



INTERNATIONAL



C U I S I N E



Jeremy MacVeigh

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# INTERNATIONAL C U I S I N E

Jeremy MacVeigh



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# PREFACE

## INTRODUCTION

*International Cuisine* was written to supply culinary arts students and enthusiasts with a reference and resource to the cuisines of the world. Chefs today are bombarded with information about foods that come from all over the world, and their understanding of where food products come from and how to use them has never been more important or more challenging. One of the most difficult things for a culinarian, future chef, or food lover to grasp is a sense of the place that a food comes from. All foods can be unraveled into a story that enlightens us about why they are made the way they are or perhaps why certain ingredients must be used for them to taste authentic. The understanding of this story is the biggest hurdle an aspiring chef in today's food industry must undertake. After learning the techniques of how to be a good cook in the kitchen, a chef must acquire the ability to write a themed menu or to pair ingredients when developing new recipes; these tasks are intrinsically linked to the past and to the people and places that created the ingredients. This text is a step in making the link.

## WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

The text was written because of a lack of resources currently available in this specific discipline. I took a position teaching international cuisine; when I looked for textbooks to use to support the learning objectives of the class, I discovered that what was available lacked information about how cuisines differ and how they developed, or the texts just covered a few cuisines or simply provided recipes. I began to write my own outlines because of this lack of information and eventually took on the project of creating this book. This text answers the questions that I had—and does so for 18 different cuisines that span the globe.

To the students reading this text as part of your education, my advice would be to immerse yourself in the culture of that which you strive to inhabit. If the culture you strive to inhabit is the culinary arts, then immerse yourself in it fully by tasting everything you can, absorbing every bit of advice, watching every aspect of what your instructors do and how they act, and being focused on this moment and nothing else. Our trade is one in which success comes from sacrifice. You will be tired, you will feel broken, and you will think that you have pushed yourself too far; but in the end, you will grow, you will be proud, you will earn the respect and admiration of others, and you will realize that you would not have reached the level that you have if you had decided—years earlier—that it was too much or it wasn't coming fast enough or it wasn't fair. By becoming engrossed in what you want to do, your senses will expand and enable you to do things you didn't know you could. I wish each of you the kind of daily satisfaction I have been afforded as part of our proud profession.

## ORGANIZATION

The text is organized by geographical region (Europe, Asia, etc.). Within each section are chapters that cover how each cuisine developed, what it is that makes each cuisine different from the rest, important culinary subregions found within each cuisine, recipes common to that cuisine, and terms that are commonly used. In creating this text, we found—from having industry experts review the material—that there was a strong desire to have a text like this published, but that the experts wanted a section on what made each cuisine different from the others. As a result, a section in each chapter discusses the unique components of the cuisine being covered, and I believe

the experts were just that—experts—in making this suggestion, as this helps to clarify how and why each cuisine is original. Each chapter includes the following sections:

- Introduction
- Historic Culinary Influences
- Unique Components
- Significant Subregions
- Recipes
- Summary
- Review Questions
- Common Terms, Foods, and Ingredients

## ANCILLARY MATERIALS

### For Instructors

#### *Instructor's Manual to Accompany International Cuisine*

Each chapter is further supported by an Instructor's Manual.

### For Instructors and Students

#### *Online Companion to Accompany International Cuisine*

An Online Companion is provided to supply additional resources for the instructor and the students; it includes test bank questions, PowerPoint slides, and additional recipes.

## CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

The chapters begin with the Middle East because many of the characteristics of civilization that led to our ability to have distinct cuisines began here. The rest of the chapters in Section I move mainly from east to west across southern Europe, then north through Europe, and end with the Iberian Peninsula. The Iberian Peninsula provides an appropriate transition to northern Africa in Section II, and then to the Americas in Section III, because all of these regions are linked in both history and cuisine. After traveling

through Europe, North Africa, and the Americas, Section IV focuses on Asian cuisines. A number of countries are not represented in this text, including all of the sub-Saharan African countries, Australia, and many more. Although it would be great to include these, and others, creating a book that covers the cuisines students are most likely to deal with in the United States was the priority. The hope is that, by opening the door to this subject, students (and others) will be encouraged to step inside the world of global cuisine (and culture) and discover more on their own. The subject is complex and vast, but this book is designed to make it approachable and usable for culinary programs.

