

A sepia-toned photograph of the Parthenon in Athens, Greece, viewed from a low angle looking up. The temple's facade, featuring columns and decorative carvings, is the central focus. The sky is a uniform, light brownish-pink color. Overlaid on the image is the title 'AS SYRRIAN HISTORY & FOOD' in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The ampersand is stylized with a decorative flourish.

**AS SYRRIAN
HISTORY
& FOOD**

“The mere smell of cooking can evoke a whole civilization.”

—Fernand Braudel



HISTORY

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Chipteh

Riza ooh Bagila

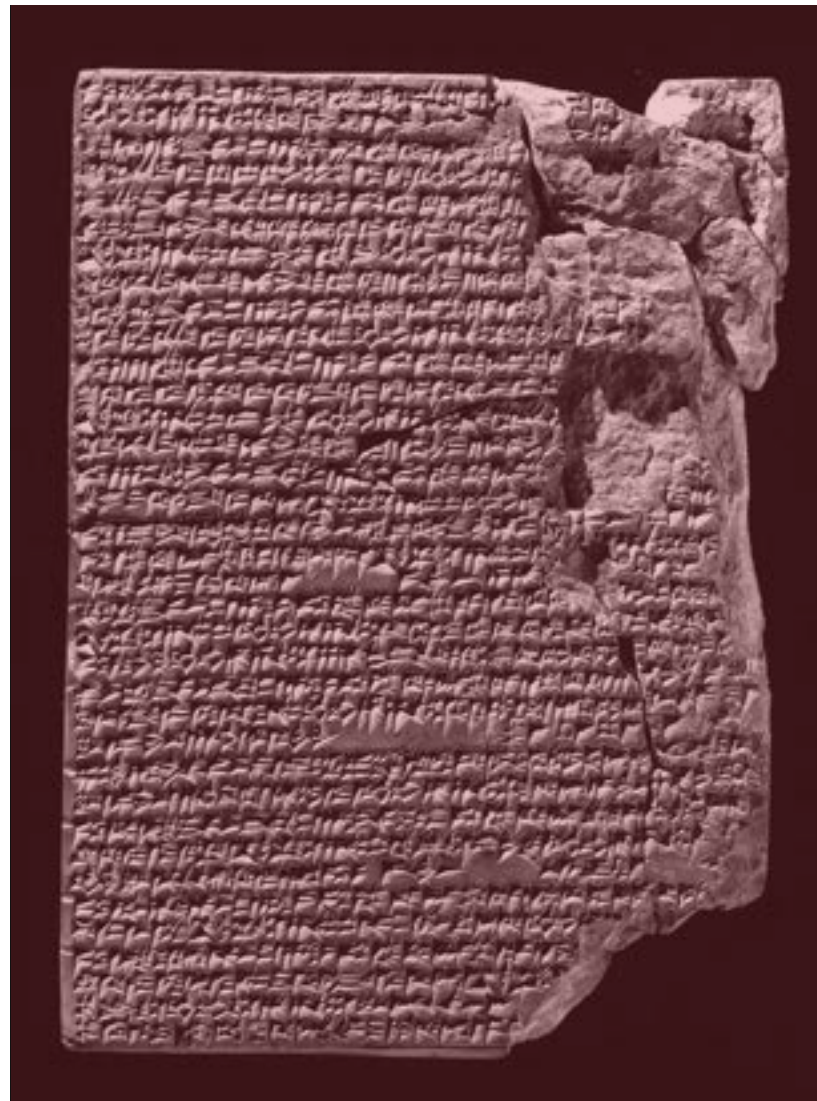
Chadeh

Bushala

Ju-jeh Kebab

Oldest Cookbook

Assyrian cuisine can be traced back to the oldest recipes in the world which were found on clay tablets dating back to 1750 BC. They are written in Akkadian, a complex cuneiform writing style, that scribes used to record laws, battle victories, and various other topics that were deemed important by the upper class. The recipes are recorded over three hundred fifty lines and include forty recipes along with two hundred varieties of bread. They also include twenty-five stew recipes: four vegetable and twenty-one meat.



