



VOLUME XXIV, NUMBER 3 SUMMER 2008

Repast

Quarterly Publication of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

Desert, Village, and City—

The Evolution of Arab Foodways



Al-Murrah Bedouin men eat communally from a dish of *kapsa* in a tent encampment on the edge of the Dahna Sands east of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in this scene from Spring 1983. *Kapsa* (*kabsa*) is made with lamb, rice, tomatoes, lemons, limes, raisins, spices, and other ingredients.

Detail from a photo by Wayne Eastep in his book *Bedouin* (London: Stacey International, 1985), copyright held by author; used with permission.

MORSELS & TIDBITS

Two current exhibits explore differing aspects of women’s status as cooks, homemakers, and citizens. **“The Old Girl Network’: Charity Cookbooks and the Empowerment of Women”** continues through October 3 at the Clements Library, University of Michigan (Ann Arbor). Curated by CHAA member Jan Longone, the exhibit features cookbooks on many themes with an emphasis on female empowerment, demonstrating how women worked together to help themselves, other women, and the outside world. Their causes included Suffrage, Temperance, military and patriotic support, education, working women, and women’s exchanges. On display will be the first American charity cookbook, *A Poetical Cookbook*, written for the 1864 Sanitary Fair to support those wounded, widowed, or orphaned by the Civil War. Jan will also give a free public lecture, co-sponsored by Clements and CHAA, on September 21 (see page 16 for details). The other exhibit, **“100 Years in the Kitchen: Selling Women the American Dream”**, continues through November at the Conrad N. Hilton Library, Culinary Institute of America (Hyde Park, NY). The exhibit highlights a century of advertisements of food and kitchen appliances, advertisements that in many ways reflected— although often in a delayed manner—the changing role of women in American society. The displays

include a summary of women’s lives and of home-cooking trends in each decade from 1900 to 1999, with representative advertisements and kitchen gadgets, plus a special section depicting propaganda directed at women during the two World Wars.

Food historian Sandra L. Oliver will be leading a participatory workshop, **“The Joy of Recipe Research: Discovering a Recipe’s Past”**, on September 23-25, 2008 at Historic Sauder Village (Archbold, OH). Participants will research historical recipes using cookbooks, newspapers, narratives, and letters, then prepare them using an open hearth or wood-burning stove. For more information, call 1-800-590-9755 ext. 3066 or visit www.saudervillage.org. Sandy will also be giving a free public talk at the Ann Arbor District Library on Sept. 28, marking the first anniversary of the library’s “Ann Arbor Cooks” database; see the Calendar on page 16 for more details. Sandy Oliver is nationally known through her food columns, workshops, and historical re-enactments, and as founding editor of *Food History News* and its website www.foodhistorynews.com. Among the books she has authored or co-authored are *Saltwater Foodways: New Englanders and their Food in the 19th Century at Sea and Ashore*; *Giving Thanks: Thanksgiving Recipes and History, From Pilgrims to Pumpkin Pie*; and *Food in Colonial and Federal America*.

CHAA member Dr. Bernard Agranoff has an article **“Brain Food”** in the forthcoming issue of *Gastronomica* 8:3 (Summer 2008). Bernie is a professor of neurosciences and biological chemistry at the University of Michigan. His article begins with historical conjectures stemming from neurochemistry, and ends with the role of fish oils in neural function, with some opinions and fun thrown in.

“Reading and Writing Recipe Books: 1600-1800” is a conference scheduled for August 8-9, 2008 at the University of Warwick in England. The co-organizers are Michelle DiMeo and Sara Pennell, while the keynote speakers are Margaret Ezell, Mary Fissell, Gilly Lehmann, and Janet Theophano.

The first annual **HomeGrown Festival** is planned for Saturday, September 13, 2008 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Kerrytown area of Ann Arbor. Over a year in preparation, this family-friendly celebration aims to be a catalyst to increase consumption and production of local, sustainably-grown foods and products. Among other activities, there will be chefs demonstrating and serving dishes using local and regional ingredients. The Steering Committee for the event includes Kim Bayer, who spoke to CHAA at its March meeting.

On the Back Burner: We invite ideas and submissions for these planned future theme-issues of *Repast*: Sweets of the Middle East (Fall 2008); Episodes in the History of Breakfast Cereals (Winter 2009); History of American Restaurants, Chefs, and Menus (Spring 2009); Scandinavian-American Food Traditions (Summer 2009). Suggestions for future themes are also welcome. ■

Repast


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THE EVOLUTION OF SAUDI ARABIAN CUISINE

by Amy Riolo

Amy Riolo, a member of the Culinary Historians of Washington (CHoW), is a food writer, lecturer, and cooking instructor. She was raised in an Italian-American family in upstate New York and is a graduate of Cornell University. Studying textile management at that school she became fascinated with design motifs from Cairo, and eventually with Arab and Islamic culture generally. Her first book, Arabian Delights: Recipes & Princely Entertaining Ideas from the Arabian Peninsula (Capital Books, 2007) will be followed by Nile Style: Egyptian Cuisine and Culture (Hippocrene Books, Spring 2009). Amy is a member of the International Association of Culinary Professionals, Les Dames d'Escoffier, and Slow Food DC. She and her husband, an Egyptian whom she met and married while living in Rome, Italy in 1996, reside in Germantown, MD and also maintain a home north of Cairo.

Saudi Arabian cuisine is a combination of healthful ingredients and time-honored techniques enhanced with exotic herbs, flowers, spices, and sometimes even incense. Traditional Saudi kitchens blend spice-infused aromas, intriguing visual presentations, fragrant flavors, and velvety textures with the sizzling sounds of clarified butter being heated on the stove.

There are three distinct periods in Saudi culinary history: antiquity, the period from the 7th Century through the Middle Ages, and modern times.

Ancient Times

Five thousand years ago food plants were grown in the lush areas surrounding desert oases, which were the agricultural centers of the Arabian Peninsula. Many ancient aqueducts still provide water to crops in these areas today. At the time, the inhabitants of Saudi Arabia were nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes. Among the most famous tribes on the peninsula are the Quraysh, who came to control the important caravan routes to and from Mecca, and the al-Murrah Bedouin inhabiting the arid lands east of present-day Riyadh, who were known for their ability to adapt to the most difficult of terrains and who had excellent tracking skills.

As they moved across the desert, tribes relied upon staples that could be taken with them, such as dried barley, rice, and dates, and preserved mutton and lamb. Such staples were used in the original recipes for one of Saudi Arabia's most beloved dishes, *kabsah*. During ancient times, *kabsah* was a one-pot melange of fragrant rice and meat simmered in clarified butter and stock. As trade and outside influences in Saudi Arabia grew, the dish became

much more elaborate.

In addition to the basics, people living along the shores of the Red Sea developed a love affair with seafood, which is as strong today as it was in ancient times. In antiquity a large percentage of Arabians were fishermen. Lobster, crab, shrimp, tuna, grouper, king fish, shark, and other kinds of seafood were enjoyed along the shores of the Red Sea. People living along the coastline would traditionally offer their guests many kinds of fish and rice at one meal. Nowadays, a unique family outing in Jeddah involves holding picnics at dusk along the sea (an area which is referred to as the *corniche*) on Friday evenings. Families bring folding chairs, spread out oriental carpets on the pavement and gaze out into the sea from which a beautiful lit fountain in the shape of an incense censor protrudes. Delicious seafood and rice dishes are enjoyed until late in the evening. Despite the presence of cars, cell phones, portable radios, and television sets, it's easy to envision the same scene taking place long ago.

In ancient times, Saudi Arabians traded with India, Africa, Central Asia, and the Levant. Over the years, Saudi Arabian cuisine consistently benefited from the steady supply of international products due to its posts along both the Gold Route and Incense Trail. Goods from the Gold Route that originated in China made their way into Mecca and Medina (which was then called Yathrib) from the seaport entries of modern-day Muscat (in Oman) and Aden (in Yemen) before traveling on to Ctesiphon (20 miles southeast of modern-day Baghdad), Fustat (near present-day Cairo), and Jerusalem. The Incense Trail also went from Southern Oman into Yemen and Saudi Arabia and up to Petra, Jordan. In addition, the Incense Trail intersected the Silk Route, which carried goods through Europe and Asia by land. The junction allowed silk goods to be acquired by Arabians, even though they weren't technically situated on the Silk Route.

Incense became as valued in the kitchen as it was in the international market. Resins like frankincense were added into stews and soups as a flavoring agent and chewed like gum. For a more subtle incense flavor, cloths would be draped over incense censors and open pitchers at the same time to infuse a beverage with the perfumed smoke. Incense was also viewed as the "final course" in a dinner party. It became fashionable to pass censors around at the end of a dinner party so that guests could perfume themselves before going out onto the street—a tradition still practiced today.

