

The Book of Dishes

by

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may God forgive him.

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, in whom is (our) trust and aid. Praised be God, the creator of days and appointer of times, the resurrector of mankind, the cause of foods, the creator of animals, who with His manifest blessings causes the plants to grow which encompass the land. For them (i.e., mankind) He sends down water from heaven, and with it He causes (all) of the fruits to emerge. He has made good things lawful for them and permitted foods and drinks, except for the forbidden kinds. God bless His prophet and chosen one, Muhammad, and his family, and bring him to the highest degrees; indeed, He is the Hearer of prayers.

Now, God – exalted be He – made the good kinds of food lawful and permitted the enjoyment of them: those which a forbidden thing has not contaminated. For He said – may He be praised and exalted – ‘Eat that which is good (*tayyib*) and do that which is proper’ (Qurʾān, xxiii 53). Indeed, some commentators have held that what is meant by ‘good’ is ‘lawful’, but (the meaning of) the word ‘good’ is well known among men. He said – praised be He – ‘Eat of that which we have provided to you, lawful, good’ (Qurʾān, xvi 115, paraphrased), making a clear distinction between them, the lawful and the good.

Now, again; the pleasures of this world are divided into six classes. They are food, drink, clothing, sex, scent and sound. The most eminent and perfect of these is food; for food is the foundation of the body and the material of life. There is no way to enjoy anything else but with health, which it supports.

It is not forbidden to be meticulous about food, and to take

an interest in it and specialize in it. He said – praised be He – ‘Say: Who has made unlawful the adornment of God, which He brought forth for His servants, and the good things of sustenance?’ (Qur’ān, vii 30). Whenever one of the companions of the prophet – God’s blessing on him and his family – made a dish and was meticulous in it according to his state at that time, then he invited him; he (the prophet) responded to that (i.e., he did not disdain it). A certain philosopher has said, ‘Four comprise the best things and complete (God’s) grace: strong faith, blameless endeavour, wholesome food and salutary drink’. Therefore it is shown that there is no blame in taking pleasure in food and specializing in it.

I have come across a number of books composed on the making of dishes, which mention strange and unfamiliar things and include disapproved ingredients. When they are brought together, the soul is not reassured by them. Men disagree in their choice among the pleasures we have mentioned, some of them preferring food over the rest and some preferring others, such as clothing, drink, sex and sound. I am one who prefers the pleasure of food over all the other pleasures, so I composed this book for myself, and for whoever may want to use it in the making of dishes. In it I mentioned what I preferred, perhaps leaving out some obvious and well-known dishes in the interests of brevity. I have followed those with relishes, condiments, pickles, fish, *jūdhābs* and sweets that I have also preferred. I have aimed at brevity and succinctness rather than prolixity and longwindedness, and I pray God to give me aid and grant me success.

I have ordered it into ten chapters. This is their introduction:

Chapter One, *ḥawāmiḍ* (sour dishes) and their kinds

Chapter Two, *sawādhij* (simple dishes) according to their variety

Chapter Three, on *qalāyā* and *nawāshif* (fried and sauceless dishes) and their kinds

Chapter Four, *harā'is* (porridges with shredded meat), *tannūriyyāt* (porridges with chopped meat) and dishes that resemble them

Chapter Five, *muṭajjanāt* (fries), *bawārid* (cold dishes), *maqlūba* (egg dishes), *sanbūsaj* (samosa) and things that serve the same function

Chapter Six, fish, fresh and salted

Chapter Seven, *mukhallalāt* (pickles), *ṣibāgh* (relishes) and *muṭayyibāt* (condiments)

Chapter Eight, *jawādhīb* (puddings served with roast meat), *akhbisa* (puddings thickened with flour or crumbs) and their varieties

Chapter Nine, *ḥalāwā* (sweetmeats) and their varieties

Chapter Ten, *qaṭāyif* (crepes), *khushkanānaj* (cookies, sweet biscuits) and things that serve the same function.