## THE RECIPES

The recipes chosen for the text are representative of the cuisine of each region and are mostly made using either common ingredients or those that can be obtained by a culinary arts school or at specialty markets. Many of the recipes include accompanying photos of the completed dish, and photos for some of the steps of the more complicated or unique preparations can also be found in the text.

The recipes are in no way a complete representation of the cuisine of the region covered, as each region that has a chapter dedicated to it in this text could easily fill many volumes on its own. The recipes are meant to provide a glimpse into the cuisines by introducing some of the more common, practical, or unique recipes that will help students and others gain an entry into this vast subject. Additional recipes are available from the companion site, and surely many instructors will want to supplement the material presented in this text with recipes that they are more familiar with. All recipes include details about the cooking methods employed in creating them and the expected yield. As with any other recipe, remember that these are guides; variation in products will always necessitate occasional adjustments to compensate for moisture contents, degree of flavor, palate differences, and so forth. One should always use one's senses when cooking.



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JEREMY MACVEIGH is a chef instructor at the Culinary Arts Campus of the Institute of Technology in Roseville, California, where he has taught classes in international cuisine, nutrition, garde manger, Asian cuisine, and baking and pastry for the last five years. Originally from Needham, Massachusetts, Chef MacVeigh got an early introduction to the life in the culinary field; his first job, at the age of 15, was in a kitchen—and the introduction stuck. As a graduate of the Western Culinary Institute in Portland, Oregon,

and with a BS in food science from the University of California at Davis, Chef MacVeigh brings a unique perspective from both the scientific and artistic aspects of the field to this subject. A member of the American Culinary Federation (ACF), Chef MacVeigh has been very active in the Sacramento chapter as a board member of the California Capitol Chefs Association for the last three years, and as a Team Sacramento coach for the student culinary team.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Wow, where to start? First, I wouldn't be the type of person who would try to do something like write this text if it were not for my mom! Setting examples, always being supportive, holding the weight of a family of seven on her shoulders without ever letting any of us know it was hard, and simply the greatest person I have ever known—that is my mom. I know I'm lucky, and now you do too! Thanks, Mom! My siblings also have always been there to lend support and to check in on their little brother over the years, and I am forever grateful to have such great brothers and sisters: Matt, Heather, Shauna, TJ, Mike, and Kathy are the best six siblings I can imagine. I also have those six to thank for a posse of 21 nephews and nieces, all of whom are a true joy to be with.

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One person at IT has had a particularly big impact on my entry into education, and subsequently this book: Chef Philippe Caillot (I know, I know—he's French!), whose understanding of and passion for the culinary arts have been an inspiration to me (and he has more than once set me straight on French cuisine!). Thanks, Philippe. In addition to the great colleagues I've been privileged to work with I would like to give the sincerest of thanks to all of my former and current students. You've all impacted me in helping me understand culinary arts more than you know (I try not to let on!) and your enthusiasm and passion for our craft is inspirational to all of us instructors. I feel confident about and look forward to the future being in a position to watch the future pass through our doors. What a thrill to see minds and hearts headed in our direction!

I would also like to thank Chef Edward G. Leonard, CMC, for his professional work in directing the production of the food for the photos; Ron Manville, for his expert photography; Patricia Osborn, for her tireless assistance and guidance in writing this text; Chris Downey, for making my rambling legible; and all those at Cengage Learning for their professional work on this project.

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Any comments or suggestions about the text will happily be accepted by e-mail at [jmacveigh@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jmacveigh@sbcglobal.net).

Sincerely,  
Jeremy MacVeigh

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# SECTION 1



# CUISINES OF EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST

To most Americans, the cuisine of Europe is the most familiar of those covered in this text, because most of the familiar foods of the United States have roots somewhere in Europe. On the other hand, the cuisine of the Middle East is often much less familiar. We have combined these cuisines in this section because much of Europe's cuisine originated in the Middle East. Wheat was first cultivated in the Middle East, and bread is now perhaps the most common food on the tables of European countries. The fermentation of beverages is believed to have been discovered and developed in the Middle East, and beer and wine now appear regularly on the tables of most Europeans. The three most common religions in Europe, along with their dietary restrictions and customs, developed in the Middle East; today, the religions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism all are represented in Europe (Christianity is the most prevalent, but the others are still significant in some cultures).