The Rise of Islam

Because of the sea and caravan trade routes, Saudi cities like Mecca and Yathrib (Medina) were already high-traffic areas prior to Islam. The new religion came to Saudi

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SAUDI ARABIA *continued from previous page*

Arabia in the 7th Century when the earliest verses of the Qur'an were revealed to the prophet Muhammad in a cave on top of the Mountain of Light in Mecca. The Prophet's wife Khadija and his companions were the first people to adopt the new faith. By the time the Prophet died in 632, the religion had spread throughout Arabia. After his death, it continued to spread through the Middle East, Asia, North Africa, Sicily, and Spain. The expansion of the Islamic empire led to numerous cultural-culinary exchanges.

New Islamic regulations with regard to eating, as well as broader Prophetic traditions and the effects of increased trade and wealth, led to customs that are still practiced on the Peninsula today. The Five Pillars of Islam helped transform not only the way people worshipped but also the way they conducted themselves in their daily lives:

1. *Shahada*, or witness, is the declaration that there is only one God and that the prophet Muhammad is his last and final messenger. In taking this oath, converts to Islam were also committing to change their dietary and other practices to adhere to Islamic principles.
2. *Salat*, prayer, refers to the five prayers that Muslims are required to give at specific times each day while facing Mecca. Over the years, meal times began to revolve around these prayer times.
3. *Sawm*, fasting, means that during the holy month of Ramadan all adult Muslims who are physically able must abstain from food and drink between sunrise and sunset, as well as obey other regulations. As a result, special dishes were created for the break-fast or *iftar* meals.
4. *Zakat*, charity, denotes the principle that all Muslims who are financially able must donate a portion of their earnings to charity. Food also became an important means of almsgiving.
5. *Hajj*, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, must be completed once in a lifetime by Muslims who are physically and financially able to do so. *Hajj* is one of the most direct ways that Islam affected Saudi cuisine. Many *hajj* pilgrims would finance the journey by trading goods along the way. As a result, the people situated on pilgrimage routes learned to become very hospitable toward the pilgrims— a religious duty, but economically beneficial as well. One of the ways the pilgrims were made to feel more welcome was for the locals to prepare dishes for them from their own homelands.

Even today, as the hospitality industry prepares for its international guests during *hajj* season when millions flock to Mecca simultaneously, the Saudis provide large buffets that cater specifically to the tastes of guests from all around the globe. While gourmet food is often the last thing on pilgrims' minds, Saudis insist on catering to their guests' every epicurean desire. If, for example, you are traveling with a Turkish or Moroccan group staying at a well-known hotel chain, the staff will make sure that you

have Turkish and Moroccan buffets for dinner so that you can be comfortable while you travel.

Many of the dishes originally created to satisfy hunger pangs of foreign pilgrims eventually made their way into the local cuisine. In addition, it is important to remember that transportation was not always as convenient as it is today. Up until the 20th Century it could take pilgrims months, or even years, to reach Mecca. Many of the Muslims who came to Saudi Arabia for the purpose of attending the *hajj* ended up staying there, and their favorite foods became integrated into local cuisine.

The medicinal and nutritional advice given by the prophet Muhammad also influenced cuisine and entertaining in Saudi Arabia. His mandates were later studied by Islamic *hakims* (physicians) who in turn created a new type of natural medicine for Muslims to follow. Islamic medicine created guidelines for eating and drinking based upon the body's elements of hot, cold, moist, and dry. The methodology is similar to the Chinese Yin and Yang or the Persian hot/cold combinations. Certain ingredients like honey, dates, water, nigella seed (*Nigella sativa* or "black cumin", known in the region as "Blessed Seed"), fenugreek, and other spices were found to be useful for treating a wide variety of ailments.

The Prophet himself, a member of the Quraysh tribe, promoted the idea that eating and drinking while sitting upright aids digestion. He forbade people to eat while lying on their stomachs, and discouraged reclining while eating because it obstructs the digestive tract. He avoided mixing multiple hot foods together in the same meal, and promoted eating one hot and one cold dish together. He recommended that dinner should never be skipped, reminding followers that eating even a few dates is better than nothing. He also commented on the benefits of a wide range of herbs, spices, and foods, many of which have been substantiated by modern medicine. These customs are still practiced in Saudi and many other Muslim societies today.

Empire and Commerce

As the Islamic empire grew so dramatically, trade boomed at an extraordinary rate. In addition to providing wealth, the years of trade also spread cultural ideas, knowledge, and recipes throughout the region. Trade elevated Arabian cuisine and living standards from its humble Bedouin origins to a new elegant status with the addition of spices and knowledge from faraway lands.

After the 7th Century, trading expanded westward to Morocco and East Africa as well as north to the Baltic Sea, and during the 8th Century the center of the Islamic Empire shifted eastward with the start of 'Abbasid rule. The middle of the 8th Century is referred to as "the Golden age"

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MANSAF: A CELEBRATORY BEDOUIN MEAL

by Clifford A. Wright

Clifford Wright of Santa Monica, CA is an internationally respected cook, food writer, and researcher. In the food world he is perhaps best known for his magisterial work A Mediterranean Feast (William Morrow and Co., 1999), a learned and comprehensive culinary history accompanied by over 500 recipes. Food writing, including his several cookbooks, is actually a second career for Cliff. After earning an MA in philosophy at the New School for Social Research in his native New York, he had a substantial career in international studies, first with the Brookings Institution, then with the Institute of Arab Studies, and eventually as Executive Director of the American Middle East Peace Research Institute. More recently, in the late 1990's, the New York Times named him as one of the most innovative cooks in the U.S. for his style of authentic regional Mediterranean home cooking.

As the noted French Arabist Jacques Berque once wrote in an article on nomads and nomadism, “anyone who has tasted the food of the Bedouins will never escape from its spell.” Because Bedouin food was subsistence food, I suspect he meant that the meager food was as soul-satisfying as the possibility of Bedouin desert life was astonishing. A proper study of the cuisine of the Bedouin has never been undertaken, perhaps because “cuisine” might be too lofty a word for what amounts to a cookery, and mostly subsistence cookery at that. Studies of Bedouin life are few, but much can be gleaned about the Bedouin’s relationship to food through studies such as Lila Abu-Lughod’s valuable *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. At the heart to an understanding of the desert life of the nomad are the camel and dromedary. The Qur’ān assures the Bedouin that the camel is a gift of God, although these “desert Arabs” are not the most sincere of believers.

Historically, the desert dweller—the meaning in Arabic of the word “Bedouin”—lived in a world of famine cooking. But as in all cultures there were times of plenty and times of celebration. Although the Bedouin might have eaten the seeds of the *drīn* (the fruit of a kind of nard, *Aristida pungens*), wild *fonio* (*Digitaria exilis* Stapf.), *tawit* (the white mulberry, *Morus alba*), and grains of *cram-cram* (sandbur, *Cenchrus biflorus* or *Pennisetum distichum*) as well as desert rat, a delicacy in the Badiat ash-Shām, the heart of the Syrian desert, it is the Palestinian and Jordanian Bedouin who have one of the most magnificent of celebratory meals.



Local notables in the town of Ramallah, Palestine gather around a platter of *mansaf*, early 1900's.

Archival photo, *The Jerusalem Times*.

The Bedouin of Jordan and Palestine prepare a repast of tender lamb and rice pilaf known as *mansaf*. It is a magnificent preparation for joyous occasions such as weddings, family reunions, big festivals, or the arrival of a deeply honored guest. In Palestinian households it is traditionally made when there is an abundance of lamb. The preparation of *mansaf* is perhaps taken even more seriously in Jordan. Even though the population of Jordan is for the most part sedentary today, nearly all native Jordanians are of Bedouin descent. Among Jordanians, great debates can ensue about the preparation of *mansaf*. One Iraqi woman told me that her relationship with a Jordanian man broke up because she admitted to not caring for *mansaf*.

