were advised to use a third recipe, *mushabbak*, which made creative use of a coconut shell:

Take some of this mentioned batter and put it in a coconut pierced at the bottom. Then you put your finger on the hole and you fill it with batter. You put sesame oil in the cauldron, and when it boils, you take your finger from the hole and move your hand around. Rings of latticework are created from it. So take them up and throw them in syrup and it comes out excellently.⁸

Using the coconut shell produces a lengthy, swirled tube of dough on the hot oil’s surface, as with modern American funnel cakes. The resulting *mushabbak* were plaited, pretzel-size fritters that could take any of a variety of forms, such as circular spirals crossed by a few spokes, window-like squares, etc.

Zulābiyā and *mushabbak*, which go back centuries earlier, would be strongly influenced by *luqmat al-qādī* and elevated by their association with it. They were already being widely sold in Baghdad markets in the Ninth Century, where they seem to reflect Persian influences. In these early decades of the ‘Abbasid dynasty the Arabs of Baghdad admired the more highly refined culture and cuisine of Persia, which they officially ruled.

The term *zulābiyā* (and later variants like *zalābiyya*) had entered Arabic from the Persian *zalibīya*, meaning latticework. Over time, perhaps the meaning of the Persian word receded from memory, for a corresponding Arabic word, *mushabbak* or *shabbakiyya* (from a verb meaning to form a tangle, mesh, plait, or lattice, the

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same root found in the Arabic word for “window”), came to refer to this fritter when it had a distinctly latticed form, while a *zalābiyya* fritter might be made in any shape, such as a ball or whorl.

This distinction can be seen in a Baghdad cookbook copied down by the scribe Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq, written in the late 900’s but reflecting the palace cuisine of the 800’s. Chapter 100 of this manuscript is devoted to *zalābiyya* and includes six recipes. Five are versions of *zalābiyya* designated as “plain” and “unlatticed”. In these five recipes, the little cakes take many forms: they can be “fingers”, “rings”, or “disks” of dough that are fried in fat; they can be slices of oven-baked sponge cake moistened with milk; the cakes can be dipped in honey and sprinkled with sugar, or else eaten in savory form as an accompaniment to porridge.

But one of the six recipes is designated *zalābiyya mushabbaka* (“latticed *zalābiyya*”). It is made with a thin, yeasty *samīd* batter poured through a coconut shell into hot oil. Each latticed cake, as soon as it is fried, is dipped in a thickened honey made aromatic with rosewater, musk, and/or camphor. The reader is instructed not to serve the resulting fritters if they are soft, dense, or leathery:

If your batter was done right, the moment the batter falls into the hot oil, it will puff and look like a bracelet with a hollow interior... The well-made ones should feel brittle and dry to the bite, and crumble and fall apart in the mouth.⁹

The manuscript goes on for two more paragraphs describing how to counteract factors that can ruin *zalābiyya mushabbaka*: under-leavened dough, watery honey, or an unlucky daily temperature or humidity.

The chapter closes with the words of an unnamed poet extolling this latticed sweet. A few lines:

Like cornelian arranged in rows, as if of hollow tubes
of pure gold woven.
Laced into each other, as if with embroidered silken
fabric made.
Buried in white sugar, cloistered from the prying eyes.¹⁰

Regional preferences seem to have emerged for either latticed or unlatticed varieties of *zalābiyya*. This is reflected in a comment made by traveler Muhammad al-Muqaddasi in his geographical treatise (c. 946). Comparing the customs of the Levant (including his native Jerusalem) with other regions, he wrote: “They make *zalābiyya* in the Winter, but they do not plait the dough.” He likened this and other Levantine customs to those of Egypt.¹¹ It appears, then, that latticed *zalābiyya* hadn’t gained a foothold in the Eastern Mediterranean in early medieval times. Other geographic variation is mentioned below.

To the Far West and East

Fairly rapidly, the custom of making these morsels spread, with Islam, to the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans.

In Morocco and southern Spain, an anonymous 13th-Century cookbook from the Almohad dynasty included a few versions of *qāhirriya*, the elegant sugar-almond ring fritter noted above in the 1373 Cairo cookbook, *The Description of Familiar Foods*. These ones feature unusual spices and aromatics inside (nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon, lavender, spikenard, pepper, galingale, camphor, etc.) and can be batter-fried in almond oil or even baked in an oven.¹²

The same cookbook described how to make *zalābiyya* fritters using a runny, fermented batter that could be tinted with purple, red, yellow, or green plant dye. A punctured vessel was advised for dripping this batter into the oil. “The batter will run out through the holes into the frying-pan, while you are turning your hand in circles, forming rings, lattices and so on, according to the custom of making it.” These fritters were dipped in spiced honey and then drained so that only what had been absorbed remained, one of the ways to ensure a result that is juicy inside but still slightly crunchy outside.¹³

Clifford Wright has found that a different form of *zalābiyya* was one of the types of pastry that wealthy families in medieval Tunisia would prepare for special occasions. Here, the fritter was a puffy, slightly crunchy ball of deep-fried batter, glazed with honey and almonds.¹⁴

In the East, Muslim rule was established in northern India in 1206 with the founding of the Delhi Sultanate. In 1334, in an incident described by Tim Mackintosh-Smith in his article in this issue, traveler Ibn Battutah of Morocco presented the Sultan of Delhi with trays of *luqmat al-qādī* and other sweets made by his Yemeni confectioner. I conjecture that this *luqmat* was probably one of the opulent varieties found in the 1373 Cairo cookbook, which we noted had a filling of sugar and pistachio/almond inside a ball (‘Abbasid) or ring (Fatimid) of batter. The Fatimids, who were based in Egypt and held power until 1171, had maintained connections of faith and commerce with communities in Yemen, Syria, Iran, and western India.

