

THE ART OF
Persian Cooking

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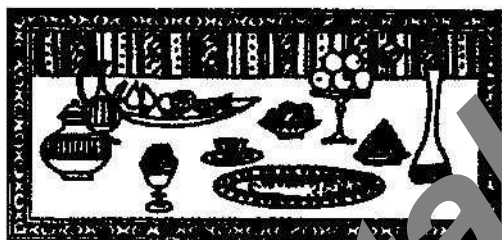
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Preface

During the nine years that I lived in the United States of America I watched with pleasure the curiosity and interest of my friends in Berkeley, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York as they enjoyed the exotic and delicate Persian dishes I served to them. It was their urging that persuaded me to commit my knowledge of Persian cooking to paper.

Increased communications and extensive travel from one country to another have made a pygmy of our world to a point where all men are neighbors. Today there is more need than ever before for all people to work together toward a mutual understanding of the customs, manners, and morals of other lands and cultures.

Certainly one fundamental of life that all men have in common is food. Everyone must eat to survive, but



different people have different food preferences and various methods of preparing their dishes. To understand the food habits and tastes of another country enables one to understand more fully those people's way of life.

Since food is generally based on tradition, I believe that to learn only the recipes of a country's classic dishes is not sufficient. Some knowledge of the traditions behind the dishes, or at least some details of their historical and cultural origins, seems desirable. However, to express the traditions of a nation like Persia, whose customs have changed constantly throughout the ages, is beyond the capacity of any one book.

Despite the difficulties, I have attempted in this book to depict typical customs of Iranian life, along with descriptions of traditional concepts of culinary art which though dating back to ancient times, are still in existence today.

For many centuries the Iranians have looked upon food from three different points of view: the medicinal, the philosophical, and the cultural. Their physicians and philosophers considered food and drink as the principal factors in reviving the body and as an effective means to strengthen or weaken man's character. Consuming an excess of rich and luxurious foods, such as enormous quantities of red meats, fats, starch, or alcoholic beverages, was considered to provoke evil thoughts and to convert a man into a greedy, selfish beast. A healthful diet of vegetables, fruits, fish, fowl, and certain delicacies



composed of mixed petals and blossoms of roses was believed to have unusual powers that could transform man into a gentle and noble creature.

Eat naught but regal food, if you would develop both the body and the soul.

This bit of wisdom was penned by an ancient Persian philosopher.

Short explanations of some of the foods and beverages believed to be the most constructive to health, because of their medicinal values, are given in the last chapter of this book.

The third point of view is the cultural and artistic. Food was considered an art, furnishing enjoyment to both body and mind. And so the Iranians cultivate not only the taste and flavor of their dishes, but also the manner in which they were presented. Unfortunately, most of the elaborately artistic and outstanding dishes in Persian classical cooking have never been recorded. In the course of the ages they have been passed down orally or visually from generation to generation, and as usual, each family proudly cooks its inherited recipes for its own enjoyment.

Not only do Persian dishes vary from one section of the country to another just as, in China, Cantonese cuisine differs from Peking cooking but from family to family. In general the peerage of Shiraz has always been famous throughout Persia for exceptional skill in the culinary arts, and many of the recipes in this book are from Shiraz, handed down to me by my grandmothers and members of



my family on both sides who, generation after generation, produced these same dishes in their kitchens for various public offerings and for private parties. It was in Shiraz, a thirteenth – century city in southern Iran, where I was born.

It is close to Persepolis, the ancient capital of Persia.

To supplement these recipes, I have translated and tested many others which I have gathered for years from my friends of big, old families living in the greatest cities in the north, east and west of the country.

Now nothing more of importance remains for me to say except to offer my sincere thanks to my dear friend, Miss Frances Richardson of Los Angeles, the intelligent and learned head of the library of Twentieth Century Fox, who favored me by reading and commenting upon the composition of this book with great honesty ; to His Excellency, Mr. Bahrood, General Director of General Administration of Fine Arts of Iran and to Dr. Simin Daneshvar, Editor of Nagsho – Negar, the periodical by the Administration of Fine Arts, who granted me permission to reproduce the old paintings and pictures in this book. Their help was indispensable.

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