My brother-in-law, Omar al-Qattan, a Palestinian filmmaker, told me that *mansaf* derives from the root word *nasafa*, which means to explode in the intransitive sense, that is, it causes something to explode. How this is related to the actual preparation is unknown. Maybe this is the way to think of it, as the tastes and aromas are an explosion of flavors. The flavors come not so much from spices, although they are used, but from a curious little dried yogurt product called *jamīd*. *Jamīd* is defatted and dehydrated yogurt made from sheep or goat’s milk and sold in rock hard nuggets prepared in the spring and summer. It may have been originally a nomadic Turkish invention. The butterfat of the yogurt is separated by churning, accomplished by shaking the yogurt in a goat skin bag called a *shakwa*. The separated butterfat is then used to make *samna*, clarified butter. The defatted yogurt, called *makhīd* at this point, is strained under high pressure through a cloth, concentrating it into *jamīd*. The *jamīd* is salted and formed by hand into small balls to be placed in the sun and dried until hard. To reconstitute the *jamīd*, which is now fifty percent protein, it is soaked in water and then melted, giving its distinctive earthy flavor to the

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DAMASCUS CUISINE

by Charles Perry

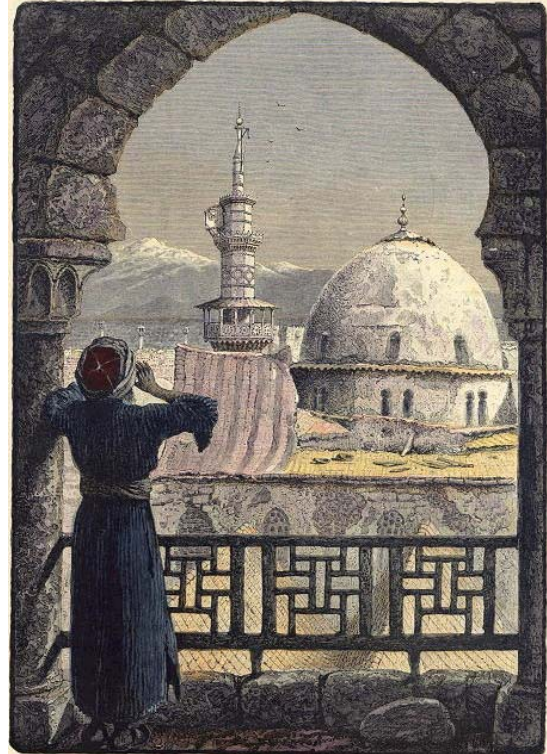
Charles Perry, longtime President of the Culinary Historians of Southern California (CHSC), is perhaps the world's leading authority on medieval Arab cookery. He began studying Arabic on his own at age 15, and completed a bachelor's degree in Near Eastern Languages at UC-Berkeley in 1964. His interest in gastronomy was sparked during a year (1962-3) that he spent studying modern Arabic at the Middle East Center for Arab Studies in Shimlan, Lebanon. He worked eight years as a journalist and editor at Rolling Stone, the rock music magazine, followed by 12 years as a freelance food writer, and then 18 years as restaurant reviewer and syndicated food columnist at the Los Angeles Times, where he retired this past April. Mr. Perry has traveled extensively throughout the Middle East, presents frequently at food conferences, and has been a major contributor to The Oxford Companion to Food and the journal *Petits Propos Culinaires*. His books include the anthology *Medieval Arab Cookery* (2001) and *A Baghdad Cookery Book* (2005), the latter a translation of the 13th-Century cookbook by *al-Baghdādī*.

To Americans, "Arab food" means the cuisine of the modern countries of Syria, Lebanon, Israel (the Arabic-speaking population), and Jordan. Most Arab restaurants and cookbooks are the work of Christians from Lebanon or Syria.

This is the cuisine of hummus, tabbouli, and falafel. It uses a preparation called *kibbi* (lamb, onions, and bulgur wheat beaten to a smooth paste) in a wide variety of dishes, raw, poached, grilled, baked, or fried. Many dishes are finished off with the *taqliya*, a flavoring of garlic and cilantro or ground coriander briefly fried in butter. Here tomato sauce is never a thick, sweet marinara-type sauce but simply tomato juice, continuing a medieval tradition of cooking meat with a tart flavoring, which was formerly provided by sour fruits.

Two great cities have distinctive dialects of this cuisine. Aleppo is known for its scores of *kibbi* preparations, made in unique shapes such as cylinders or domed disks, stewed or grilled with various fruits and vegetables, cooked in a variety of sauces. The city's signature is the use of a medium-hot dried red pepper, which often appears where fresh herbs would be used elsewhere in the region. Aleppo often substitutes sour pomegranate or tamarind syrup for lemon juice. A characteristic Aleppo dish is *muḥammara*, a paste of walnuts, red pepper, garlic, and sour pomegranate. A few Aleppo cookbooks have appeared, all products of Aleppo's Jewish and Armenian communities.¹

The cuisine of Damascus is not as distinctive— possibly



"A Muezzin Chanting the Call to Prayer from a Gallery of the Minaret of 'Isa (Jesus)' in Damascus, Syria.

Wood engraved print from Sir Charles William Wilson, ed., *Picturesque Palestine, Sinai, and Egypt*, vol. 2 (1881).

because Damascus has been less prosperous than Aleppo in recent centuries— and it's certainly not as well known in this country. This essay is based on the cookery of Umm Nabīl Alḥorāni, the daughter of an old Damascus family. In 1980 I enjoyed several weeks of Umm Nabīl's excellent cooking in Damascus and she gave me a typewritten list of all the dishes known to her. I have also consulted Umm Ḥadhām al-Bārūdī's list of Damascus dishes, which appeared as an appendix to an edition of a 13th-Century Baghdad cookbook edited by her brother.²

These are some of the cuisine's characteristics:

1. Strong Turkish influence, dating from when Damascus was an administrative center under the Ottoman Empire. Even today, Damascus is acknowledged to make the best baklava-type pastries in the Arab world. Examples of Turkish dishes rarely found elsewhere in the region (al-Bārūdī excludes all but *tirli* from her list, probably because she could see that their names are not Arabic):

Ababusti (Turkish *kabak bastı*, "stewed gourd"): Stewed gourd garnished with fried lamb, pine nuts, and yogurt.

Aṭirtma (Turkish *oturtma*, "seated, placed"): Eggplant slices, ground lamb, and pine nuts, all fried brown, baked in a particularly thin tomato sauce with a topping of yogurt. It is always served with the typical Turkish accompaniment of a hot green pepper.

Basmashkāt (Turkish *basmış katı*, "pounded layer"): A dish that is not possible unless you're on close terms with your butcher, because each serving requires a particular thin, broad muscle from a lamb's shoulder blade. It is flattened and filled with fried meat and pine nuts, sewn up

into balls about the size of baseballs, and cooked in a lamb and tomato stew. This dish does not appear to be known in Turkey, so it may have been unique to the Syrian Turks.

Jazmaz (Turkish *cızbiz*): Fried meatballs.

Tirli (Turkish *türlü*, "various"): Mixed vegetables fried and then stewed with tomato juice and garlic.

2. A taste for combining tahini (sesame paste) with yogurt. A universal snack throughout the region is baba ghannouj, eggplant purée flavored hummus-fashion with tahini, lemon, and garlic. Damascus prefers its own *bādinjān mutabbal*, which is the same with a dollop of yogurt added for a mellower flavor.

3. A range of stews called *mnazzli* (Umm Nabil's list puts them in a separate category from the more familiar stews called *yakhni*). Elsewhere in the region, *mnazzli* (Classical Arabic *munazzala*, "lowered," perhaps in the sense of "cooked down") is a stew of lamb, tomatoes, and eggplant. In Damascus they distinguish among *mnazzlit aḥmar* ("mnazzli of red"), made with tomatoes; *mnazzlit aswad* ("of black"), made with eggplant slices (which are first toasted in an ungreased pan, giving a flavor reminiscent of roasted ears of corn); *mnazzlit aḥmar wa-aswad* (tomato and eggplant; Umm Nabil's specialty, which she depth-charged with stuffed grape leaves tied with thread); and *mnazzlit akḥḍar* ("of green"), made with zucchini. The distinguishing feature of a Damascus *mnazzli* is that it contains no onion—the meat is browned in clarified butter with chopped garlic before the appropriate vegetable and cooking liquid are added (plenty of cilantro is also added). There are also meatless *mnazzlāt*, such as the appetizing *mnazzlit karamb*, kohlrabi that is stewed, tightly covered, with garlic, cilantro, and a good deal of butter.

If *mnazzli* is made with olive oil instead of butter, it is called *m'alli* (*muqallā*, "well fried").

4. Particular dishes:

Abū Shalhūb ("father of Shalhūb"): Pieces of eggplant and cabbage are fried with garlic and then cooked with water and bulgur wheat. It is finished off with the *taqliya*. Since Shalhūb is a Christian name (it was Omar Sharif's surname before he converted to Islam), this meatless preparation may be a Christian fast-day dish that has been accepted by Muslims.

Bāshā wa-'asākru ("the pasha and his soldiers"): Chunks of gourd stewed with minced meat, chickpeas, tomato juice, and bulgur wheat, the gourd being the pasha and the chickpeas being the soldiers.

Ḥrā'it isba'u (*ḥarāqat isba'u*, "the burning of his finger"; al-Bārūdī spells it *ḥirāq isba'u*): Lentils cooked with noodles and optional chickpeas, made tart with pomegranate or lemon juice. At the end it's flavored with *taqliya* and garnished with fried onions and pita bread croutons.