Soon, less-refined fritters also appeared in India. They were very close to the squiggly, latticed version of Arab *zalābiyya*, but made with local ingredients. For example, different mixes of flour (wheat, rice, and pulses) were used in different regions, and they were

often fried not in sesame oil but in Indian *ghee* (preserved butter) or other fats, until the fritters were golden, or a deep orange if the dough was colored with saffron.

The name given to this Indian fritter is not *zalābiyya* but *jalebī* (otherwise transliterated as *jilābi* or the Anglo-Indian *jelaubee*). A well-known 1886 Anglo-Indian historical dictionary¹⁵ hazarded that *jalebī* is a corruption of the Arabic term *zalābiyya*. But now it appears far more likely to be rooted in the Persian word for rosewater, *julāb*. In the West, *julāb* gave us the name for a beverage, “julep”, while in India and elsewhere it became a general word for “syrup”. This etymology makes sense because *jalebīs* are finished by, and derive all of their sweetness from, a bath of syrup made with cane sugar and rosewater.

The late K. T. Achaya listed *jalebī* as one of the refined and festive foods that Muslims brought to India after the year 1000, enriching its cuisine. He gave a number of historical references to the fritters, beginning with a Jain work by Jināsura (c. 1450) that mentions *jalebīs* served at a feast.¹⁶ Today, the *jalebī* is also known, by that name, as far west as Afghanistan and as far east as Indonesia, regions that have felt strong Muslim influences historically.

In Modern Times

It’s not surprising that these morsels, already so well traveled in medieval times, left modern descendants in many countries. To bring some order to the variety of names, shapes, and techniques, I find it convenient to classify them as either whorls, lattices, puffballs, rolled strips, or wafers.

I was able to taste a homemade “whorl” variety when I lived with the Aytounas, an Arabic-speaking family of Berber origin, during Summer 2001 in Chefchaouen, a mountain town in northern Morocco. We ate these little fritters, which had been made in the kitchen by Mrs. Aytouna and her eldest daughter, during a humble dinner on the evening of Mawlid, the Prophet’s Birthday. As is traditional, the sweets were served as an accompaniment to *harīra*, a savory soup with symbolic religious undertones. Isolation, religion, and many other forces have made Moroccan mountain towns more traditional, if not backward, compared to some other Arab lands, and even these fritters seemed like preserved relics of the foodways of yore. Although the Moroccans refer to them as *shabbakiyya* (literally “latticework”), these are not the long spirals or convolutions of dough normally given such a name, but short arcs, stubby and gnarled. They were a bit crunchy on the surface and a bit chewy inside, dark golden brown in color, glazed with honey and sprinkled with white sesame seeds.



Greek *loukoumathes*, “puffball” pastries fried in oil and glazed in syrup, are one of the derivative forms of Arab *luqmat*. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Later, on a trip to Tunisia in 2004, I was surprised to see that the honey-soaked fritters are made there in the swirling “lattice” style. They are called *zalābiyya* and are a garish, translucent orange, 3-4 inches in diameter, piled up on platters for sale at shop counters and street stalls. In neighboring Algeria they have the same name and appearance.¹⁷

Among Lebanese Christians, these colorful, latticed fritters are instead called *mushabbak*. In Iraq and Iran, they are *zalābiyya* and are sometimes given as alms to the poor during Ramadan. Those dipped in honey instead of sugar syrup are considered of higher quality. Take one step further east and they go by the name *jalebī*, starting in Afghanistan, where they are traditionally served with fish in the Winter and are even sold from fish stalls. Because it is fried in oil, the Indian *jalebī* has much symbolic importance during Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights in mid-Autumn. In southern India, the batter can include a mixture of wheat flour, *urad* flour (made from the black gram bean), vegetable oil, and yogurt. The batter is extruded into the hot oil using a coconut shell or pastry bag.¹⁸

The third form of *zalābiyya* is what I call a puffball, a hollow sphere of deep-fried batter the size of a Ping-Pong ball, glazed in honey or syrup. This is the kind popular in Egypt today. (We noted earlier how Clifford Wright has identified this as a type that was enjoyed in medieval Tunisia.) To make them, spoonfuls of soft, yeasty, well-fermented dough are dropped into the hot oil. A few years ago, I prepared some with pre-mixed ingredients from a *zalābiyya* packet that I bought at an Arab-owned grocery in Ann Arbor. This had been exported by an Egyptian firm, Holw El-Shām. Within Egypt, the balls are actually more often called *lu‘mat al-*

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'ādī, the local pronunciation of *luqmat al-qādī* ("judge's morsel"). Similarly in Greece (*loukoumathes*) and Turkey (*lokma*), where the puffball fritters are common at festivals, shops, and funerals, and are usually glazed with a honey syrup and sprinkled with cinnamon or other spices. In Oman (*loqemat*), rice flour is added to the batter, and cardamom, lime juice, saffron, and rosewater may be added to the sugar-syrup.¹⁹

A rolled-out form of *zalābiyya* fritter is made in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, particularly among Christians.