One facet that binds the Middle Eastern and European regions together is the importance of wheat in their diets and cultures. Bread has been a basis of European nutrition for centuries, and other wheat-dependent products are common as well. Products like pasta and pastry dough, in particular, are two common and widespread uses of wheat flour. Pastry dough is one of the ingredients that

helps make the cuisine of these regions different from other parts of the world, specifically with regard to the making of desserts. Although sweet foods are eaten in other cultures, the idea of an entire course of sweets—as in the dessert tradition of many European countries—is unique to this region. In other parts of the world, sweets fit into the meal cycle differently and are more typical of what most would think of as a snack. Europe is also unique in that it was, for a period of history, the major power center of the world; as such, its countries held considerable influence over many other parts of the world. The culinary habits of much of Europe have evolved relatively rapidly over the last few centuries, and exploration, colonization, and immigration have all influenced the culture and culinary habits of these populations. During the same period of time in the Middle East, cultural change has been much less dramatic. The preservation of culture has remained a priority for the people of this region, and there have been fewer attempts by Middle Eastern nations to expand into or colonize other regions of the world.

Europe and the Middle East are home to a number of ingredients that are used regularly in other parts of the world, although their origin in this part of the world may not always be recognized. Some ingredients indigenous to Europe and the Middle East include the aforementioned

wheat as well as pine nuts, pistachios, walnuts, artichokes, asparagus, cardoon, cauliflower, caraway, cumin, broccoli, peas, common cabbage, Brussels sprouts, horseradish, watercress, melons, oregano, and mint. Many of these still play important roles in the local cuisine.

Although the cuisines of Europe and the Middle East have evolved over the years, they will forever be connected by their histories. This book begins with a chapter on the Middle East, an appropriate starting point because this region is considered the genesis of many aspects of cuisine (as well as civilization itself). We will travel from east to west, through the southern reaches of the Middle East and Europe, in this section. Then we will move north and east, and finish with one of the southernmost points, the Iberian Peninsula—a natural point from which to move on to African cuisine in our next section.

Although many of these cuisines may be familiar to people in the United States, it is very important for those aspiring to understand today's cuisines of the world to know how these cuisines differ and how they developed into what they are now. The following chapters will reveal many of the aspects that make each of these cuisines unique from one another, as well as how these cuisines have influenced our own in this increasingly global culinary marketplace.





# CHAPTER 1



# Cuisines of the Middle East

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this chapter, you will be able to

- explain what makes the cuisines of the Middle East unique.
- discuss the significance of religion in the cuisines of the Middle East.
- understand common cooking methods used in traditional Middle Eastern cuisines.
- recognize common recipes found in the cuisines of the Middle East.
- produce a variety of recipes common to the Middle East.
- define the terms listed at the conclusion of the chapter.

## INTRODUCTION

The cuisines of the Middle East are historic, because they have remained heavily dependent on traditions and methods from early cultures that flourished in this part of the world long ago. These cuisines have, to a large extent, resisted many outward influences while blending components of the dominant cultures within this region over the centuries. Whether it be the Persian (present-day Iran) cuisine that has drifted all the way to Europe, the Ottoman (present-day Turkey) cuisine that has found a home throughout the Mediterranean and beyond, or the spread of Arab traditions throughout North Africa and into Southern Europe, Middle Eastern cuisines have left an indelible mark on most of the world at some point in history, and the qualities that instigated this spread are the same that have preserved it.

This chapter examines the cuisine and culture of this region by focusing on the regions within this large area that have played the most significant role in both the local cuisine and the influences that have spread from it. A number of countries that are usually included in this region are not cited in this chapter simply because there is not enough space to do so. Certainly, entire books can be—and have been—written specifically about the cuisine of the Middle East.

The Middle East has long been a region of turmoil, both politically and religiously. The significance of the religions that exist in this region—Judaism, Islam, and Catholicism are all represented—cannot be overstated in either the context of its historical events or the development of its cuisines. Currently, the dominant religion in the area is Islam, and this faith has much to do with the similarities found in the cuisines of the Islamic nations. All of the countries examined in this chapter are Islamic nations, with the exception of Israel and (to some extent) Lebanon, which has a sizable Christian population. Other factors besides religion certainly are important in the development and uniqueness of the cuisines found here—climate and resources are significant

ones, for example—but all evaluations of these cuisines should be viewed within the context of the religious beliefs of the culture as well.

What many may be surprised to learn is that the Middle East is the birthplace of much of what is taken for granted in parts of the Western world today. This chapter will examine some of the contributions the Middle East has made to other cultures, and it will examine some of the most significant influences other cultures have had on this region as well. The culinary variations within this region are also examined, as are some common recipes.