Kabāb retains its medieval meaning of ground meat, but the word is applied only to ground meat formed into a sausage shape on a skewer. Shish kebab is called *lahma mishwiyya*.

Kibbi kuzbariyyi ("coriander kibbi"): Fried balls of *kibbi* flavored with cilantro and tarragon.

Kibbi mdallali ("pampered kibbi"): Small fried *kibbi* patties which the diner dips in yogurt.

Msabbiḥa ("index finger" or "that which praises"): Ordinary hummus topped with fried pistachios and pine nuts, often made tart with pomegranate juice in place of lemon. Since hummus usually has some kind of garnish in Syria and Lebanon and pomegranate sometimes substitutes for lemon juice, it's unusual for a variation such as this to have its own name. (In Jerusalem, *musabbiḥa* is a humbler dish of hummus topped with boiled dried fava beans.)

Shākiriyyi (unexplained name; the medieval Shākiriyya were the caliph al-Mamun's Central Asian praetorian guard): Lamb shanks, boiled until tender, cooked in garlicky yogurt and served cold over hot rice.

Shalbātū bi-burghul or *bi-ruzz* (the first word is of unexplained origin; looks rather Aramaic): Fried pieces of cabbage cooked with bulgur wheat or rice in meat broth, garnished with boiled lamb.

Sitti Zibqī ("my lady Zibqī"; al-Bārūdī has it as *Sitti Azbaqī*): Lentils cooked with fresh noodles, finished with the *taqliya*. The gluey green known in Arabic as *mulūkhiyya* and in English as "Jew's mallow" (*Corchoris olitorius*) is sometimes added.

Ṭibākhrūḥu (*ṭibākh rūḥu*, "the cooking of his soul"): Another variation on the popular theme of lamb stewed with tomatoes, onions, and eggplant, this one flavored with mint and garlic at the end of cooking. There is also a version made with sliced carrots in place of eggplant, which continues the medieval practice of using eggplant and carrot as seasonal alternatives.

Twaitiyyāt ("little mulberry sweets", from *tuwait*, diminutive of *tūt*, mulberry; al-Bārūdī calls this *tūtiyyāt*): Small lumps of leavened dough (actually, a little larger than mulberries) stuffed with sweetened walnuts or pistachios and either fried or baked.

Znūd al-banāt ("girls' forearms"): *Kibbi* formed into a sausage shape on a skewer and grilled. ■

Endnotes

1. A recent example is Poopa Dweck, *Aromas of Aleppo: The Legendary Cuisine of Syrian Jews* (New York: Ecco, 2007) [see capsule review on p. 15 of our last issue].
2. Umm Ḥadhām al-Bārūdī, "Mu'jam al-Ma'ākil al-Dimashqiyya", in *Kitāb al-Ṭabikh*, Fakhri al-Bārūdī, ed. (Damascus: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1964).

Don't Miss Dessert!

Theme of our Fall 2008 issue—

Sweets of the
Middle East

Book Review

A TART AND SWEET HISTORY

Pierre Laszlo,
Citrus: A History
 Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007
 256 pp., \$25 cloth

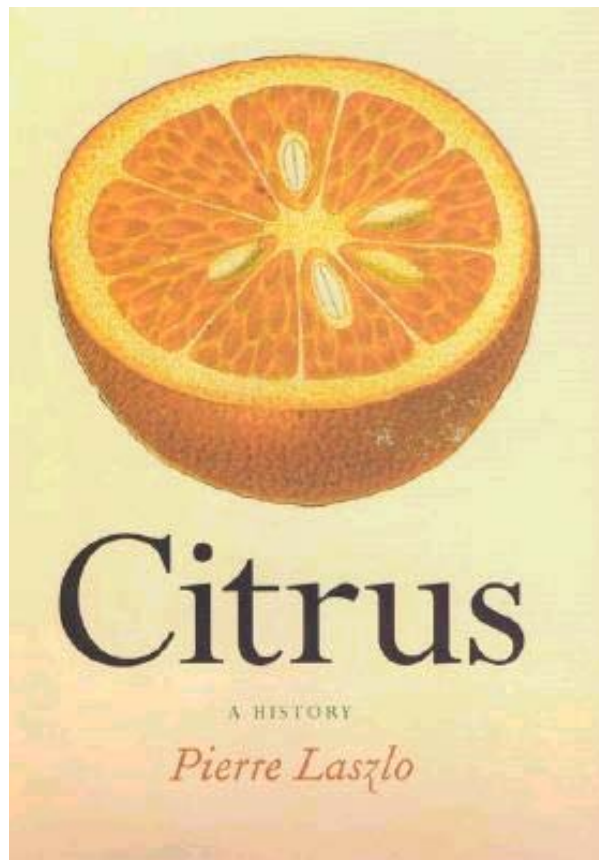
by George F. Estabrook

CHAA member George Estabrook has been Professor of Botany at the University of Michigan since 1970. He specializes in economic botany and ethnobiology, and is Associate Editor of the Journal of Economic Botany. In January 2006 George spoke to CHAA on "The History of Citrus Fruit". He and his wife Virginia, a doctoral student in biological anthropology, do much of their research in Portugal, where they own an apartment in Torres Vedras.

This book is not a textbook, but anyone interested in food history will delight in it. The author's engaging story-telling style lets you feel as if you are in conversation with him, even though he wanders frequently into digressions about slavery, politics, war, or romance, whose direct relevance to citrus is not always made clear.

A real strength of the book is the way it reveals the place of citrus in American and European culture during the last few centuries. Based on contemporary publications, especially magazines and newspapers, artwork and images of containers and packaging, his accounts and interpretations during this period are well founded in historical evidence.

The historical biogeography of the genus *Citrus*, from its domestication in Indonesia several thousand years ago to its introduction into Mediterranean Asia, Africa, and Europe about 1000 years ago, is less well known. This is especially true of the sweet orange (*C. sinensis*), now one of the most widely cultivated crops in the world. Economic botanists still acknowledge several plausible histories for its introduction and spread into the Mediterranean area. Certainly by 1000 CE, sweet orange was widespread throughout coastal Iberia (then under Moorish/Arab rule), and the author's accounts of history since this time are well founded. His explanations of the establishment of commercial citrus growing in the New World, and in the U.S. in the



mid-19th Century in particular, are especially insightful, evoking religious beliefs, promotion of tourism, and profit motive.

Drinking citrus in the form of orange juice, lemonade, and lime punch has been important to the maintenance of human health, revealed through a series of well told, if anachronistic, anecdotes. The author's expertise as a chemist enables lucid accounts of commercial citrus juice scams, and of the extraction and use of the essential oils in citrus peel for flavoring, cosmetics, and other unexpected things; for example, I recently cleaned my bicycle chain with a more environmentally friendly solvent made from citrus peel.

With the kind of meandering, but always engaging, vignettes that the reader has come to expect, Laszlo goes on to examine the symbolic role of citrus in our prose, poetry, music, and art. The final chapters present a series of mouthwatering descriptions of culinary presentations involving citrus. As a special treat for the eyes, there are several photographs, beautifully printed in brilliant color, that illustrate a full spectrum of the presence of citrus in our culture through recent history.

The author, an Emeritus Professor of Chemistry at the University of Liège (Belgium) and the École Polytechnique (Palaiseau, France), has also written *Salt: Grain of Life* (Columbia Univ. Press, 2001). ■

TWO VERSES FROM ARAB SPAIN

Medieval settlement by Arabs brought citrus plants from Asia across northern Africa and into the Iberian peninsula. The carefully irrigated citrus bowers in Andalusia were an endless source of fascination for its Moorish poets. These highly cultured men of letters felt stimulated through all of their senses— by the sweet and sour flavors of the fruit, of course, but also by their fragrances, shapes, textures (moist flesh and leathery rind), and hues. The clash of colors on the skin of an orange as it ripens— cool dark green and fiery yellow— inspired both of the following verses. They were among the poetic fragments that appeared in a literary anthology, *Kitāb Rāyāt al-Mubarrizīn wa-Ghāyāt al-Mumayyazīn* (Book of the Banners of the Champions and the Aims of the Discerning), completed by ‘Alī ibn Mūsā ibn Sa‘īd al-Āndalusī of Alcalá la Real, Spain in the year 1243. They are translated from the Arabic by *Repast* editor Randy Schwartz.

Young Orange

Dwarf daughter of the grove, a rainbow kissed her
leaving its blessing upon her skin.