The dough, once risen, is flattened with a rolling pin and cut into ribbons or triangles.

These are fried in oil, then sprinkled with sugar or glazed with syrup. The dough might include spices such as nigella seeds (black cumin) or *mahlab* (an almondy-tasting powder made from the pits of wild black cherries).

Such fritters are sometimes served for breakfast with fruit preserves, and can also be eaten as a simple dessert anytime or following

evening mass during Epiphany. The fritters can also be made in the puffball form, which the Christian Arabs call *'awwamah*, literally "floating thing".²⁰

We must note two other types of *zalābiyya* that have been eaten in Syria in modern times. One, a puffball type that was fried in olive oil, was made by Jews there

during the eight feast days of Channukah.²¹ The symbolism is evident, as this holiday commemorates a miracle of olive oil following the successful Maccabean revolt against oppressive Syrian rule (165 BC).

The final Syrian type of *zalābiyya* was not fried at all, but cooked waffle-style between a large hinged pair of iron plates. This produces a thin, crisp, round wafer with a grid pattern on the surface, similar to the Italian *pizzelle*. The Syrians would sprinkle sugar on the surface, sometimes first rolling the wafer into a cone shape while it was still hot.

A little over a century ago, when it was noticed that the conical *zalābiyya* wafers cooked by Syrian-American immigrants would make an ideal, edible cup for a frozen treat, the "ice-cream cone" was born. Although the exact details are in dispute, the moment of creation might have occurred at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, a world's fair held in 1904 in St. Louis.²²

How remarkable that luscious, deep-fried morsels served in the rich palaces of medieval Baghdad would evolve—in the New World about 1,000 years later—into one of the most cheap and common forms of pastry ever known! ■



Albert Doumar, owner of Doumar's Cones and Barbecue in Norfolk, VA, shows how to turn wafer-style *zalābiyya* into an ice-cream cone. The disk-shaped pastry is cooked like a waffle between metal plates, then rolled around a wooden mold while still warm and pliable. It soon cools to a crisp. Doumar's uncle, Abe Doumar, was one of several Syrian-American vendors who recalled fashioning ice-cream cones in this way as an innovation at the 1904 world's fair in St. Louis.

Photo: David Alan Harvey/Saudi Aramco World/SAWDIA (see Endnote 22).

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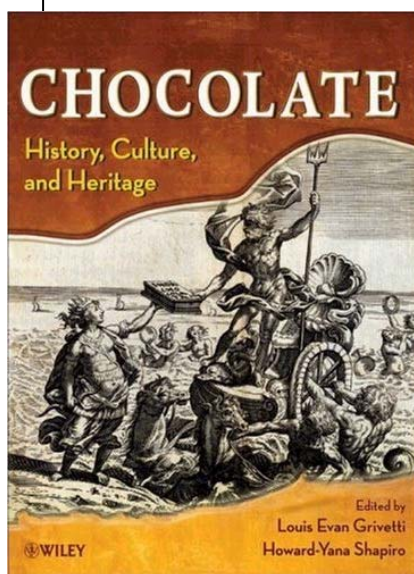
For the Chocoholics

In addition to "Chocolate: Food of the Gods", a talk presented to CHAA by chocolatier Nancy Biehn on March 15, we make note of three recent studies of chocolate.

Univ. of Texas anthropologist Meredith L. Dreiss and a collaborator, Sharon Edgar Greenhill, have completed a book, *Chocolate: Pathway to the Gods* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 2008; 208 pp. + 60-min. DVD, \$30 cloth). The work, based on the authors' archaeological and ethnographic research in Mesoamerica, details the history of chocolate among the peoples of that region (Mayan, Aztec, Olmec, Mixtec, and Zapotec), focusing on the social, cultural, sacred, and medicinal contexts. The accompanying DVD includes their earlier documentary film of the same title, whose world premiere was on February 20, 2005 at a meeting of the Historic Foodways Group of Austin, TX.

Chocolate: History, Culture, and Heritage (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2009; 1000 pp., \$99.95 cloth) is a collection of

57 essays written by members of the Chocolate History Group, a scholarly network formed in 1998 by the Univ. of California-Davis and Mars, Incorporated. The work is co-edited by UC-Davis nutritional anthropologist Louis E. Grivetti and Howard-Yana Shapiro of Mars, Inc. Drawing from their backgrounds in such diverse fields as anthropology, archaeology, biochemistry,



culinary arts, gender studies, engineering, history, linguistics, and nutrition, the writers examine facets of the global history of chocolate, from ancient pre-Columbian times to the present.