## HISTORIC CULINARY INFLUENCES

Throughout history, the Middle Eastern countries have spread their influence in the culinary field during periods of conquest and invasion. The crusaders who descended on this region during the Middle Ages brought some of their own traditions with them, and they stayed in some areas for nearly 200 years. As the crusaders returned to Europe, they brought with them the culinary influences they had experienced during their time in the Middle East. Muslim armies occupied Spain and Sicily for hundreds of years before, throughout, and after the Crusades. Following the expulsion of the Arab armies from Spain, the Spanish exported many culinary techniques and ingredients to the Americas (having been influenced themselves by the Middle Eastern peoples). Throughout these periods, the customs and cuisines of the Middle East spread across much of the world.

Although Middle Eastern cuisines undoubtedly have left their mark on many other countries, the development of these cuisines was also influenced by other cultures. The following section examines the more distinct of these influences, including some that are interregional.

### Ancient Greece

Some of the earliest influences on the development of Middle Eastern cuisine came from the Greek incursions into this area during Greece's rise as a civilization. The ingredients that were consumed in the Middle East during this period include cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, garlic, lentils, fava beans, garbanzo beans, olives, figs, grapes, dates, almonds, and walnuts. The Greeks spread many of these ingredients deeper into the Middle East than their native range, and they took these ingredients back home with them.

### Persian and Roman Empires

As the developing empires of the Persians and Romans battled for control of the lands of the Mediterranean, many of the dishes that are now common first developed. The Roman Empire provided expertise in the spread of agriculture; it was the early power in the region after the decline of the Greeks. The Romans are largely credited with providing the structure and experience in irrigation that allowed not only the spread and greater yield of local indigenous produce but also the inclusion of new foods from distant lands in the local crops. This increased productivity and food wealth assisted in the development of more sophisticated cuisines, such as those that evolved with the Persian Empire.

The Persian royalty began a tradition of enormous feasts that included such familiar foods as *polou* and *chelou* (two primary methods of Iranian rice cookery), *dolmas* and *kebabs* (techniques acquired from Turkish nomads), marzipan and stuffed dates, and the use of ingredients such as yogurt, quinces, and honey. This period also saw the development of the sophisticated and artful use of spices and fine rice cookery in early Persian cuisine, which is still a hallmark of the cuisine of Iran to this day. Some of the early spices used by the Persian Empire include cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and mace from the Indonesian islands, and cumin, coriander, and fennel from the Mediterranean. The production of some of the finest long-grain rice—along with the precise method of cooking it—has given Persian/Iranian rice cookery much of its lofty reputation.

### The Emergence of Islam

Prophet Mohammed of Arabia died in the year 632, and his followers began the spread of the Islamic faith. The Islamic Empire went on to include all of the Middle East, northern Africa, much of western Asia, Spain, Sicily, and parts of Eastern Europe at the height of its power. During this period, many of the ingredients common to the Middle East began to work their way into the cuisines of Europe and Asia. Sugar traveled from India into Europe; rice extended from India into parts of the Middle East that weren't already using it (Iran, Syria, and Iraq grew it already) and into Europe (specifically, Spain). Ingredients that made their way from the conquered lands into the Middle East included dried and salted fish, honey, and hazelnuts from Eastern Europe; cheeses, wine, chestnuts,

and saffron from the Mediterranean countries; and spices such as pepper, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and mace, which spread further out from their rooted homes in Persia.

The result of the spread of Islam was not unlike the later discovery of the Americas in the respect that ingredients, recipes, and techniques from conquered lands flowed into and out of the Middle East. Events such as these cause confusion and debate about the origins of many dishes that, over time, are adopted and often renamed in many new locations. From a culinary perspective, everyone won, as is often the case following any period of unrest and invasion since the introduction of new ideas and techniques improves the cuisines for all.

The other culinary significance of this empire was the impact that the dietary guidelines or laws that are part of the Islamic faith have had on the diets of its followers. Similar to the Jewish faith, which also had many followers in the region during this period, Muslims who observed their faith with vigor abstained from eating a number of foods that were common in other Mediterranean cultures at the time. Many Muslims avoided pork, shellfish, and alcohol, which was a notable difference between themselves and the Christians in the region. This influence remains one of the dominant features of Middle Eastern cooking, as most Middle Easterners are Muslim and thus followers of the Islamic dietary edicts.

### Ottoman Empire

After the fall of the Islamic Empire, a new empire emerged in the region: the Ottoman Empire. Like the Islamic Empire before it, this empire also stretched into Asia and Europe during its height of power. It left a lasting impression on these lands, and it felt their influence as well.