She dazzles the eye, an ornament of peridot
and pure gold fashioned by rain,

as if Moses, God’s prophet, had set her ablaze,
and the sage al-Khadir laid his green palm over her.

al-Āṣamm al-Marwānī
Córdoba, Spain, 12th Century

Ripening Orange

The troops lined up and raised a lookout,
Turk and Tanzanian on an orange-skin terrain.

When the battle broke, the Turks were routed
by the ranks of eager and invincible Africans.

But then the Turks shook off their stupor,
returning to fight the fight of courageous men.

War seldom spares the eyes that survey its carnage,
but this war gapes the mouth with gladness.

Abu Dharr Muṣ‘ab ibn Muhammad ibn Mas‘ūd
Jaén, Spain, 1140-1208

MANSAF *continued from page 5*
mansaf. *Jamīd* is made in the home for the most part, although one can find it in stores in Amman.

In the preparation of *mansaf*, large chunks of lamb are first browned in clarified butter and then slowly stewed in the liquefied *jamīd* and some water with a sprinkle of *bahārāt* spice mix until the meat is falling off the bones. Meanwhile, the rice pilaf is cooked in the usual way, but at the end of the cooking some *jamīd* sauce is stirred in to make the rice a bit watery.

How one eats *mansaf* is as important as how it tastes. Several overlapping sheets of a thin fine wheat-flour flatbread, the size of a small pizza, called *marqūq*, are laid directly on the table or a large communal platter and are covered with the stewed lamb and cooked rice pilaf. Another bread can be used, called *shrak*, a whole-wheat flatbread baked on a domed griddle over an open fire. It is very thin, as is *marqūq* bread. Almonds and pine nuts previously fried in clarified butter are sprinkled abundantly on top of the rice. Finally, a bit of melted clarified butter is sprinkled on top and the eating begins.

Everyone eats with their fingers in a ritualized manner with a high degree of etiquette. Hands are first washed and the right sleeve rolled up. Guests sit or stand around the table sideways, with their right side tilted slightly toward the food, and eat only with the first three fingers and thumb of the right hand. Each person stakes out a small area of the *mansaf* that is in front of them and moistens it with the bowl of *jamīd* that is passed around. Grace is given, *al-hamdu lillāh* (thanks be to God), and the eating begins.

One eats in one of two ways. Small amounts of rice and meat are picked up, compacted slightly, and brought up to the mouth. No food should fall from the hand or the mouth as you eat, nor should your fingers touch your mouth; the food is flipped into the mouth from about an inch away. In another method the diner forms a ball of rice in the palm of the right hand, constantly flipping the ball in the air because it is quite hot. Then, for those who are dextrous and talented, the rice ball is flipped, sometimes from a foot away, into the mouth. In some situations the host will form the rice ball in his own hand for the guest of honor.

There are several essential ingredients in making *mansaf*, besides the lamb, rice, and *jamīd*. One is the spice mixture known as *bahārāt*, which can be purchased in Middle Eastern markets or made at home by combining ground black pepper, allspice, cinnamon, nutmeg, coriander seed, cumin seed, and cardamom seeds. *Mansaf* is not a dish you will find in a restaurant— it is a special preparation for a special event. ■

SAUDI ARABIA*continued from page 4*

of Islamic trade. The ‘Abbasid caliphate, based in Baghdad, controlled the entire Islamic empire, which included Saudi Arabia. From Morocco, the Arabian Peninsula adopted couscous and *tajines*, which are very similar to their Moroccan counterparts except that they are made with typical Saudi spices. Local spice mixtures, known as *baharat*, were enriched by spices found on the East African island of Zanzibar off the coast of Tanzania. It was there that the Saudis obtained cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon, and pepper essential to their spice mixes. Nowadays there are separate spice mixes for fish, poultry, beef, lamb, and vegetables. Spices were seen as highly personal and were used essentially as traditional medicines. Spice-shop vendors would “prescribe” spice mixtures to cure physical and spiritual maladies the way modern doctors prescribe pharmaceuticals.

Under the ‘Abbasid caliphate, a noteworthy amount of education and scientific knowledge was spread throughout Islamic society. The average thinkers of the time were not only successful physicians and philosophers, but astronomers, alchemists, and writers as well. The “father of modern medicine” Ibn Sina, known as Avicenna in English, is one of the most famous figures from this time period.

The ‘Abbasids also placed great importance on cooking, and the philosopher al-Kindi began to write about it as an art form. The ‘Abbasid kitchen, which was based largely on Persian cuisine, was adapted to native Arabian ingredients and eventually influenced Saudi cuisine a great deal. Common Persian ingredients like basmati rice, dried lemons and limes, baklava pastry, flower waters, and dried rosebuds became common in the Arabian kitchen. As a result, Saudi *kabsah* was enhanced with fragrant basmati rice, and dried lemons and limes added their deep citrus flavor. Even as settled life became more common in Arabia, this dish of nomadic origin remained popular, with lamb and chicken being common additions to the recipe.

As the Islamic empire grew eastward, trade and relations with India increased significantly. So many new goods from India were being introduced to the Arabian Peninsula that the Arabic term *al-hind* (“India”) was used to represent anything coming from faraway lands regardless of their exact origins. Coconuts, for example, are *jowz al-hind* (“Indian walnuts”), while tamarinds are *tamr hindi* (“Indian dates”). In the case of tamarinds, the Arabic name accurately states the source of origin. Cardamom, a spice integral to Saudi coffee mixes as well as sweet and savory dishes, was obtained from India. As they traded with Northern Europeans, Arabians introduced cardamom to Scandinavia, where it still plays an important role in many Swedish baked goods.

Although coffee grew prior to the 13th Century in

Ethiopia and Yemen, it is believed to have been roasted for the first time in 13th-Century Yemen. Coffee culture spread to Saudi Arabia with the help of imams (Muslim clerics), who learned about its stimulant properties and used it as an aid to stay awake during long hours of devotion. Soon it became known as “the wine of the Muslims”. The cultural connotations of drinking coffee in Saudi Arabia bear some resemblance to the western associations with the drinking of alcohol. The intoxicating aroma of Saudi coffee—lightly roasted grounds mixed with the cool, crisp flavor of cardamom—exudes from homes, shops, cafés, restaurants, and supermarkets throughout the Kingdom. More than just a drink, it’s used as a means to lift spirits, talk over problems, or get people together and celebrate.

A Modern Melting Pot

During the modern era, ingredients like corn, tomatoes, and potatoes from the Americas became available in Saudi Arabia. Saudis began growing their own produce, which they now even export to other countries in the world.

Since the 20th Century brought increased wealth and opportunity to this petroleum-rich region, people from all around the world came to the Arabian Peninsula for employment. Many of these immigrants and their descendants work in or own restaurants. Their signature dishes have become part of today’s Arabian cuisine. Excellent and authentic Lebanese, Pakistani, Indian, Senegalese, Egyptian, Chinese, Japanese, and Moroccan cuisine can be found in Saudi Arabia today.

Increased wealth and modern transportation have made it possible for people of the Arabian Peninsula to go abroad and try different cuisines. When they return home, they are eager to incorporate the “new” foods they tasted into Saudi cuisine. As a result, cities like Jeddah, Riyadh, Medina, and even Mecca are filled with international chain restaurants. American, European, Indian, and Middle Eastern restaurants are everywhere. A trip to the supermarket in any one of these cities reveals famous American and French brands offered side by side with traditional Arabian ones. Typical wedding buffets may offer varieties of Moroccan couscous and *tajine* along with Arabian *kabsah* (which today can be made with beef, chicken, or lamb, tomatoes, and more than a dozen spices), Pakistani bread, Indian *biriyanis* and *tikkas*, and American and Egyptian desserts.

With such a wide variety to choose from, and a rapidly changing culinary scene, one might assume that Saudi Arabians would be concerned about keeping their food identity intact. As one Saudi airline pilot claimed, however, “In essence...Saudi cuisine is a melting pot...just like American cuisine is...we adopt food from everywhere and make it our own.” So far, it’s an arrangement that’s worked out beautifully. ■

WINDS FROM THE EAST

An Empire of Spices

It is remarkable how the lust for spices—or to be precise, for the riches that could be made from them—played such a major role in world history. When we remember that Vasco da Gama crossed the Indian Ocean, and Columbus the Atlantic, searching not for gold and silver but for the Spice Coast and the Spice Islands, or when we recall the violent rivalry that arose between the Christian West and the Muslim East for control of spice routes, we are reminded that this luxury item stimulated the early stages of globalization (trade, exploration, conquest, and empire-building). Three new books explore the history of spices and their impact on the world order:

- John Keay, *The Spice Route: A History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, California Studies in Food and Culture, 2007; 308 pp., \$16.95 paper). The author has written several earlier books on the history of India, China, and the British East India Company.
- Michael Krondl, *The Taste of Conquest: The Rise and Fall of the Three Great Cities of Spice* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007; 320 pp., \$25.95 cloth). Krondl, a food writer and cooking teacher and a member of the Culinary Historians of New York, explores the impact of the spice trade on the cuisines represented by Venice, Lisbon, and Amsterdam. He spoke about the book at the New School in Manhattan in February and to CHNY in April.
- Paul Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008; 288 pp., \$30 cloth). This is perhaps the most scholarly of the three books. Freedman, a history professor at Yale, also seeks to explain the medieval demand for spices, not only for their taste and fragrance but also for their sacred, symbolic, and medicinal importance. We would be remiss not to also mention an excellent anthology of survey essays in global culinary history edited by Freedman, *Food: The History of Taste* (Berkeley: University of California Press, California Studies in Food and Culture, 2007; 368 pp., \$39.95 cloth), which won the IACP Cookbook Award for 2008 in the category “Food Reference/Technical”. Freedman was interviewed last November by Lynne Rossetto Kasper on her radio program, “The Splendid Table”. ■

Faster Than You Can Say “Flavor Packet”

Bang the gong *three* times!— three Asian-inspired convenience foods have major birthdays this year.