The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History and Mars, Inc. teamed up to present a symposium, "Chocolate: The North American Experience", at the museum on March 7. Speakers included Grivetti and Shapiro, co-editors of the book just mentioned; Peter Liebhold, the museum's Curator of Work and Industry; food writer Marian Burros; pastry chef and author Steve Klac; Georgetown Univ. Prof. Susan Terrio, author of *Crafting the Culture and History of French Chocolate* (Berkeley, CA, 2000); and Mort Rosenblum, author of *Chocolate: A Bittersweet Saga of Dark and Light* (New York, 2005).

C.H.A.A. MEAL REPORT



REMEMBRANCE OF BISTROS PAST

It seems as if restaurants branded as “bistros” are popping up here, there, and everywhere outside of France. But the *genuine* bistro is a bird of a different feather, and one that’s increasingly hard to spot even in its native habitat. To recall, and to help preserve, the reputation of the authentic bistro and its historic cuisine was the solemn purpose of our theme meal last December 7.

But not too solemn! To the strains of *chansons sentimentales*— mostly Edith Piaf— about 40 members and friends of the CHAA reveled in the sort of hearty eating and drinking that might have been found in Paris in the 1920’s and 1930’s. The dishes that we’d prepared were arranged on a long, central buffet table, while two separate serving corners were set up with potables and desserts. We were seated at tables in groups of six or eight, our dining experience heightened by the casual but clever banter.

The Bistro Era

It was only in the late 1800’s that bistros arose in Paris and other major French cities. They probably evolved from rental apartments in which the landlord would provide not only a room but also meals prepared in his basement kitchen. By serving food and drinks not only to these tenants but to outside boarders as well, the landlord could support himself and his family nicely.

The typical establishment that this begat was a small, cramped, family-owned eatery: the husband manned the kitchen, while his wife ran tables and poured drinks. The warmly-lit atmosphere of a bistro was one of casual familiarity. Traditional décor might include a bar covered with zinc plating; brass-and-glass fixtures; a high, molded ceiling with wooden beams and perhaps some bric-à-brac suspended there; long benches (*banquettes*) padded with imitation leather, where diners sat cheek-by-jowl next to strangers; wooden chairs and tables, the latter spread with sheets of white paper or checked cotton tablecloths; sturdy, plain tableware and carafes, and aluminum breadbaskets. (The small, circular high-top tables with accompanying high-chairs, now called “bistro sets”, came much later.) The brief daily menu would be handwritten on a slate that was brought tableside, or else on a wall-mounted chalkboard or mirror.

Traditionally, bistro offerings are built around relatively simple, inexpensive dishes. Surprisingly, the cooking of these urban eateries wasn’t far removed from the traditional home cooking of towns and villages. In the summary provided below, you’ll notice that our meal included a fair panoply of classics from the provinces of France. Sometimes these rustic foods are given a loftier touch— sliced truffle, a bit of caviar, or a velvety sauce. The bistros made a specialty out of *plats mijotés* (main dishes cooked with a low flame, thus long and slowly, whether on a burner or in an oven), since these dishes tend to keep well over time. They stand at a pole opposite from the climactic *à point* creations that one might find prepared, symphony-like, in the great dining establishments. The *mijoté* genre includes such subgenres as stews (*ragoûts*, *civets*, *fricassées*, *gibelottes*, *matelotes*, *estouffades*, etc.), braises (*braises*, *daubes*, etc.), and pot-roasts (*poêlage*). Classic examples of *mijoté* dishes include *bœuf bourguignon*, *coq au vin*, *pot-au-feu*, *civet de lièvre* (a stew of jugged hare), *chou farci* (stuffed cabbage), braised stuffed oxtail, and several dishes from our own meal described below. Long, slow cooking is also often involved in preparing soups and broths, vegetable *fondues*, certain puddings, and *compotes*.

Such dishes might require hours to cook, but once finished they remain, for quite some time, ready to serve immediately. A few can be consumed lukewarm or even chilled; the rest can be kept simmering on the burner of a stove, in a *bain-marie*, on a portable brazier, or in an oven. Thus, they make ideal fare for bistros, which were originally places attracting lodgers and other workingmen looking for a quick but hearty meal.¹ Ironically, today it is *McDo* (the Western invasion of fast food and shopping-mall culture) that threatens the bistros: their number has declined, and their continued viability is being put to the test.

No fast food here! Collectively, our meal was the fruit of well over a hundred hours of planning, shopping, and especially long, slow cooking. That may be old-fashioned, but we were reminded that it’s time well spent, for it yields rich rewards.

To Wash It Down

The wines at our meal, selected by Dan Longone, were bottles of red and rosé bearing the *Vieille Ferme* label, from the southern Rhône valley in Provence. Edward Behr, in his survey of French food, noted that *terroir* (geographic elements such as soil and climate) is the foundation for the production of wines and, therefore, for the development of regional cuisines themselves:

The greatest influence on French cooking is French wine. France produces more of the world’s best wines

than any other country, and their great variety in taste reflects the soil and climate of individual vineyards. The combination of food and wine is so good that French food is inevitably made to complement this outstanding wine.²

In addition to wines and Perrier mineral water, we also enjoyed bottles of sparkling *cidre* (apple cider) and *poiré* (perry, i.e., pear cider). Normandy is the region best known for the latter two products. Just as with grape wines, they are made by fermenting the juices of varieties of fruit that are specially cultivated for this purpose. Cider

pressed from the red Calville apple, most notably in the Pays d’Auge region of Normandy, also gets distilled into a famous apple brandy called *calvados*.