The Ottoman Empire was based in present-day Turkey and included most of the present-day Middle East, as well as parts of Eastern Europe, northern Africa, and western Asia. This vast empire spread many of its customs and culinary traditions into these lands, and it also brought a number of new ingredients and other culinary aspects into Turkey and beyond.

Some of the Turkish culinary contributions that spread with the Ottoman Empire include the simmering of foods in meat broths, the soup-making tradition, the stuffing of foods (for example, grape leaves), and the honey-soaked pastries for which the Turkish pastry chefs are renowned. These customs became

common throughout the Middle East and beyond during this period, and many of the customs of other countries that the Ottomans ruled over flowed into Turkey as well.

During the reign of the Ottoman Empire, the city of Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) developed into a site of grand culinary feasts and banquets. The rulers of the empire and the nobility held well-documented events that included hundreds of dishes and greatly impressed visiting guests from Europe and other countries. Many of the dishes found in the descriptions of these events are enjoyed in countries throughout the Middle East today and are embraced as part of this complex cuisine that so many call their own.

## UNIQUE COMPONENTS

The cuisines of the Middle East differ from cuisines that are common in the United States in a variety of ways. These cuisines are ancient and strongly influenced by the history, religion, and cultural identities that unite and divide the populations of the Middle East. The following section highlights some of the distinct components of these cuisines.

### Influence of Religious Edict

Religious beliefs in the Middle East have had a dramatic affect—more than in most other places—on the diets of the population. Whether this entails the avoidance of pork, alcohol, or any improperly slaughtered animal for a Muslim; the periods of fasting for a follower of the Jewish faith; or the period of avoidance of meat during the Lenten months for a Christian, religion reigns strongly in this region of the world.

The major religion in this region today is Islam; its followers are known as Muslims. In the Muslim faith, a number of food edicts exist that greatly influence the dietary choices of faithful followers. Followers are required to avoid pork, carnivores, alcohol, birds of prey, improperly slaughtered animals, and blood, unless their life is threatened by such avoidance (such as by starvation or forced feeding). All of these foods are considered *haram* (prohibited) and thus are avoided by strict followers of the faith. On the other hand, Muslims are also encouraged by these edicts to eat other foods that are considered *halal* (permitted), but to eat only for survival and health—self-indulgence is considered *haram*. Halal foods include all plant foods, cattle, sheep, goats, camel, venison, rabbits, and seafood. Muslims are also highly regarded for their

generous hospitality, as it is considered a responsibility not only to welcome a stranger into your home but also to feed that stranger. These edicts are followed by a large part of the population, and in many ways they not only define the cuisine but also are a significant factor in defining the people.

Israel was formed after World War II to provide a homeland to the millions of displaced followers of Judaism, commonly called Jews. Those who are faithful to the Jewish faith also follow a number of edicts with regard to food that play a significant role in their dietary choices. The Jewish faith has many of the same edicts as the Muslim faith, with some notable exceptions. The dietary laws or edicts of Judaism are known as the laws of *kashruth*. These laws are some of the most complex dietary restrictions in the world, and a strict observer follows a custom that ties him or her to religious brethren from thousands of years ago.

The laws of *kashruth* exclude a number of foods from the diet and associate many foods with particular celebrations and other religious days or periods. The foods that are to be excluded include pork, shellfish, fish without scales, crustaceans, birds of prey, animals that prey on animals or that don't "chew the cud," blood, and improperly slaughtered animals. In addition, milk and meat cannot be eaten together; thus, dairy and meat are not combined. There are also many foods connected with religious holidays, as well as foods that are eaten on the Sabbath (Saturday), that tie followers to their faith in culinary matters.

The avoidance of pork, shellfish, and nonkosher foods is perhaps the most noted and distinct difference from the diets of many Europeans and Americans, but the observance of religious periods throughout the year—and the foods that are associated with those periods—are of equal significance, and diverge from what is commonly practiced in many other parts of the world.

### History

This region has made some of the most important contributions to the culinary world. It was here that agriculture is believed to have originated in the eastern world, bread was first produced, beer was first fermented, yogurt was accidentally made, and the three major religions and their dietary restrictions originated. The historic importance of this region to the religions of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity have made this region home to many of the strictest followers of those religions,

and thus to the dietary habits that accompany close adherence to the edicts of these religions.