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The recipes were presumably written by a master chef to his student. A master chef is one of the few people who would be able to write in Akkadian. Also, it does not include specific amounts for the ingredients so only someone well-versed in cookery could recreate dishes. Because the recipes contained expensive, exotic ingredients and were considered worthy of being written down, archaeologists assume that the meals were meant for royalty.

FOOD

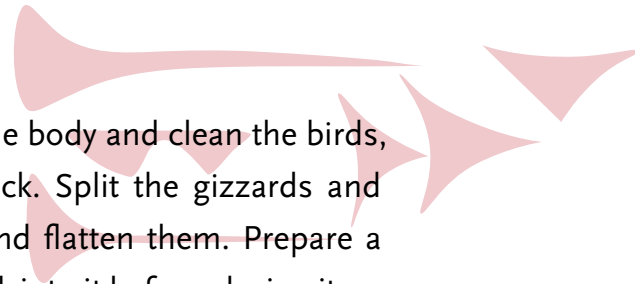
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“Remove the head and feet. Open the body and clean the birds, reserving the gizzards and the pluck. Split the gizzards and clean them. Next rinse the birds and flatten them. Prepare a pot and put birds, gizzards and pluck into it before placing it on the fire...Put the pot back on the fire. Rinse out a pot with fresh water. Place beaten milk into it and place it on the fire. Take the pot (containing the birds) and drain it. Cut off the inedible parts, then salt the rest, and add them to the vessel with the milk, to which you must add some fat. Also add some rue, which has already been stripped and cleaned. When it has come to a boil, add minced leek, garlic, samidu and onion (but not too much onion)...Rinse crushed grain, then soften it in milk and add to it, as you kneed it, salt, samidu, leeks and garlic along with enough milk and oil so that a soft dough will result which you will expose to the heat of the fire for a moment. Then cut it into two pieces. Take a platter large enough to hold the birds. Place the prepared dough on the bottom of the plate. Be careful that it hangs over the rim of the platter only a little. Place it on top of the oven to cook it. On the dough which has already been seasoned, place the pieces of the birds as well as the gizzards and pluck. Cover it with the bread lid [which has meanwhile been baked] and send it to the table.”

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The ingredients used in these recipes are similar to those used in contemporary Assyrian cuisine. The meats included beef, lamb, goat, pork, deer, fish, turtle, shellfish, and fowl (for meat and eggs.) At this time, most meat consumed was boiled, and the grilled meat was reserved for sacrifice. Ancient Assyrians consumed a wide range of plant-based foods that included dates, apples, figs, pomegranates, grapes, grains, root and bulb vegetables,

and mushrooms. For sweeteners, they consumed honey, dates, grape juice, and raisins. For fats, they used ate both animal and plant fats such as clarified butter, sesame, linseed, and olive oil. Bread was a staple and was often baked with pistachios, figs, raisins, apples, cumin, and coriander. Beer, made out of fermented barley, was considered a national drink. Only the wealthiest in the Assyrian empire consumed wine.



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The Assyrian Empire eventually fell. However, Assyrians still proudly remember their heritage. Faced with religious persecution in their homeland, many decided to emigrate to other countries. Some of these immigrants were my great-grandparents. When they arrived in America, they decided to settle in Chicago, which was and still is home to a large Assyrian population. They got jobs, bought property, had children, and fully integrated into American culture. Despite the changing times and different locations, they passed on their cultural pride, traditions, and recipes.