Tripes, prepared for our bistro meal as described below, are often baked with the addition of *cidre* and/or

calvados, and the same beverages are also famously paired with the finished dish.

We Know Where Our Bread Is Buttered

A bouquet of fine *baguettes* stood upright in a large earthenware jug on our buffet table. The loaves were purchased at downtown Ann Arbor’s Café Japon, which features both Japanese and French cuisine and is especially well-known for its *baguettes* and *croissants*.

The baguette was born at about the same time and place as the bistro itself— in Paris, in the years around 1900. Unlike whole-grain, sourdough, and other ancient breads of France, this was a refined urban bread made by professional bakers. It quickly became the standard bread served in bistros as well as more *haute cuisine* restaurants. At myriad street-corner *boulangeries*, customers could buy such loaves for their own meals at home. Yet the baguette, so ubiquitous in city centers, was not common in French suburbs until the early 1960’s, and not in rural areas until the early 1970’s.³

The baguette makes a wonderful accompaniment to all manner of food, but only if eaten fresh— within a few hours. Classically, the dough is made with only white flour, water, commercial yeast, and salt. The soft, airy crumb of a fine baguette already has a buttery flavor and a creamy hue; unlike a croissant, these are achieved without actually adding any butter or milk to the dough.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of a bistro meal, before the rest of the food arrives, the breadbasket is likely to be accompanied with some fresh butter. The *beurre*

purchased for our meal was the Président brand, proudly exported “From the heart of Normandy”. Indeed, Normandy and much of the rest of northern France have long been famed for their cow’s-milk products such as butter, cream, and cheese.

Butter was the traditional cooking medium in a region that includes most of

the North and a couple of promontories running southward— one down the Atlantic coast as far as Bordeaux, the other down the intermountain area as far as Lyon. Animal fats (especially duck, goose, and pig) found wider use than butter in France’s central plateau and in Alsace-Lorraine, while olive oil dominated Provence and Nice in the southeast, with their Mediterranean *terroir*. These “culinary domains” were identified by Waverly Root in his acclaimed work *The Food of France* (New York, 1958), where he argued that cooking-fat is what ultimately shaped the cuisine of each region.

Starters: From Soup to (Pine)nuts

For starters, our bistro meal boasted a *pâté de campagne* [prepared by member Sonia Manchek], i.e., a country *pâté* or, more precisely, *terrine*. It was made from chicken livers coarsely chopped with fresh pork and bacon, then oven-baked topped with thyme and bay leaf, and finally turned out, chilled, and garnished with *cornichons*.

continued on next page



Sonia Manchek’s pâté de campagne. Photos: Randy Schwartz

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Potage Parmentier with truffle oil [Judy Goldwasser] is a soup in which potato, leek, and truffle try to outduel one another in their earthiness! This is actually just one member of a large French family of leek-and-potato soups. The grandmother of this family is the simple *potage taillé* (“cut soup”), named for the dicing of potatoes and leeks that graces its thin broth, which is sometimes slightly thickened with flour. If some milk, cream, or butter is added to the cut soup, the result is called *potage bonne femme* (“good-woman soup”). If the cut soup is instead mashed, blended, or puréed, it becomes *potage Parmentier*, named for the 18th-Century Parisian botanist who led in popularizing the potato. If the cut soup is instead chilled, and half-and-half is added, it becomes *crème vichyssoise glacée*, invented in 1917 by Chef Louis Diat at New York’s Ritz-Carlton and named after his native Vichy, France.

The *salade Niçoise* [Jane and Herbert Kaufer], redolent of the Mediterranean Summers around Nice on the Riviera, is probably the most famous of the French composed salads. Instead of being tossed together in a bowl, the items of a composed salad are attractively arranged on a serving platter. Jane followed a Julia Child recipe that calls for chunks of tuna, anchovy fillets, tomatoes, potatoes, green beans, hard-boiled eggs, lettuce, black olives, and *vinaigrette*. A Winter salad [Randy Schwartz] was equally colorful, with *frisée* and other greens, bright-red roasted beets, toasted walnuts, and soft, fresh goat cheese, all dressed with an orange-juice *vinaigrette*. Roasting the beets in an oven, after drizzling them with olive oil, enhances their flavor and color. In French markets, beets are normally sold pre-cooked in this way, and reportedly this has been true for decades.

The French call the leek “the poor man’s asparagus”. To make *poireaux à la vinaigrette* [Marion and Nick Holt], the white portions of leek stalks are sliced into lengths, tied up in a bundle just like asparagus, simmered in salted water until just tender, then patted dry and seasoned with salt, pepper, oil, and vinegar.

Eggs are not commonly seen at breakfasts in France. Instead, *omelettes* and similar dishes are traditional early courses at other meals, especially at lunch, the big repast of the day. *Cœufs Jeanette* [Harriet Larson] is a dish that Jacques Pépin named in honor of his mother, who was chef-owner of a small Lyon restaurant, Le Pélican; she fixed it often at home when he was a boy, usually as a first course for dinner. It is made by halving some hard-cooked eggs; the yolks are removed, mashed with chopped parsley and other seasonings, and replaced; the halves are then sautéed stuffed-side down, and served lukewarm with a thin, mustardy, mayonnaise-type sauce.