The history of this region is part of its very core and identity. The people who live here proudly follow the steps of their ancestors and resist the modernization that has occurred in many other parts of the world. There are many examples of foods that are eaten for the observance of religious days or as part of an annual or life ritual, and this history is often visible at the table. This connection with the past is a strong part of both the character and the culinary habits of the inhabitants of this storied region.

### Balance of Sweet and Sour

The cuisines of the Middle East often display a skillful art of combining sweet and sour components that balance the acidity of one with the sweetness of another, to allow the aromas of each to be highlighted. This unique combination spread from this part of the world, as the Persian and (later) the Ottoman empires spread across Europe and Asia. Many classic European dishes display these combinations, perhaps as a direct result of the influence of the Middle East.

Some examples of the sweet ingredients commonly used are figs, dried apricots, dried currants, peaches and pears, sugar, *dibs* (reduced grape juice), pomegranate molasses, and other syrups. Some of the sour ingredients common to these cuisines include sumac, pomegranate seeds, dried limes, lime and lemon juice, and *verjuice* (unripe grape juice). Many of these sweet-and-sour components are found in a number of preparations in Middle Eastern cuisine, including in many meat dishes, a characteristic that often helps to identify foods from this region. These contrasting elements are used with great skill in these cuisines, and the unique combinations can be seen in many dishes—from rice dishes to stews and even desserts.

### Baking, Simmering, Stewing, and Fire Roasting

The cooking methods most common to the cuisine of the Middle East include baking, simmering, stewing, and fire roasting. Historically, much of the cooking in the Middle East has been done over an open fire or fire source or in a communal oven, and these methods are employed in the majority of methods from this region.

Today, foods are often cooked in an oven at home, although in many rural parts of the Middle

East, the communal oven is still in use. Bread is included with each meal, and this baking tradition has lent itself to the many slow-simmered stews and braised dishes that can be cooked using the same heat source used to bake the bread.

The outdoor fire pit that was so common to nomadic herdsman—from whom the ancestors of these areas originated—is still a part of the cuisine today. Many kebabs and fire-roasted eggplant dishes that are common to Middle Eastern cuisine hark back to the days of the Turkish tribes and other nomads that roamed these parts in ancient history.

### Wheat and Rice: Grains of Life

Rice and wheat make up the majority of the diet within this region. Wheat is grown extensively throughout the Middle East, and rice is grown in pockets where ample water is found in more localized regions, Iran in particular. Bread is the most common starch used in the Middle East, and it plays an important role in the daily meal patterns of most homes. Flatbreads are used as a utensil in the typical meal, and as such they are part of most meals.

Bread is sacred in the Middle East; a piece of bread dropped on the ground will surely be picked up by the next passerby, who will place it out of harm's way while reciting a prayer. Many varieties of bread are found here, but most of them are yeast-leavened flatbreads that accompany every meal. Wheat is also used in the form of bulgur and couscous in many parts of the Middle East.

Rice has similar importance in the parts of the Middle East where it is the focal point of most meals. In parts of Iran and Turkey, rice is used to make the famous *polous*, *chelous*, and *pilafs* that these countries are known for around the world. The preferred rice in these countries is aromatic long-grain rice, which is often replaced with *basmati* when these dishes are made in the United States. The varieties that are grown in the Middle East differ from those available in the United States, as very little of the highest grades of rice in the Middle East ever make it out of the countries in which they are grown (mostly Iran). Some of the highest-prized rice varieties in Iran are *ambar-boo*, *darbari*, and *sadri*, and these are usually sought out to make *polou* and *chelou* dishes.

### Spices

The Middle East's position between Asia and Europe has played a significant role not only in the development of

this region and its role in many conquests throughout history but also in that it became the route through which spices from the Orient traveled to Europe.

Spices from India, Indonesia, and China all passed through the Middle East in a lucrative trade with European countries that occurred for hundreds of years before being circumvented by the Portuguese (to some degree) when they discovered a sea route around Africa in the late fifteenth century. Prior to this time, and continuing after it at a less feverish pace, the countries of the Middle East were permeated with such spices as cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, peppercorns, tamarind, ginger, turmeric, and mace, which traveled in large caravans across the region. Not surprisingly, the people of the Middle East became experts on how to use these spices over time, and the incorporation of many spices into the cuisine of the Persian Empire and, later, the Ottoman Empire cemented the use of these spices in the dishes of the Middle East. These spices are mixed with the spices indigenous to the area, which include fennel, coriander, and cumin, resulting in a taste that has long been appreciated by visitors from other countries. The use of these spices, along with the spices of the Americas that were introduced later (chiles and allspice being the most significant), has resulted in many spice blends common to Middle Eastern cooking today.