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Chipteh Meatball Soup

Time: 90 minutes Yields: 6 servings

Ingredients

Meatballs:

- ½ c. jasmine rice
- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 small onion
- ½ green pepper, diced
- 1 T. basil
- 1 T. paprika
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. curry powder
- 1 tsp. black pepper
- 1 tsp. allspice

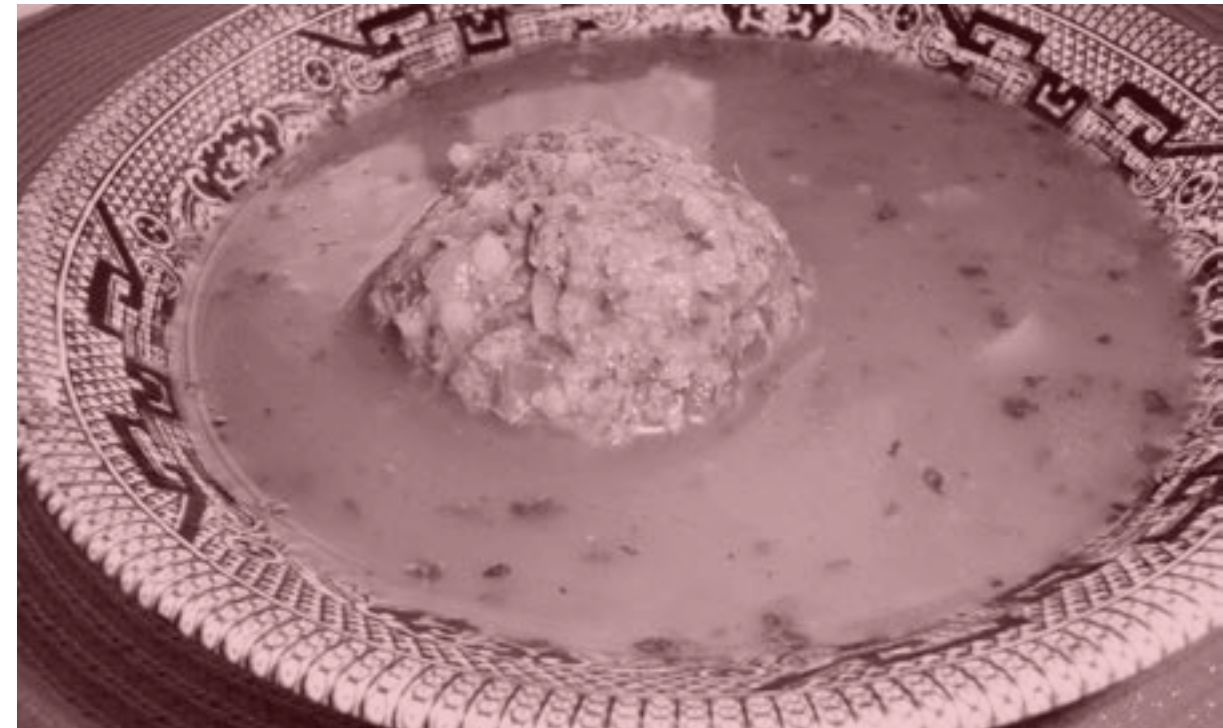
Soup:

- 2 T. vegetable oil
- 1 small onion
- 1 small green pepper, 1 inch strips
- 1 T. paprika
- 6 oz. canned tomato paste
- 1 T. basil
- 1 tsp. salt

Steps

Meatballs: Pour 2 cups of water over the rice and allow to soak for 30 minutes. Mix the remaining meatball ingredients. Rub the soaked rice between your hands to break it up. This will make it easier to cook inside of the meatballs. Remove a ¼ cup of rice and add to the meatball mixture. Set the remaining rice and liquid aside to use in the soup. Knead the meatball mixture with your hands and form into 8 large meatballs. Set aside.

Soup: Add oil, onion, green pepper and paprika to a 5 quart Dutch oven. Fry the onion and green pepper over medium heat until soft. Add tomato paste and the remaining rice, and the water it has been soaking in. Add 4 additional cups of water, basil and salt and bring to a boil. Carefully drop the meatballs into the soup. Cover and cook, over low heat, for 30 minutes, or until the rice inside the meatballs is fully cooked.