Another egg dish eaten lukewarm is the *quiche* [Pat Cornett and Mel Annis], a deep, steep-sided, savory tart that was originally baked as Lenten fare. Its rich, custardy filling is made by whisking together raw eggs and *crème fraîche* (a slightly fermented cream), then adding butter and any other ingredients desired. Pat made a version that uses leeks, Swiss chard, Cremini mushrooms, Gorgonzola cheese, and toasted pinenuts. The term *quiche* is related to the German *kuchen*, “cake”; its earliest known appearance in Lorraine was in a ducal account book from 1586. A now-famous non-Lenten version that includes pork, ham, or bacon appeared in the late 1800’s with the name *quiche de Lorraine au lard*.⁴

Let’s Hear It for Salt Cod!

Salt-preserved cod (*morue*), being a nonperishable source of protein and a quite tasty and versatile ingredient, has for centuries played an important role in French cookery. In the 1400’s, Basque and Norman fleets began plying the Grand Banks off Newfoundland, salting codfish there for shipment back to European ports. One of the very first restaurants in Europe, Les Trois Frères Provençaux (1786-1869), in Paris near the Palais Royal, owed much of its success to a dish of salt cod with garlic.⁵ Even today in France this preserved cod, usually caught near Iceland, is much more commonly eaten than fresh cod (*cabillaud*). It is featured in dozens of hot and cold dishes of almost unimaginable variety.

Two such salt cod dishes were offered at our bistro meal, both made with recipes from *Bistro Cooking* (New York, 1989) by Patricia Wells, Paris-based food critic for the *International Herald Tribune*. In both recipes, the planks of salt-dried fish are soaked several times in fresh water to remove most of the salt and rejuvenate the flesh in the days before they are broken into pieces for cooking.

Gratin de morue [Eleanor Hoag] was luxuriant in its creamy whiteness of cod and potato. The dish combines milk, *crème fraîche*, butter, egg yolks, garlic, thyme, and other seasonings, and is finished in the oven to receive its golden-brown crust.

The tomato-red *morue à la Provençale* [Joanne and Art Cole] is a recipe that Wells adopted, she wrote, from one of her favorite spots, a neighborhood bistro— Le Caméléon, in the Montparnasse district of Paris— “where the food has flavor, character, personality.” Here, the cod is added to a sauce made from fresh ripe tomatoes, onions, garlic, and herbs. Le Caméléon accompanies this dish with boiled redskin potatoes topped with *aïoli*, the famed garlic-olive oil “mayonnaise” of Provence.

Tastes Like Chicken?

In French cookery and commerce, domestic rabbit (*lapin*)— but not the wild rabbit (*lapereau*) or hare (*lièvre*), which are hunted game— is actually classified as poultry because of its mild flavor and texture. Backyard and barnyard hutches proliferate in villages and rural areas.

Lapin à la moutarde [Laura and Dan Gillis], domestic rabbit cooked in a mustard sauce, is a tradition dating back to the 1600's. Rabbit and other *à la moutarde* dishes helped make Dijon, capital of the Burgundy region, famous for this condiment. Laura used a recipe from *The Balthazar Cookbook* (New York, 2003) by Keith McNally et al., a publication associated with that chef's popular Manhattan brasserie, Balthazar. The rabbit meat was purchased at the Holiday Market in Royal Oak.

Leek and rabbit stew [Gwen and John Nystuen] was improvised from the "leek and rabbit pie" recipe in *Julia Child & More Company* (New York, 1979), simply by omitting the biscuit topping. The rabbit meat, purchased from Sparrow Meat Market in Ann Arbor's Kerrytown shops, was left on the bone and marinated ahead of time with herbs and olive oil. Later the pieces were dredged with flour and browned in bacon fat, then long-simmered in wine and stock along with leeks, onions, and celery. The resulting stew was finally thickened with the addition of *beurre manié* (a blending of butter and flour).

Cook Gently for Several Hours

Cassoulet de Toulouse [Julie and Robert Lewis] is a much-loved rustic *estouffade* (slow-cooked stew) of dried white haricot beans and meats. In its original context among the peasants and villagers of the Southwest, the meats would have included leftover scraps from the household kitchen. The name *cassoulet* derives from the brick-red clay vessel in which this stew is traditionally baked, uncovered, in an oven: *cassolo* in Occitan, *cassole* in French, akin to *cazuela* in Spanish. The vessel's broad opening is good for allowing lots of thick, golden-brown *gratin* to form on the surface. This crust is periodically broken with a spoon and stirred into the rest of the stew, only to be formed anew by the heat of the oven. An instruction often given in *cassoulet* recipes is, "Cook gently for several hours."

Guided by a recipe in Anne Willan's *The Country Cooking of France* (San Francisco, 2007), Julie used Great Northern beans, de-boned *confit de canard* (duck preserved in its own fat, traditionally in a crock, jug, or terrine), lamb shoulder from a local farmer, de-boned lamb breast from Sparrow's, fresh pork sausage, garlic sausage, bacon *lardons*, tomato paste, beef broth, dry white wine,

browned bread crumbs, a large *bouquet garni*, and other seasonings. The major elements are cooked separately and then assembled with the beans for the final oven baking, which intermingles all of the flavors in a velvety richness. The dish is at its heavenly best on the second or third day it is served.

