

An Arabian Feast

*A Feast for Seventy Souls, Served at Dusk from an Open Hearth
Cooked for the St Sebastian's Day Feast AS XXXIV*

Lord Stefano d'Urbino (Alistair Ramsden)
7th January AS XXXIV (CE 2000)

For the first course, take twelve ratls¹ of unleavened bread and serve it heaped on platters. And strew sweet smelling flowers about the tables. And provide plenty of fresh water and cordials.

For the second course, take sixteen ratls of fresh cheese, and olives and pickles, and almonds and pistachios and hazelnuts, and raisins and figs, and serve them decoratively on platters.

For the third course, take four ratls of yogurt and mix it with finely cut cucumber, or as thou will with herbs or spices, and also mix into it a little lemon juice, and serve it in small bowls.

For the fourth course, take one ratl of savoury chickpea paste² and mix it with three ratls of shelled boiled chickpeas, and serve this too in small bowls.

For the fifth course, take six large cucumbers and six bunches of mint and parsley and other herbs and make a salad, and dress it with a little olive oil and lemon juice.

For the sixth course, take twelve ratls of best chicken breast, skin it and dice it large, and soak it in four ratls of yogurt and two of lemon juice, and add thereto a little salt and pepper and nutmeg. And this will soak from noon until just before dusk, when it will be fried on a hot grill and served immediately. And take care to serve a portion of it to the sick and the invalid because it is not hot to the taste.

For the seventh course take twelve ratls of best minced mutton, and soak it in six ratls of lemon juice, and ginger and garlic, and coriander and cumin, and plenty of pepper. And this will soak from noon until just before dusk, when it should be formed into little cakes, and fried on a hot grill, and served immediately. And this should taste of very hot spices.

For the eighth course, take sixty ratls, meaning three or four sides, of fresh mutton. Separate the rib chops from the shoulder chops, neck chops and neck, and these again from the roasting legs, and discard the belly. Take the rib chops and cut them up into cutlets, and soak the cutlets in six ratls of lemon juice, and coriander and mint, and garlic, and plenty of pepper. And this will take from noon until just before dusk, when it will be fried on a hot grill, and served immediately. And this too should be a very hot dish.

For the ninth course, take the aforementioned shoulder chops, neck chops and neck of mutton, and stew them with four ratls of lemon juice and two of honey, and pepper, and cinnamon, and ginger, and garlic, and saffron, and plenty of cardamon, and add thereto a ratl of chopped onions, and the same of carrots, and rosemary, and other herbs if you desire. And this should cook slowly for most of the day. And before you grill the aforementioned chicken, and lamb-mince cakes, and lamb cutlets, take the stew out of the fire, and take out the loose bones and other inedible items, and take some liquid from it and add a ratl of bread crumbs to thicken it, and return that to the pot to thicken the whole stew, and serve it in large bowls with spoons.

For the tenth course, take the aforementioned roasting legs of mutton, and grease them well with olive oil, and rub them with salt, and roast the legs slowly in a covered pot or dish. And this will take from a little after noon until dusk. And when the meat is done, cut it into little pieces and serve it on platters. And serve with it little pots of green sauce, made from plenty of parsley, and balsamic vinegar, and other herbs if you desire.

For the eleventh course, take nine ratls of pastries and biscuits and serve them on platters, and include little Turkish jellies if you desire.

And for the twelfth and final course, take eight ratls of peaches, apples, oranges and lemons, and slice them up, and serve them on platters, and dust them with finely ground sugar and cinnamon if you desire.

¹ A ratl is a medieval Arabic term of measure of approximately one pint. For the purposes of this document, one ratl is taken to be 500g or 500ml.

² Hummus, as far as I understand it (see Cariadoc's Miscellany) has no extant recipe. However all the ingredients for hummus, being chickpeas, sesame seeds, garlic and lemon juice, *are* period; and as it has a familiar and tasty flavour, I have used it to bulked out whole chickpeas. As an aside, chickpeas need to have their cartilaginous shells removed before preparation.

The Shopping List for *An Arabian Feast*.

"Food for seventy with the money for fifty."

Note: For a feast, we are serving 70 people x 750 g per person = 52.5 kg (finished weight).

3 kg pita bread	\$15
2 kg middle eastern biscuits & pastries	\$22
2 kg Greek style yogurt	\$8
1.5 kg Greek fetta	\$15
15 kg side of lamb (about three or four sides) @ \$5/kg	\$75
3 kg lamb mince @ \$5/kg	\$15
3 kg chicken breast @ \$10/kg	\$30
4 large cucumbers	\$4
250 g garlic	\$2.50
250 g onions	\$0.50
250 g carrots	\$0.50
1.5 kg fresh peaches	\$6
250 g apples	\$1
500 g oranges	\$1.50
250 g lemons	\$1
7 bunches of coriander, mint, flat leaf parsley, rosemary and other fresh herbs	\$7
5 litres lemon juice	\$20
1 kg olives	\$9
750 g canned chickpeas	\$4
500 g pickles	\$3
500 g butter	\$2
500 ml olive oil	\$5
500 ml honey	\$3
250 g breadcrumbs	\$0.50
250 g hummus	\$2.50
250 g almonds	\$4
250 ml balsamic vinegar	\$2.50
125 g hazelnuts	\$2.50
125 g pistachios	\$2.50
250 g raisins	\$1
125 g dates	\$1
125 g figs	\$1
Raw sugar, salt, pepper, coriander, cumin, cardamon, saffron, ginger, nutmeg, cinnamon	\$10
7 kg rice	\$20
cordials (1 litre red wine vinegar, 2 kg sugar, 1 bunch fresh mint)	\$7
Dishwashing liquid, paper towels, tea towels, garbage bags	\$10
TOTAL (70 people x \$4.50 = \$315)	\$315
bunches of sweet smelling flowers	(arranged with the Steward)
a large grill plate, and wood or coal for the fire	(ditto)

Documentation

- An excerpt from “The Arabian Knights”, from the C14th Syrian Manuscript edited by Muhsin Mahdi, also known as the Mahdi Manuscript, translated by Husain Haddawy 1990, Everyman’s Library 1992 edition, pages 66-68. (ISBN 1-85715-087-2.)