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Rice with Lima Beans

Time: 35 minutes Yields: 4 servings

Ingredients

- 1 3/4 c. hot water
- 1/4 c. fresh dill, chopped
- 8 oz. lima beans, frozen
- 1 T. vegetable oil
- 2 T. butter
- 2 c. jasmine rice
- 1 tsp. salt

Steps

Pour 1/4 cup water over lima beans and microwave on high for 3 minutes. Fry dill and drained lima beans in oil and butter for 1 minutes, over medium heat. Wash and rinse the rice, drain. Add rice to the dill and lima beans. Add salt and 1 1/2 cups water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low. Cover and cook for 30 minutes, or until the rice is tender. Stir a few times during the cooking process.

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Tea Pasty

Time: 135 minutes Yields: 3 chadeh

Ingredients

Dough:

1½ tsp. yeast
¼ c. warm water
1 tsp. sugar
5 c. flour
¼ c. sugar
1 tsp. salt
½ c. unsalted butter, melted
½ c. vegetable oil
½ c. sour cream
2 small eggs, beaten

Martookha (filling):

1 c. salted butter
½ c. vegetable oil
3½ c. flour

Glaze:

1 egg, beaten
1 tsp. sugar

Steps

Dough: Add yeast and 1 teaspoon sugar to the warm water and set aside. Place dry ingredients into a large bowl and mix. In a separate bowl, mix the wet ingredients and the yeast. Blend well and add to the flour mixture. Knead the dough for 10 minutes. Cover and place in a warm spot for 1 hour.

Filling: Melt the butter in a large saucepan. Add vegetable oil and flour. Stir over medium heat for approximately 30 minutes, or until brown in color, resembling peanut butter.

Separate dough into 3 portions. Roll each portion into a circle, on a floured surface. Gently transfer to an oiled cookie sheet. Spread a third of the filling and press the edges together. Use a fork to decorate the edges. Poke a few holes on the tops of the fork, then brush the tops with the glaze. Bake at 375°F for 25–30 minutes or until golden brown.





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Bushala Yoghurt Soup

Ingredients

1¼ lb.	natural full cream milk yoghurt
1 c.	celery leaves
2 c.	flat parsley
2 c.	coriander
½ c.	mint
3 c.	swiss chard
1 c.	spring onions
1	green bell pepper
3 T.	flour
¼ c.	short grain rice
1	large egg
2 tsp.	salt
1 pinch	paprika, for garnish

Time: 40 minutes Yields: 6 servings

Steps

Prepare all the herbs by washing thoroughly to remove any dirt. Remove the thick stalk from the swiss chard. Roughly dice all the greens, keeping the mint separate. In a large pot, add the yoghurt, egg and rice; beat until smooth. Next add 6 cups of cold water to the pot and stir gently. Mix the flour with 1 cup of water and add to the pot. Slowly bring to boil on medium heat, continually stirring until the yoghurt sop starts bubbling. Add the bell pepper and mint. Let boil for 15 minutes on medium heat, stirring the whole time. Add salt to taste. Add the rest of the herbs and mix through. Continue gently stirring for the next 10 minutes. Take off the heat and keep stirring for another 5 minutes. Pour soup into bowls and spring with a little sweet paprika and raisins. Leftovers can be refrigerated and served cold.



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Chicken Kebab

Ingredients

1¼ lb.	chicken wings
¼ c.	lemon juice
1 T.	natural yoghurt
4 cloves	garlic, crushed
¼ tsp.	saffron strands
1 pinch	salt

Time: 110 minutes Yields: 6 servings

Steps

Cut the chicken wings at the joints to create smaller pieces. Add lemon juice, yoghurt, garlic and saffron to the raw chicken pieces. Mix well and let marinade for an hour in the fridge. Prepare for barbecue. Skewer the chicken pieces and place over the white-hot coal, turning regularly to prevent burning. If you find that they are cooking too quickly and burning, you will need to raise them further away from the coals to reduce the direct heat. When the chicken is golden and cooked through, remove from skewers, sprinkle with salt and serve.