Maurice Curnonsky, the great gastronome and scholar of regional French cuisine, enthused that "the *cassoulet* is one of those great dishes that form a complete meal and that fill gourmets with supreme happiness. To be deliciously anointed with *cassoulet* is tantamount to a gastronomic deification." He distinguished a number of different varieties, including those of Castelnaudary, Carcassonne, and Toulouse (all in the Languedoc region of southwestern France, toward the Pyrenées), and that of the Périgord region just to the north. The latter version, he wrote, is sometimes "a little too rich to my liking because it is complicated by truffles."

Curnonsky went on to write that preparing a *cassoulet* is first and foremost a matter of having sufficient time. The beans, he said, must first be soaked in water for "12 hours at the least", then must be cooked very slowly. He recounted that Castelnaudary native Prosper Montagné, the great chef who later compiled the *Larousse Gastronomique*, went to the town cobbler one Tuesday morning to buy some shoes, only to find the shop door locked and a placard reading, "Premises Closed on Account of Cassoulet".⁶ Anatole France, in his *Histoire Comique*, claimed to have visited a small tavern on rue Vavin, in Paris, where a Mme. Clémence had been simmering essentially the same batch of *cassoulet de Castelnaudary* for 20 years, merely replenishing the goose, pork, or other ingredients now and then as needed! He also slyly observed that compared to this, the rival *cassoulet de Carcassonne* is nothing but a sheep's-leg with beans.⁷

Alongside the *cassoulet*, our buffet table was graced with two other bean stews. The *pistache* [Stephanie Rosenbaum] is a dish with essentially the same ingredients as the *cassoulet*, but cooked in a pot on the stove. The recipe came from the Restaurant La Rotonde by way of Louise Bertholle's *Secrets of the Great French Restaurants* (New York: 1974 English translation by Paula Wolfert). La Rotonde, in operation since 1947, is associated with the Hôtel Poste et Golf in the town of Bagnères-de-Luchon, up in the Pyrenées only three miles from the Spanish border. Dried *flageolets* [Howard Ando] were cooked with seasoned chicken-stock in a crock pot for three hours before being joined by *mirepoix* vegetables and crispy, rendered pieces of Niman Ranch Applewood Smoked Bacon. The *flageolet* is a dwarf variety of haricot with the color of a Lima bean. The French consider this "the Queen of beans" and use it mainly to accompany

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meats, but the item isn't as common in our own country. Howard purchased his at By the Pound, a bulk-food retailer in downtown Ann Arbor, and he devised this recipe himself.

Tripes de bœuf [Bill and Yvonne Lockwood], or beef tripes—the tastiest parts of cattle's stomachs—are a delicacy in France, with dozens of different kinds of preparations and finished dishes. Tripes are highly gelatinous and need prolonged cooking. Bill used a recipe given in the classic book by Julia Child, Louisette Bertholle, and Simone Beck, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (New York, 1961). He baked the tripes with onions for six hours in an oven, and used such seasonings as thyme, bay leaf, pepper, fennel, and orange peel. The tripes were purchased at a Mexican supermarket in southwest Detroit's *barrio*. In France, one visits a shop called a *triperie* to buy this ingredient either fresh, precooked, or blanched and pickled. The four cattle stomachs yield their own distinctive types of tripe: flat, honeycomb (the kind Bill used), etc. A *triperie* will also sell pig and sheep tripes, as well as a host of other variety meats.

Vegetables Baked in a Bread Oven

The dishes *gratin de morue* and *cassoulet* from our meal, discussed above, are examples in which *gratin* plays an important role. This term, often misconstrued by Americans to mean “grated cheese”, refers to the crust created by intense heat in an oven or under a grill. Many French *gratin* dishes get their golden-brown crusts from heat alone, without the addition of cheese or breadcrumbs.

Potato-mushroom *gratin* [Jan Longone], from a recipe in *Bon Appétit* (December 2008), uses heavy cream, Parmesan cheese, Cremini mushrooms, thyme, and garlic. Again finished with a *gratin* are *pommes de terre à la boulangère* [Jan and Octavian Prundeanu], a creamy dish of potatoes and leeks. Jan Prundeanu followed a recipe from Wells's *Bistro Cooking* that makes use of chicken broth and wine.

The term *à la boulangère* (“in the manner of the baker”) recalls an old custom in French towns. On Sundays on the way to church, families would drop by the local bakery with a piece of meat to be roasted there and picked up later on the way home. These roasts would be positioned on racks in the baker's hot, wood-burning bread oven, while casserole dishes filled with, say, sliced potatoes, leeks, and a bit of water, would be strategically placed below them to catch the dripping juices and fat, gaining not only a rich flavor but a wonderful *gratin*.