The Twenty-Eighth Night

The following night Dinarzad said to her sister Shabrazad, “Sister, if you are not sleepy, tell us one of your lovely little tales.” Shabrazad replied, “With the greatest pleasure”:

[The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies]

I heard, O happy king, that once there lived in the city of Baghdad a bachelor who was working as a porter. One day he was standing in the market, leaning on his basket, when a woman approached him. She wore a Mosul cloak, a silk veil, a fine kerchief embroidered with gold, and a pair of leggings tied with fluttering laces. When she lifted her veil, she revealed a pair of beautiful dark eyes graced with long lashes and a tender expression, like those celebrated by the poets. Then with a soft voice and a sweet tone, she said to him, “Porter, take your basket and follow me.” Hardly believing his ears, the porter took his basket and hurried behind her, saying, “O lucky day, O happy day.” She walked before him until she stopped at the door of a house, and when she knocked, an old Christian came down, received a dinar from her and handed her an olive green jug of wine. She placed the jug in the basket and said, “Porter, take your basket and follow me.” Saying, “Very well, O auspicious day, O lucky day, O happy day,” the porter lifted the basket and followed her until she stopped at the fruit vendor’s, where she bought yellow and red apples, Hebron peaches and Turkish quinces, and seacoast lemons and royal oranges, as well as baby cucumbers. She bought Aleppo jasmine and Damascus lilies, myrtle berries and mignonettes, daisies and gillyflowers, lilies of the valley and irises, narcissus and daffodils, violets and anemones, as well as pomegranate blossoms. She placed everything in the porter’s basket and asked him to follow her.

Then she stopped at the butcher’s and said, “Cut me off ten pounds of fresh mutton.” She paid him, and he cut off the pieces she desired, wrapped them, and handed them to her. She placed them in the basket, together with some charcoal, and said, “Porter, take your basket and follow me.” The porter, wondering at all these purchases, placed the basket on his head and followed her until she came to the grocer’s, where she bought whatever she needed of condiments, such as olives of all kinds, pitted, salted and pickled, tarragon, cream cheese, Syrian cheese, and sweet as well as sour pickles. She placed the container in the basket and said, “Porter, take your basket and follow me.” The porter carried his basket and followed her until she came to the dry grocer’s, where she bought all sorts of dry fruit and nuts: Aleppo raisins, Iraqi sugar canes, pressed Ba’albak figs, roast chick-peas, as well as pistachios, almonds and hazelnuts. She placed everything in the porter’s basket,

turned to him, and said, “Porter take your basket and follow me.”

The porter carried the basket and followed her until she came to the confectioner’s, where she bought a whole tray of every kind of pastry and sweet in the shop, such as sour barley rolls, sweet rolls, date rolls, Cairo rolls, Turkish rolls, and open worked Balkan rolls, as well as biscuits, stuffed and musk-scented kataifs, amber combs, ladyfingers, widows’ bread, Kadi’s tidbits, eat-and-thanks, and almond pudding. When she placed the tray in the basket, the porter said to her, “Mistress, if you had let me know, I would have brought with me a nag or a camel to carry all these purchases.” She smiled and walked ahead until she came to the druggists’s, where she bought ten bottles of scented water, lilywater, rosewater scented with musk and the like, as well as ambergris, musk, aloewood, and rosemary. She also brought two loaves of sugar and candles and torches. Then she put everything in the basket, turned to the porter, and said, “Porter, take your basket and follow me.” The porter carried the basket and walked behind her until she came to a spacious courtyard facing a tall, stately mansion with massive pillars and a double door inlaid with ivory and shining gold. The girl stopped at the door and knocked gently.

But morning overtook Shabrazad, and she lapsed into silence. Then her sister said, “Sister, what a lovely and entertaining story!” Shabrazad replied, “What is this compared with what I shall tell you tomorrow night if the king spares me and lets me live! May God grant him long life.”

- “Al-Baghdadi, A Baghdad Cookery Book” 1226 AD / 623 AH, translated by A J Arberry, in *Islamic Culture*, 1939; and “An Anonymous Andalusian Cookbook of the Thirteenth Century”, a translation by Charles Perry of the Arabic edition of Ambrosio Huici Miranda, with the assistance of the English translation by Elise Fleming, Stephen Bloch, Habib ibn al-Andalusi and Janet Hinson, and with the assistance of the Spanish translation by Ambrosio Huici Miranda; in *A Collection of Medieval and Renaissance Cookbooks* also known as Carriadoc’s Miscellany, edited by David Freidman, also known as DSM Carriadoc of the Bow, 5th edition, 1988.
- “The Original Mediterranean Cuisine”, by Barbara Santich, Wakefield Press 1995.