## SIGNIFICANT SUBREGIONS

The Middle East has been home to some of the greatest empires, as well as some of the greatest internal unrest. Although borders have shifted and countries' names have changed, with regard to cuisine the Middle East consists of the following four major regions.

### Persia/Iran

Iran is home to one of the most storied and historic of all of the cuisines of the Middle East, because the Persian Empire—which rose to prominence before the modern calendar—developed one of the first great cuisines. This cuisine has had a major impact on the development of the cuisines of all of the other Middle Eastern countries and beyond.

Iran is situated between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman to the south and the Caspian Sea to the north, with Iraq and Turkey along its western border and Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan along the border to the east. Because of its location

between the other Middle Eastern countries, and as the gateway to Asia, Iran has long been a strategic country that has influenced—and been influenced by—these neighbors in all matters.

Iran is a mountainous country; the large Zagros Mountains run along the western border with Turkey and Iraq, and down along the Persian Gulf. Another mountain range called the Elburz Mountains, which ring the shores of the Caspian Sea, dominates the northern portion of the country. The central region of Iran is dominated by a vast semi-arid interior plateau, which is used primarily as pasture for sheep and goats.

The northern section of Iran is the most populated and also the most fertile, with significant production of citrus, pistachios, wheat, sadri rice (similar to basmati), melons, eggplants, and other vegetables. This region has a temperate climate and receives a significant amount of moisture in the mountains, which provides irrigation to the valleys below. In this region, a long tradition of fishing produces some of the world's finest beluga caviar from sturgeon from the Caspian Sea.

The southern section of Iran is considerably more arid and has a warmer climate than the north; production of dates and citrus is more significant in this region. The Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman provide a significant amount of seafood, including swordfish, tuna, and shrimp, which are caught in abundance when the stocks are healthy (wars have had a significant effect on fisheries here).

The cooking of Iran in many ways still resembles that of the ancient Persian Empire, with rice dishes such as polou and cholou still adorning tables, accompanied by kebabs and eaten by hand with breads like *lavash* and *barbari*. The tradition of making fine pastries like *baklava* and freezing cordials to make *sharbat* (sherbet) is also a consistent part of Iranian cuisine.

Iranian cuisine has been held in high regard for centuries for the quality of the rice dishes created here; the expertise in baking and pastry, including breads and fine sweetmeats that have spread from Iran into the rest of the Middle East and Greece; the expertise in combining meats with sweet and sour ingredients; and the deft touch in using the many spices that have traveled across this land from Asia on their way to Europe.

## Turkey

Turkish cuisine really includes two main cuisines under one roof: the classic Ottoman cuisine that developed with the great Ottoman Empire during the Middle Ages and beyond, and the significantly different Anatolian

(central Turkey) and eastern Turkish cuisines, which have greater ties to Arab neighbors. Of these different styles, the Ottoman culinary contributions are clearly more significant in terms of influence over other subregions included in this chapter. The Ottoman Empire once incorporated nearly all of the Middle East and beyond, and during its reign it developed a level of sophistication and a culture of lavish feasts that have rarely been replicated anywhere in the world.

Geographically, Turkey is often referred to as the gateway between the east and the west, as Turkey borders Europe in the west and the Middle East and Asia in the east. Turkey is a large country that separates the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea, as well as bordering Greece and Bulgaria in the western part of the country, and Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Iraq, and Syria in the eastern part of the country. The northern, eastern, and southern sections of Turkey are mountainous, whereas the western portion mostly consists of valleys surrounded by the waterways that connect the Black and Mediterranean seas. Turkey is a fertile country, with significant portions of its land used to raise crops of hazelnuts, olives, grapes, figs, sugar beets, wheat, and citrus. With multiple seas on its borders, Turkey is also provided with abundant catches from these waters; swordfish, tuna, turbot, bonito, and anchovies are a few of the prized catches.

The Ottoman Empire began its rise in Turkey in the thirteenth century and continued to rise in prominence and influence during the following centuries. In its grandest years, during the eighteenth century, elaborate banquets were held in the capital of Constantinople (present-day Istanbul). During this time, the court cuisine of the empire included a virtual army of chefs and cooks creating a large variety of specialties that are still common today, as well as in many countries that were encompassed by the empire. Some of the specialties that were made during this period include kebabs, *sherbets*, pilafs, jams, and soups, as well as many types of *halvas*. The Ottoman influence and style includes a penchant for stuffing foods, such as dolmas and stuffed eggplant or peppers, as well as a great tradition of pastries.