Chou rouge à la Limousine [George and Virginia Estabrook] is a casserole of red cabbage, chestnuts, and

red wine. In former times, peasants of the Limousin region, a high plateau in central France, would survive the harsh Winter by subsisting largely on cabbage and chestnuts. The chestnuts were also exported to other regions. The Estabrooks' version of this dish was inspired by a recipe in *Mastering*. They sliced the cabbage, boiled the chestnuts, rendered some bacon and duck fat, and added finely chopped onion, garlic, sour apple (to help safeguard the cabbage's color), some red table wine, and chicken-vegetable broth from their own stockpot. This was then oven-baked for hours in a large Creuset casserole dish.

Vegetable side-dishes at our meal included:

- *céleri braisé* [Phil and Barbara Zaret], stalks of celery long simmered in *consommé* along with a carrot and onion, which are discarded before the braise is thickened with *beurre manié*. Recipe from Fernande Garvin, *The Art of French Cooking* (New York, 1958).
- *haricots verts* [Patty Turpen and Carl Paulina], green beans blanched briefly in boiling water and drained, then combined with butter, crushed garlic, and toasted almonds.

Closing the Meal, Closing the Deal

In the old days of the bistro, a man might be satisfied by a *prix fixe* meal that ended with a simple cheese plate or some fruit. But the customers at a modern bistro might not be sold on anything less than an over-the-top example of the confectioner's art. The whole spectrum was seen at our meal.

We tried two different cheeses from France [purchased by Rich Kato]. The first was a ripened and runny *double-crème* with a white rind, made in Pélussin (just south of Lyon) from pasteurized cow's milk and cream. The other was a raw-milk *Comté*, which is a semi-hard, golden-colored, cave-ripened cow's-milk cheese having a mild, nutty taste. A member of the *Gruyère* family, it is produced in large wheels in the mountainous Franche-Comté region adjoining Switzerland.

Poires au vin rouge [Jane Wilkinson] are pears oven-roasted in a syrup of sugar, red wine, vanilla, and spices. In this elegant form of *compote*, a jewel-like finish is achieved by alternately basting with syrup and sprinkling with turbinado sugar. The resulting Bosc pears were resplendent, garnished with mint leaves and glistening like ice sculptures.

Other sweets at our meal included:

- orange rice pudding [Nancy Sannar]
- *kougelhof* [Pat Cornett and Mel Annis], a rich, yeast-risen coffee cake with wine-soaked raisins.

It is baked in a high, swirled ring-mold and is popular in Alsace, Germany, Austria, and Poland, with varied spellings such as *kugelhupf*, *gugelhupf*, and *suglhupf*.

- *génoise* [Mary Lou Unterburger], or butter sponge cake, with apricot *liqueur* and whipped cream
- *bûche de Noël* [Sherry Sundling], a famous Yule-log cake made by rolling up a large sheet of *génoise* and icing it with butter cream. Sherry, a caterer, went all out, right down to the real-looking garnishes of mushrooms (fashioned from homemade Swiss *meringue*) and holly leaves and berries (carved from marzipan).
- *truffes aux chocolat* [Rita and Jim Goss], chocolate “truffles”, a butter-rich *petit-four* candy made to look like fungi freshly dug from the earth. Rita exercised great artistry in creating several varieties, including an almond-praline type. ■

Endnotes

1. This quick-service feature is probably what encouraged the notion that the French term *bistro* derives from the

Russian *bystro*, which means “quickly”. As the story goes, this command would be shouted to cooks by Russian soldiers occupying Paris in 1815-6, at the close of the Napoleonic Wars. But that would be difficult to document, for the earliest known appearance of the word “bistro” in French print was no earlier than 1884. Another theory is that the word is a truncation of *bistrouille*, a slang term for coffee mixed with cheap brandy. A third theory is that it derives from *bistreau*, a term from the Atlantic provinces for a cowherd and, by extension, any good-natured fellow.

2. Edward Behr, “Paris (or What is French Food?)”, Part I, in *The Art of Eating* 45 (Winter 1998), p. 5.
3. Behr, pp. 6-8.
4. Conseil National des Arts Culinaires, *Lorraine: Produits du Terroir et Recettes Traditionnelles* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1998), pp. 131-3.
5. Prosper Montagné, *Larousse Gastronomique* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1961), p. 806 s.v. “restaurant”.
6. All passages from Curnonsky are translated here by Randy K. Schwartz from *Recettes des Provinces de France, Sélectionnées et Présentées par Curnonsky* (Paris, 1962), p. 221.
7. Anatole France, *Histoire Comique* (Paris: Calman-Levy, 1903), pp. 223-4.



Jane Wilkinson’s *poires au vin rouge*

CHAA CALENDAR

(Unless otherwise noted, programs are scheduled for 4-6 p.m. at Ann Arbor Senior Center, 1320 Baldwin Ave.)

Sunday, April 19, 2009

“Cuisine Traditions of Mali, An Islamic
Country in the African Sahel”

Ann Larimore, Professor Emerita of Geography
and Women’s Studies, Univ. of Michigan

Sunday, May 10, 2009

3-5 p.m., William L. Clements Library,
University of Michigan

Lecture on the exhibition, “500 Years of Grapes
and Wine in America: A Remarkable Story”

Dan Longone (Professor Emeritus
of Chemistry, Univ. of Michigan)
and Jan Longone (Curator of American Culinary
History, Univ. of Michigan Clements Library)

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