

Al-Qadmus

“Didn’t Cadmus teach the Greeks the alphabet, which he had brought from Phoenicia?” This was written on the tomb of Zeno of Citium, a Hellenistic philosopher of the Phoenician origin and founder of the school of stoicism.

This time we were hosted by a family in the town of Al-Qadmus, which is located in north-western Syria, about a thousand meters above sea level within the Latakia Mountains. Al-Qadmus was named after the Phoenician god Cadmus, who, according to legend, was the son of a Phoenician king. He crossed the Mediterranean in search of his sister, Europa, who was carried off by Zeus, king of the Greek gods. During his search for his sister, he founded many cities, most notably Cadamea, which he later called Thebes.

Al-Qadmus is located in the high areas within the Latakia Mountains, with characteristics that distinguish it from its surroundings. These mountains overlook the coastal line and are close to its cities (half an hour from Baniyas and an hour from Tartous). The high humidity in the coastal cities, along with the heat in the summer, make the cities and villages of the mountains with their mild weather a haven for the people of the coastal and the interior cities. The town of Al-Qadmus itself rises about 800 meters above sea level, and some of its surrounding villages reach about 1,000 meters. It is also surrounded by forest and natural reserves. It is considered a connection point between the coastal line and inner-Syria, especially between Tartous province and Hama province. So, Al-

Qadmus has a touristic and strategic value because of its location and height. However, our host, Om Abdulla, drew our attention to the fact that there are also negatives to this location and height. For example, the cold weather and the snowfall throughout the winter months limit the options of plants to be grown in annual seasons, while the people of the coastal plains have more options throughout the year. For this reason, Om Abdulla believes that the people of Al-Qadmus were historically less comfortable financially than their neighbours. There is no doubt that the snowy high altitude areas were historically isolated, and despite the great development in transportation and communication methods and the diversity of sources of income now, the collective memory still carries some of that ancient legacy of feeling less affluent and worrying about resources.

In addition to the collective memory, nature and the geographical location imposed dietary habits that became part of the cultural identity of Al-Qadmus. For example, kishk is a well-known food in Al-Qadmus, and this is a logical choice for the region because kishk is bulgur that has been stored for many months mixed with yogurt or labneh. Lacking good storage in the past, bulgur mutated slightly after few months, so people made sure to find a way to benefit from it before it rotted by mixing it with the other product available throughout the year, which is yogurt. Another popular food in Al-Qadmus region that also embodies the idea of extending the life of a seasonal crop, is a kind of dried fig that is sometimes mixed with walnuts and can be consumed all year round. A third

example of maximising the use of seasonal produce is the storage of the loof, or Arum in English, which is a poisonous wild plant if eaten raw and not cooked that appears in late winter and early spring. Loof is consumed in the coastal region in its season, either by sautéing it and then eating it with bread, or by cooking it with bulgur. The people of Al-Qadmus added another use to it by preserving it in pottery or glass jars after cooking it in a way similar to preserving pickles, so it could be consumed throughout the year. These are some examples of how the people of Al-Qadmus overcame their lack of food options because of the snow, the rocky nature, and the geographical remoteness of their area.

Om Abdullah taught us how to make the Milady Pastry, which is associated with the Eastern New Year, and it is an occasion that the people of Qadmus celebrate annually and eat grills and pastry. We explained the Eastern New Year celebrations in Syria thoroughly previously in the chapter on Eid Bulgur.

- **Milady Pastry**

- **Ingredients:** 4 cups of flour (about half a kilo), two cups of warm water, a teaspoon of salt, half a teaspoon of sugar, butter, sesame and black seeds, and (optional) ground fennel and fenugreek.

- **Instructions:** Add sugar and salt to the flour, add warm water gradually, and knead until it takes the texture of cohesive dough, and leave to rest for half an hour. Om Abdullah does not use any yeast, but some use a quarter teaspoon of yeast. It is also common to add a spoonful of ground fennel and a teaspoon of fenugreek.

After half an hour, divide the dough into small balls, put butter on a smooth surface, and stretch the dough using fingers. Fold the dough and sprinkle butter on it, then fold again, add butter, then form into the shape of a flower, and sprinkle sesame and black seeds on the face.

Grease the tray with butter, then lay all the pieces in the tray, press them slightly so that they become almost flat. Finally, put in the oven until they are well cooked.

It is common to fill the dough, before folding it, with muhammara, thyme, or cheese. Then it can be folded and formed in the shape of a flower going through the whole

process until put in the oven. In this way, there would be plain traditional Milady Pastry, in addition to different options of filled ones.

Muhammara recipe: onions, tomatoes, red pepper, salt, sesame, and black seeds.



