

Syrians from Antakya

Our book starts with a group of Syrians who live in two parallel worlds, as we visited a Syrian family whose origins go back to Antakya, Abu Ammar and Om Ammar Ibrahim. This was the first family to host us in their home for this project, and since then Aunt Om Ammar sadly left us, may she rest in peace. We, as the project team, pray for her soul and wish that she would be happy with our work on this book, and that we have fulfilled our duty to communicate her experience and the experiences of other Syrian women and families with integrity and respect.

According to United Nations and current international law, Antakya is the capital of the Turkish state of Hatay. However, until 1939, Hatay was called the Iskenderun Province, which was historically part of Syria. We will not go into the details of the political events that led to the separation of Iskenderun from Syria here. It is sufficient, for the context of this book, to say that many of the people of this district still consider themselves to be Syrians ethnically and culturally, besides being proud Turkish citizens who are and active and integral component of their society and country. During the separation, many Syrians from Antakya immigrated into Syria, and despite the political tensions between Syria and Turkey over the decades, family and social relations

Antakya has a great historical and symbolic importance, especially in Christianity. Christians in the world used to follow either the Western Church, based in the Vatican in Rome, or the Eastern Church, which was initially based in

Constantinople (Istanbul) and then in Antakya. Although it is now based in Damascus, the head of Eastern Church is still known as the “Patriarch of Antioch and All the East”, in a clear indication of the huge symbolic importance of Antakya to the Christians of the East in general.

Abu Ammar and Om Ammar, our hosts, were born in Aleppo after their families immigrated there in 1938. After getting married, they moved to Latakia and settled there with their family for decades now. This family continued to visit their relatives in Antakya annually until these visits stopped with the beginning of the war in Syria. Om Ammar used to own her family's house in Antakya until the late 1990s when the Turkish government started confiscating all the properties of those who immigrated before the annexation of the district in 1939.

Nostalgia for Antakya dominated our conversation with this family. Although all members of the family were born either in Aleppo or Latakia, the emotional connection to Antakya has always been present, as well as the connections with family and relatives back in Antakya.

Food is surely one of the most important ways through which we maintain our connection with a distant culture, distant people, and places from which were cut off forcibly. This is why this family treated us very generously to five different dishes: Eej (Antaklian version of tabbouleh); kibbeh on skewers with Zarzourat; Tawaya with Asourat (AKA Potato Kibbeh); Kotz Barakeh, and Yogurt Treet. Here are the recipes for three of these dishes.

- **Asourat with Tawaya (served together)**

- **Ingredients for Asourat:** two cups of fine bulgur (soaked and drained), one boiled and mashed potato, one teaspoon of salt, one teaspoon of cumin, half a finely chopped onion, one tablespoon of chilli paste, one tablespoon of tomato paste, one finely chopped tomato.

- **Instructions:** Rub all the ingredients, except for the potatoes, together really well, then add the potatoes and mix them with the rest of the ingredients and rub a little. Add a teaspoon of chopped parsley, a teaspoon of dry basil, a teaspoon of green basil, and two tablespoons of olive oil and rub a little. Using your hands, form them into the shape of fingers and line them up in a plate, then decorate them with walnuts, basil and mint.

- **Ingredients for the Tawaya:** two tablespoons of oil, two tablespoons of ghee, half kilo of chopped meat, one finely chopped onion, one teaspoon of black pepper, two finely chopped tomatoes, half a tablespoon of tomato paste, and half a tablespoon of pepper paste.

- **Instructions:** Heat the oil with ghee and stir-fry the meat well, then, add the onions and spices and stir. Add the tomatoes and stir, then add the tomato paste, the pepper paste, and a teaspoon of salt and stir until everything is mixed well. Leave on a medium heat for about 10 minutes until well cooked.

- **Kotz Barakeh**

The dough: a quarter cup of sugar, two cups of white flour, two cups of warm water, and two tablespoons of

instant yeast. Mix them together very well until becoming cohesive, then leave aside for ten minutes. Then, add half a cup of oil and 3 additional cups of flour and knead well. Form the dough into small circles (neither thin nor thick) in an oven tray.

In another bowl, mix half a kilo of minced meat with two onions and two finely chopped tomatoes. Add a teaspoon of salt, a teaspoon of black pepper, a handful of finely chopped parsley, a splash of oil, and two teaspoons of the black seed and mix well. Distribute these ingredients over the dough circles, pressing the dough slightly in the middle to allow for more filling. Put in the oven until well cooked.

- **Yogurt Treet**

Ingredients: a kilo of yogurt, 3 cloves of garlic, a pinch of salt, half a kilo of minced meat, two tablespoons of ghee, one sliced Syrian flat bread.

Instructions: Put the yogurt in a pot on fire and stir continuously then add the garlic and salt and stir until the yogurt is heated. In a separate frying pan, put the ghee and the meat and sauté until done. Crunch the bread by frying it with oil. Put half the bread in a bowl, add the yogurt then the meat and garnish with chopped parsley.