Rice-A-Roni, “the San Francisco treat”, was invented 50 years ago by Vincent M. DeDomenico. In 1958, experimenting with a dish made by his sister-in-law, he combined rice, vermicelli noodles, and dried soup to produce a kind of instant pilaf. His Sicilian-immigrant family, which had already built up a local noodle-making business called Golden Grain Macaroni Co., sold \$100 million worth of Rice-A-Roni in its first year! DeDomenico passed away last October at the age of 92.

Also celebrating its 50th anniversary is “chicken ramen”, the world’s first form of instant ramen, which was introduced in 1958 by Momofuku Ando and his Nissin Food Products Company in Osaka, Japan. Sold as a block of quick-fried Chinese noodles, it can be boiled in water for only three minutes along with the accompanying packet of soup seasoning, which is usually heavily laced with monosodium glutamate (MSG). Rock musician Elvis Costello has titled his new CD “Momofuku” to emphasize how quickly he threw the music together— although it did take him longer than three minutes! Momofuku Ando, 96, passed away in January 2007.

Glutamate itself was discovered in 1908 by chemistry professor Kikunae Ikeda at the University of Tokyo, where its centennial celebration is scheduled for this September. Ikeda called the flavor *umami* (“deliciousness”), and it is sometimes referred to as the fifth basic flavor, after salty, sweet, sour, and bitter. When Ikeda isolated the responsible amino acid from seaweed broth and turned it into a salt, he dubbed it *ajinomoto* (“essence of taste”) and helped form a company of that name to market it. Ac’cent, a form introduced in the U.S. in 1947, has also been popular, but the Ajinomoto Company in Japan is still the world’s leading producer of MSG. ■

CHAA Winter Meetings

SPOTLIGHT ON SUSTAINABILITY AND THE TABLES OF EUROPE

The Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor, now celebrating its 25th anniversary, hosted a rich series of monthly talks this Winter organized by Program Chair Julie Lewis. The presentations took up gastronomic traditions in selected parts of Europe (Russia, Sweden, and Burgundy), as well as the rediscovered practices of local, organic, and diverse food production.

Russia and Sweden

Moscow native Alina Makin, head of the Intensive Russian program at the University of Michigan, got our Winter schedule of talks underway on January 20 with her PowerPoint presentation, “Dining à la Russe: Evolution & Revolution in Russian National Cuisine from the 10th to the 19th Century”. She accompanied her talk with samples such as vinaigrette beet salad with dill (a typical Lenten dish), breads, stuffed breads and pies, cookies, and beverages. Ms. Makin identified several underlying factors that have shaped Russian cuisine, including the region’s abundant forests and bodies of water, the challenges faced by its tillers of the soil, its massive enslaved peasantry, low overall population density, the weakness of external trade ties, and the strength of Christianity there from the 10th Century onward.

Six historical stages of Russian foodways can be discerned in this period, Makin explained:

- Old Russia from the 10th to 16th Centuries was the setting for many classic Russian foods such as sourdough rye bread, *kasha* buckwheat porridge, *blini* buckwheat pancakes, *borshch* beet soup, and *pirogi* pies. The words themselves (*kasha* = “feast”, *pir* = “fire”, “feast”) reflect how some of these were originally ritual holiday foods. The Byzantine Orthodox calendar has about 200 fasting (“Lenten”) days a year, when eggs, milk, and meat may not be eaten. A taboo against mixing fast and non-fast dishes discouraged culinary innovation.
- With the annexation of eastern lands and the growth of east/west trade, the ensuing period up to the late 1600’s enriched the aristocracy and widened class distinctions. Huge dishes such as baked or roasted meats graced the noble table, as did food formed into decorative art. Eastern introductions included noodles, dumplings, tea, sugar, and citrus and other fruits.
- Western-style reforms begun under Tsar Peter the Great’s rule (1696-1715) also affected cuisine, as seen in the adoption of West European table settings, service, and meal times, beverages such as ale and wine, the all-important potato, and Germanic-influenced *zakuski* appetizers.
- The post-Napoleonic era of the early 1800’s saw a resurgence of Russian nationalism, the assimilation of heritage dishes, and publication of the first native cookbook, V. Levshin’s *Ruskaia Povarnia* (1816). French chefs such as Carême and Urbain Dubois helped simplify meal courses and introduce many lighter, more refined dishes, such as beef Stroganov.

- The late 1800’s saw the replacement of the Russian stove by the range, and the collection and reconstruction of provincial village recipes. Many cookbooks were published, most notably Elena Molokhovets’s *A Gift to Young Housewives* (40 editions from 1861 to 1917).
- The Bolshevik period was characterized by simple, peasant-based food and diets of deprivation. Few cookbooks were published.

“Traditional Swedish Foodways” was the topic of the February 17 presentation by Kathleen Timberlake, a CHAA member who for years has researched and written about Scandinavian and Scandinavian-American customs. She provided samples of crisp-breads, homemade cookies and other baked goods, berry jams, and coffee. Kathleen explained that while 90% of Swedes now live in urban settings, they continue to nurture ties to natural and rural areas and gardens. Their passionately-held food traditions won’t be displaced anytime soon by global and industrial foods. Among foreign influences that have long been felt in Sweden, however, are German customs, sophisticated French techniques (introduced after 1818, when a former marshal of Napoleon, Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, took the Swedish throne), and, especially in the far south, Danish cuisine with its rich ingredients like goose, pork, and eel.

The main traditional grains of Sweden are rye, barley, oats, and flax. Wheat flour, thought of as a French borrowing, was used mostly for fine baking. Leading aquatic foods include *strimming* (Baltic herring), *sill* (North Sea herring), flatfish, shrimp, crab, crawfish, anchovies, and smelt. Dairy products are also very important, including fresh milk, clabbered milk, yogurt, and cheeses made from goat’s-milk whey. Popular meats include pork, ham (a classic Christmas dish in the south), sausages, blood pudding, beef, venison, and reindeer. The potato, not content to appear in its own guise at almost every lunch and dinner, makes more veiled appearances inside sausages and as a type of flour. Other key vegetables are cabbage and its relatives; root vegetables (rutabaga, turnip, carrot); and a variety of peas and beans. Venerable laws give Swedes the right to forage in woods even on private property: most prized are mushrooms and—important for their Vitamin C—berries (lingonberry, raspberry, currant, gooseberry, blueberry, cloudberry, strawberry). Sauces made from the lingonberry (a sort of Old World cranberry) are used as dressings or accompaniments for all manner of dishes. Prominent herbs and spices include cardamom and saffron (in baked goods), dill (especially with salmon), pepper, mustard seed, and mint (in candies).

Among other celebrated Swedish foods are about 150 types of pickled herring, popular among all classes; *surstrimming*, a herring traditionally fermented in the ground to a smelly finish; *lutfisk*, the famous stockfish dish; “Jansson’s temptation”, made with smelt, grated potatoes, onions, and cream; “Thursday pea soup”, made with whole dried yellow peas; nettle soup; and *pytt i panna*, a hash of leftover meat, potato, and onion, fried in fat and served with an egg on top.

The Wines That Made Burgundy Famous

“Exploration of the Wines of Burgundy: An Historical Overview” was the April 20 presentation by Alex Pratt, buyer in the wine department at Morgan and York. The latter is an Ann Arbor retailer of fine wines and specialty foods; it was created in 2001 with the sale of the Big Ten store, whose roots went back to 1940.