On the other hand, the nomadic inhabitants also contributed greatly to the cuisine of the Middle East with their practice of grilling foods over a fire with metal skewers (kebabs) and their production of yogurt. Yogurt is believed to have been discovered and popularized by the nomadic people of eastern Turkey, who also are credited with the introduction of kebabs (the term is Persian, but the method is believed to have

been popularized by Turkish tribesmen). The cuisine of the central and eastern portions of Turkey tends to be spicier and more rustic, and it relies heavily on the use of wheat—mainly in the form of bread and bulgur (*burghul*)—lamb, yogurt, and pulses, of which lentils and chickpeas are the most common.

With its contributions from both the Ottoman Empire and some of the nomadic herdsmen, Turkey has had a major influence on the cuisine of not only the Middle East but many other parts of the world as well.

## Israel

Israel was created as a homeland for displaced Jews after World War II, and in culinary and cultural terms it is quite different from the other countries of the Middle East. The creation of Israel as a Jewish homeland contrasts its population sharply with that of its neighbors, all of which have a majority population of Muslims. The population of Israel also is made up primarily of immigrants who returned to their native land from all over Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Both the religious differences and the role of immigrants (and the cuisines that they brought with them) play a significant role in making this cuisine unique from the others in the Middle East.

Two main branches of Judaism have resulted from the periods of Jewish migration out of the Middle East. Because of the significant amount of migration throughout history of followers of the Jewish faith, the Jewish culture developed very differently depending on what part of the world the followers lived in. A general delineation of these groups based on where they lived includes Sephardi Jews and Ashkenazi Jews. The followers who migrated into Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Caucasus are known as Ashkenazi Jews. The other groups, known as Sephardi Jews, are those who once settled in India and other Asian countries, northern Africa, Middle Eastern countries, Spain, and southern Italy. The significant difference between these two groups is that most of the countries in which the Ashkenazi Jews settled were Christian countries that, for the most part, persecuted the Jews when they lived there, whereas the Sephardi Jews lived in mostly Muslim countries (Spain and parts of Italy were once under Arab rule) and were more accepted by the Muslim populations than were their relatives in the Christian world. Because of these differences, the two groups have very divergent cuisines; both groups are represented in present-day Israel in major proportions (the Sephardi Jews are a slight majority).

Ashkenazi Jews have many culinary traditions that mirror the lands they lived in, including *borscht*, *goulash*, *knishes*, potato *latkes*, and *gefilte*. The Ashkenazi adopted the food customs of the European and Asian countries they immigrated to, making adjustments to some of the foods to follow the dietary edicts of kashruth, such as replacing pork with poultry when making schnitzels. There were (and still are) significant numbers of Jewish immigrants in Germany and Russia, as well as in eastern and central European countries, and those who immigrated to Israel brought the food customs of these countries with them.

In the case of the Sephardi Jews, the culinary customs are much different; these groups have developed primarily alongside Muslim men and women. The Sephardi Jews came from other countries in the Middle East, as well as North Africa and India. Their culinary practices are much like those of the Middle East, with dishes such as *tabbouleh*, *falafel*, *hummus*, *baba ghanoush*, *polou*, and other classic Middle Eastern dishes serving as mainstays of their diet as well.

The cuisine of Israel is one of constant evolution, because of the influences from these two main groups of Jews and the many countries from which they have come. In many ways, this development mirrors that of the United States, where significant immigrant populations contribute to creativity and an abundance of styles. These groups of immigrants also are coming to learn to understand and appreciate the cultures and specialties of one another, resulting in a cuisine of inclusion that inspires chefs as they form a culinary identity.

## The Fertile Crescent and Egypt

The area known as the Fertile Crescent includes the countries of Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. These countries, along with Egypt, have similar culinary customs. The Fertile Crescent is regarded by many as the cradle of civilization, because historical evidence indicates that settled communities with complex social structures began here. Egypt is also a region with an ancient history, and the ancestors of this country played important roles in the development of its early cuisines as well.

The Fertile Crescent is so named because humans are believed to have first cultivated wheat and domesticated sheep here; it may also have been the first region to develop a written language. The methods of using olives to extract oil and grapes to make wine are also believed to have been a part of very early forms of civilization in this region.



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