

The Heart of the Silk Road:

How Ancient Persia and Modern Iran Shaped the Mediterranean Palate

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Outline

- ❖ Importance of the Geographical Region of Interest
- ❖ How one food culture shapes another
 - Impact of major military campaigns
 - Impact of ancient trade routes
- ❖ Enduring Traces
 - Flavors
 - Techniques
 - Ingredients
 - Dishes

c. 8000 BCE: Zagros Mountains Goat & Sheep Domestication



c. 7000 BCE: Fertile Crescent Cradle of Civilization / Birthplace of Agriculture



c. 3000 BCE: Elamite Civilization

Yale Culinary Tablets – First Recipes



How one food culture shapes another



Wars, invasions, annexations, and conquests



goods

Trade routes & movement of culinary



Migrations and movement of people



Geographical proximity

Impact of Major Military Campaigns

- Wars
- Invasions
- Conquests
- Annexations
- Colonization

Expanding empires spread their native foods and adopted new culinary knowledge from conquered territories.

622-750 CE: Arab Conquests of Persia



When the Arabs conquered Persia, they found a sophisticated & refined cuisine. They adopted its refined cuisine and spread Persian-inspired food culture across the Mediterranean from the Levant to Spain.

Impact of Ancient Trade Routes

- Persian Royal Road
- Silk Road Routes (Land)
- Silk Road Routes (Ocean)

Persian culinary influence also reached Mediterranean cuisines through ancient trade routes.

Silk Road Routes (130 BCE-1453 CE)



Silk Road Routes (130 BCE-1453 CE)



**The Heart of
the Silk Road**

Ancient Persia: Cradle of Spice Culture

<p>1. Botanical birthplace of several of world's major spices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saffron• Cumin• Coriander• Caraway• Fenugreek• Sumac
<p>2. Cultural and commercial bridge carrying such spices from India and Central Asia to the Mediterranean centuries before Europe's spice routes began.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cinnamon• Cardamom• Black Pepper• Cloves• Ginger

Enduring Imprint of Persian Cuisine on the Foods of the Mediterranean

- ❖ Through centuries of conquest, trade, and cultural exchange, Persian cuisine left a deep and enduring imprint on the Mediterranean world — shaping its:
 - Flavors
 - Techniques
 - Ingredients
 - Dishes

Enduring Imprint of Persian Cuisine on the Foods of the Mediterranean

❖ Flavors

❖ Techniques

❖ Ingredients

❖ Dishes

- Tang of sour fruit
- Sweet-and-sour harmony
- Aromatic layering
- Fragrant infusion
- Nuts & fruit as key ingredients
- Elegance in presentation

Enduring Imprint of Persian Cuisine on the Foods of the Mediterranean

❖ **Flavors**

❖ **Techniques**

❖ **Ingredients**

❖ **Dishes**

- Slow-cooking & braising
- Refined rice cooking
- Stuffing fruit and vegetables
- Plant-forward cooking
- Combining warm spices & herbs
- Inspissating fruit (fruit syrups)

Enduring Imprint of Persian Cuisine on the Foods of the Mediterranean

❖ **Flavors**

❖ **Techniques**

❖ **Ingredients**

❖ **Dishes**

- Saffron
- Pistachios
- Pomegranates
- Rosewater
- Sumac
- Dates
- Natural sweeteners

Enduring Imprint of Persian Cuisine on the Foods of the Mediterranean

❖ Flavors

❖ Techniques

❖ Ingredients

❖ Dishes

- Flavored & layered rice dishes
- Yogurt-centric dishes
- Herb-rich egg-centric dishes
- Plant-forward slow-cooked stews
- Dolmehs (stuffed fruit and veg.)
- Nuts-, dried-fruit, & syrup-based confections

Thank you for your attention.



About the Author

Nader Mehravari has spent over 40 years immersing himself in the practical culinary traditions of Iran and the larger Persianate societies around the world. He not only brings these traditions to life in the kitchen but also explores their associated historical, cultural, and social dimensions. While developing and recreating traditional Persian dishes in a modern Western home kitchen, he carefully documents the methods behind individual and category of dishes. He is now working on an innovative Persian cookery book that applies accurate historical information and modern food science principles to make these dishes both accessible and traditional for Western home cooks, while teaching the foundational techniques of Persian cookery. His culinary work has been widely recognized, including in a series of 20 recipes/articles on SeriousEats, showcased at culinary gatherings like the Oxford Food Symposium, published in culinary journals like Petits Propos Culinaires, and features on BBC-TV and BBC-Radio.

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