Mr. Pratt noted that the wines of Burgundy (Bourgogne) in east-central France are some of the finest and most famous in the world. The limestone deposits underlying this region and the resulting chalky soil give its major grape varieties (notably the red Pinot Noir and the white Chardonnay) their distinctive mineral backbone, but the cool climate means that vintages of the highest quality are not routine. The major vineyards are situated in the Côte d’Or, Côte Chalonnaise, Mâconnais, and Chablis areas.

The Romans introduced vines to Chablis itself, but the Burgundians, a Scandinavian tribe who settled in the First Century CE, expanded the practice of winemaking in the region. Significant advances were made in the early Middle Ages, when Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries became proficient in the key techniques of husbandry, fermentation, aging, and record-keeping. By late medieval times the leasing of vineyards on a *fermier* (cash-rent) or *metayer* (share-crop) basis had begun, a practice whose remnants exist today. Church lands were confiscated by the 1789 Revolution, leading to complex, inheritable private ownership of vineyards. Chablis, the dry wine made from Chardonnay grapes in that area, became prevalent in Paris in the 1800’s in part because it was so easily shipped there via the Seine, but after completion of the Paris-Marseilles railway in 1856 it had to compete with cheaper southern wines.

Quality winemaking did continue in the region, interrupted only by the *phylloxera* disaster (1870’s) and the world wars. (During the *phylloxera* years, several vintners relocated to the sandier soils of La Rioja in northern Spain, where their influence on wine is still felt.) Postwar over-reliance on chemical fertilizers and on alternate varieties gave way to a return to traditional organic methods in the 1970’s, boosting wine quality. On the other hand, certain deviations from tradition have also tended to improve quality, such as fermenting in temperature-controlled stainless-steel tanks rather than in oak casks.

Pratt also discussed the delicate factors affecting the quality of each kind of grape grown in the region. Agricultural *terroir* (comprising the elements of soil, microclimate, altitude, and slope) is more relevant to Burgundian wines than to almost any others. Its impact operates side by side with more human factors of history and tradition, and the myriad decisions made by vintners, such as exactly when to harvest the grapes, whether to de-stem and/or partly de-juice (*saigner*, “bleed”) them prior to fermentation, how long to ferment, etc. The highest-quality vintners, who necessarily produce on a very small scale, are honored with the designation Grand Cru or Premier Cru, ranks that now number 34 and 476 members, respectively.

WORD Up: Grow Organic, Eat Local

“Slow Food: Finding and Celebrating Our Local Food Community” was presented on March 16 by Kim Bayer, a

member of the leadership team for Slow Food Huron Valley (SFHV). SFHV is the Washtenaw County chapter, or “convivium”, of Slow Food International, a movement begun by journalist Carlo Petrini of Bra, Piemonte, Italy in 1986 as a protest against the incursion of fast food. Now boasting over 80,000 members in more than 100 countries, the key goals of the organization are to promote fairness, sustainability, quality, and healthfulness in the production and consumption of food.

Slow Food’s mission necessarily entails the preservation of endangered tastes. Bayer noted that some 70% of global food diversity has been lost since 1900, and today only 30 plants account for the vast majority of human global consumption of non-animal foods. In the U.S., Slow Food works closely with RAFT (Renewing America’s Food Traditions) and maintains a sort of endangered-species list of foods, called the Ark of Taste. To “eat locally” is one strategy to safeguard such endangered foods and to increase the healthfulness and savoriness of our diets. The locavore movement advocates consuming foods from one’s own “foodshed”.

SFHV, one of six *convivia* in Michigan, currently has 80 members and a mailing list of 300. It meets monthly and publishes its own newsletter. Activities have included promoting local foods and producers, farmers’ markets, and community gardens; farm tours; potluck meals featuring local foods, and workshops about procuring and cooking such foods; presentations at schools, and an Edible Schoolyards project at Tappan Jr. High; and Pie Lovers Unite! (co-organized with the Sustainable Table), a pie festival and tour of local and sustainable food producers. Bayer also listed several local eateries whose chefs are “thinking outside the box” and trying to implement Slow Food principles.

One such eatery is Zingerman’s Roadhouse in Ann Arbor. Alex Young, the head chef there since its founding in September 2003, made a presentation to us on May 18, “Double Digging Deep: The Story of Chef Alex’s Organic Garden”. Double digging, Young explained, is a key aspect of the system of small-scale cultivation known as WORD (Wide rows, Organic methods, Raised beds, Deep soil), elucidated by Vermont gardener Edward C. Smith in his book *The Vegetable Gardener’s Bible* (Storey Publishing, 2000).

At his Cornman Farm, Chef Young and his farm manager clear each new plot by digging two one-foot-deep layers, forming a very well-aerated bed of soil. Their fertilizers and pest controls are fully organic, including such “high-tech” methods as straw, manure, restaurant scraps, and crop rotation with clover and vetch. Plant diversity is important to replenish the soil, prevent blight, and attract a balance of insects. The short Michigan growing season is extended by use of a greenhouse. By using a roto-tiller and plow to mechanize Smith’s hand-spade methods, they have gradually increased the land under tillage to 3 acres, with plans to expand to 15-25.

This year, Cornman Farm supplied the Roadhouse with 16-18 tons of potatoes, and smaller quantities of heirloom tomatoes (18 varieties), corn, chili peppers, and other crops. Customers at the restaurant have responded well to these local ingredients and to a menu that is now updated on a weekly basis. Young’s goals next year include growing a variety of grains for use at Zingerman’s Bakehouse. ■

CELEBRATING TWO GIFTS FROM ANCIENT AMERICA

International Year of the Potato

By United Nations declaration, 2008 is the International Year of the Potato. “Potatoes have become increasingly important in the developing world for both sustenance and income”, noted Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as he helped launch the effort. “We are happy that the International Year will allow us to raise awareness of the importance of potatoes, which originated in the Andes of Peru but since then have spread all over the world, particularly now in developing countries”, he said. Potatoes are currently the fourth largest food source on the planet, following wheat, rice, and corn. Over half of the world’s potatoes are now grown in the developing world, where production has doubled in the past 15 years. The leading producer since 1993 has been China, where much of the crop is exported to the West, and more is turned into potato starch.



In conjunction with the International Year, James Godfrey, Chairman the International Potato Center (CIP) in Lima, Peru, will deliver a plenary talk on the potato at the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery this September. The symposium theme this year is Vegetables; for more information, see pp. 13-14 of our last issue. The CIP and FAO jointly organized an international forum last March, “Potato Science for the Poor— Challenges for the New Millennium”. The forum was held in Cuzco, a city in the Peruvian Andes that was capital of the ancient Inca empire.

Providing complete nutrition, and easily grown, the potato seems like a miracle food— yet its wild ancestor was toxic to humans because of its alkaloid content. We have the ancient inhabitants of the altiplano to thank for domesticating this tuber about 8,000 years ago. That is the starting point for a fascinating tale, well told in a book just published in June, *Propitious Esculent: The Potato in World History* (London: William Heinemann, 2008; 320 pp., £18.99 cloth). Its author, John Reader, a British writer and photojournalist trained in anthropology, has relied on his careful study of the subject and his wide travels, including in the high Andes, Ireland, and East Asia. We can follow every twist and turn of potato history, from the early suspicions of the plant in Europe to its overreliance there as “bread for the poor” to stave off hunger and, tragically, the resultant famine in Ireland; from the ennobling of the potato as an elegant culinary item in France and other countries to its massive use in fast convenience foods; and from the current genetic studies of the plant to its likely future role, including in space travel.

Coincidentally, potato tycoon J. R. Simplot passed away on May 28. Simplot started out as a spud farmer in Idaho and eventually amassed a fortune of \$3.6 billion, in part by contracting to supply frozen potato products to McDonald’s Corporation. ■

Chocolate: The Exhibition

“Chocolate: The Exhibition” continues at The Henry Ford Museum (Dearborn, MI) through September 7. The exhibit, now on national tour, was curated by Jonathan Haas at the Field Museum in Chicago with financial support from the National Science Foundation. The display cases trace the origins of chocolate to ancient Mesoamerica, where ruling strata enjoyed a bitter, unsweetened, frothy, nonalcoholic beverage that was made from fermented cacao beans and that had religious and ceremonial significance. The European and North American history is also covered, including such episodes as the Dutch invention of a cocoa press that allowed chocolate to be processed more cheaply, and the massive use of chocolate for WW2 troop rations.

Serious chocoholics will also be interested in three recent writings on the subject.

Findings published in a scientific journal last Fall have pushed the earliest known date for cacao use back another 500 years, into the Olmec period. Yale anthropologist Michael Coe had predicted years ago that the Olmecs probably cultivated cacao; for one thing, the word *cacao* was borrowed from the Olmec language by the later Mayans. Now, a team headed by anthropologists John S. Henderson of Cornell and Rosemary A. Joyce of UC-Berkeley, analyzing residues found in ancient pottery vessels dug up in Honduras, has reported that an alcoholic drink was being made there from fermented cacao around 1100 BCE. Their article, “Chemical and Archaeological Evidence for the Earliest Cacao Beverages”, appeared in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 104:48 (Nov. 27, 2007). Interestingly, the part of the cacao pod that was used to make this beverage was not the dark, bitter “beans” but the sweet, white pulp. The pulp has a mucilaginous quality similar to that found in okra pods.

The dual use of fermented cacao pods— for their pulp and for their beans— continued into modern times. As Allen M. Young explains in *The Chocolate Tree: A Natural History of Cacao* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007; 218 pp., \$24.95 paper), in South America the pulp is traditionally used to make a refreshing beverage, while in Central America the beans are used to make chocolate. Young, a zoologist by training, has spent four decades researching cacao in Costa Rica. This book, revising and expanding his 1994 classic, is serious and in-depth, yet accessible and fascinating, taking up such questions as the dispersal of cacao from its primeval center of origin in the jungles of Amazonia; the mystery of how the cacao plant gets pollinated; the plant’s delicate place in rainforest biodiversity; the surprising variety of human ways to exploit it; and the social, economic, and environmental impact of its large-scale cultivation and commoditization.

Last year, a double issue of the journal *Food and Foodways* (15:1-2) was devoted to the history of cacao and chocolate in the Americas and Europe. ■

JULIA CHILD: A LIFE WORTH STUDYING

by Randy K. Schwartz

This Summer, a new course was launched at the New School (a university in Manhattan) with the title “Julia Child: Culinary Revolutionary”. The title says it all, for Child, who died at age 91 in August 2004, not only influenced how we cook in our homes and restaurants— she helped reshape how we think about food itself. In conjunction with the course, its instructor Andrew F. Smith moderated a panel discussion with the same title, held for the public at the Sheila Johnson Design Center on June 12. Participants included Judith Jones, Molly O’Neill, Joan Reardon, and Laura Shapiro. A separate panel discussion, “Julia Child in America”, was organized last October 10 by the New York Public Library, with participants Dan Barber, David Kamp, Molly O’Neill, Joan Reardon, Melanie Rehak, and Laura Shapiro.

Julia Child’s very first encounter with French food opened her eyes, and it was love at first sight. It was 1948, and she and her husband Paul were making their way toward Paris— he’d just accepted a post at the U.S. Embassy— when they stopped for lunch at a restaurant in Rouen. Julia used her memory of that meal both to open and close her posthumously published memoir¹. That lunch was an “epiphany”, a “life-changing experience”, “an opening up of the soul and spirit for me”, she wrote, from the oysters *portugaise* to her first-ever taste of a *baguette*, and most of all the *sole meunière*, “a large, flat Dover sole that was perfectly browned in a sputtering butter sauce with a sprinkling of chopped parsley on top.”

Later, as the couple made a home for themselves in Paris, Julia found that if one simply showed an interest, the French people were forthcoming and generous with their knowledge. She warmly recalls an instructor at the prestigious École Cordon Bleu, a chef who had worked with the great Escoffier. It was he who taught Julia— a foreign-born woman who did not begin cooking until age 39— how to flip over an omelette “with the courage of your conviction”, and how to reduce the cacophony of techniques and recipes in French cuisine to a small set of themes and variations. This memoir of her life with Paul in Paris, and later in Marseilles and Provence, is based on their letters from the time and on extensive interviews, conducted with Julia in her last year of life by Paul’s great-nephew Alex Prud’homme, a writer in New York. The book also includes 79 of the couple’s photos.

Child’s first book, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (1961), took her and her two co-authors 12 years to write and to get into print, including several twists, turns, and publisher rejections. What drove Child was her determination to popularize French culinary techniques for the uninitiated. She confesses in her memoir, “Even if we were never able to publish our book, I had discovered my *raison d’être* in life.” As Laura Shapiro notes in a recent biography², Child wrote and organized the recipes by picturing in her mind a “desperate homemaker who couldn’t cook until the right book fell into her hands”— someone not unlike herself at age 39. But the biography also reminds us of Child’s earnest passion, her verve, which coexisted with her early inexperience and which indeed ran through her whole life’s work. Ms. Shapiro approaches the subject with obvious affection, and the biography won the IACP Cookbook Award for 2008 in the category “Literary Food Writing”. A member of the Culinary

Historians of New York, the author is well known for two earlier books, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* and *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950’s America*.

Barbara Ketcham Wheaton, longtime Curator of the Culinary Collection at Radcliffe’s Schlesinger Library where Child’s papers are deposited, notes that *Mastering the Art* was modeled after an instructional French cookbook, *Le Livre de Cuisine de Madame Saint-Ange*, first written in 1927 by Evelyn Ébrard née Saint-Ange. Child once referred to the book as “my mentor in my early days in France”. Paul Aratow, co-founder of the restaurant Chez Panisse, owns a copy of Saint-Ange that Child once sent to a friend with the inscription, “This is the best French cookbook I know.” Aratow has made an English translation of the work³, and readers can see elements that it shares with Child’s cookbooks: the focus on home cooks who have simple kitchen resources; the strong narrative voice; the clear and detailed instructions; and the theme-and-variation style of presentation. The Culinary Historians of Boston based its May 2005 annual banquet on the Saint-Ange recipes, and Aratow spoke about the cookbook to the Culinary Historians of Southern California in May 2006.

It was finally a young editor at Knopf in New York City in 1960 who agreed to see *Mastering the Art* into print. “This was the book I’d been searching for”, Judith Jones recalls, having herself fallen in love with the culinary arts while living in Paris a decade earlier. Over the course of 40 years, she would serve as editor of most of Julia’s cookbooks. In her recent memoir⁴ Jones describes her visits to the Childs’ kitchen to help fine-tune the instructions for Julia’s recipes. Julia would read out the directions and observe with an eagle eye to see how Judith carried them out, while Paul perched on a ladder taking photos of the trickiest steps. At Knopf, Jones would rise to Senior Editor and Vice President, along the way helping to bring forward not only Julia Child but other great chefs— including James Beard, Edna Lewis, Marion Cunningham, Jacques Pépin, Marcella Hazen, Lidia Bastianich, Claudia Roden, Joan Nathan, Madhur Jaffrey, and Irene Kuo— not to mention great novelists.

The last decades of Child’s life, when she was a self-effacing celebrity, are almost as full of interesting lessons as her daring earlier years. Nancy Verde Barr, an Italian-American cooking-school owner who would become Child’s leading culinary assistant in the 1980’s and 1990’s, has written a memoir of her own⁵ that gives us literally a behind-the-scenes look at Julia’s live cooking appearances on such shows as “Good Morning America”. These spots relied on a classic pairing: copious amounts of advance preparation, and a few desperate *soupons* of last-minute improvising. ■

References

1. *My Life in France* (New York: Knopf, 2006; 317 pp., \$25.95 cloth / Anchor, 2007; 368 pp., \$14.95 paper).
2. *Julia Child* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2007; 208 pp., \$19.95 paper).
3. *La Bonne Cuisine de Madame E. Saint-Ange: The Original Companion for French Home Cooking* (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2005; 800 pp., \$40 cloth).
4. *The Tenth Muse: My Life in Food* (New York: Knopf, 2007; 304 pp., \$24.95 cloth).
5. *Backstage with Julia: My Years with Julia Child* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley and Sons, 2007; 224 pp., \$22.95 cloth).

CHAA CALENDAR

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

Sunday, July 27, 2008

CHAA annual participatory theme picnic:
Family immigrant cooking, featuring recipes from the
Nebraska Centennial First Ladies' Cookbook
and other sources.
4-7 p.m., Earhart Village Clubhouse
(835 Greenhills Drive, Ann Arbor)

Sunday, September 21, 2008

Jan Longone, Curator of American Culinary History,
Univ. of Michigan Clements Library
Free public lecture in conjunction with the exhibit
“‘The Old Girl Network’: Charity Cookbooks
and the Empowerment of Women”.
3 p.m., Clements Library (library opens at 2:30 for
viewing; reception to follow lecture)

Sunday, September 28, 2008

(Co-sponsored by CHAA)
“The Food Historian in the Kitchen”
Sandy Oliver, Editor of *Food History News* and
author of *Saltwater Foodways* and other books.
2-3:30 p.m., Downtown Multipurpose Room,
Ann Arbor District Library

Sunday, October 19, 2008

“Always Enough: Oral Histories and Rural
Southern Recipes from the Mattox Family
Farmhouse in Greenfield Village”
Cathy Cwiek (Manager) and Meeta Martin (Presenter)
of Historic Foodways and Domestic Life
Programs for Greenfield Village

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