

it is usually cod first soaked in lye, which is followed by rinsing and then long boiling. The result is a glutinous mass served with melted butter and pepper. Typical side dishes are boiled potatoes and a flatbread like Wasa found now in most U.S. food markets.

Swedish and Norwegian dishes such as poached salmon, pickled herring, creamed fish, Swedish meatballs, pancakes with lingonberry preserves, or even Norwegian *rommegrot* (a thick, rich, sour cream pudding served with melted butter, sugar, and cinnamon) might be found at a *kalas* or Swedish buffet in regions of the United States where these groups are dominant. Americans call many buffers smorgasbords (from the Swedish word *smörgåsbord*, in which *smörgås* means "butter" and *bord* means "table"), but an authentic *kalas* is a buffet with tables of both hot and cold fish, meats, cheese, various breads, and a bountiful array of desserts.

ITALIAN AMERICAN EXAMPLES AND TEXTS

The Italians are another populous ethnic group in the United States that poured into Ellis Island in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Trapped under an oppressive class system in Italy with no foreseeable future other than poverty, Italians in the United States gained freedom to enter whatever business they wanted to. Perhaps even more important, they could eat all kinds of foods in the United States that in the Old Country were the private privilege of the rich. Italians are still immigrating to the United States, and according to census data from 1981 to 1998, 51,400 came to stay in the late twentieth century (Banks 2003, 236).

Food is an important and integral part of the social system in Italian families, and there are ancient guest-host traditions. This is a culture that continues to welcome family, friends, and even strangers to their homes, restaurants, picnics, and even funerals. An ancient Roman myth expresses a precedent and example for the food generosity that is still practiced among Italians today. This representative story of the host-guest relationship is told in the poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a Roman work written about the time of Christ. The narrative also informs us a little about common foods that the poor may have eaten. The meal was generous and served innocently to strangers who came to the door of Philemon and Baucis, but the strangers turned out to be gods. The story begins with an elderly couple living in a thatched-roof hut who have loved each other since their youth and accept their poverty with grace and composure.

The gods paid an unannounced visit, as the ancient story goes, and the old couple gave them their best. They provided comfortable seating, bathed the traveler's tired feet, and served them berries, cherry pickles with endives, radishes, fresh cheese, and roasted eggs. They gave their best wine and water, nuts and

fruits (figs, dates, plums, grapes, and sweet apples), and placed a heavily laden honeycomb in the middle of the table. This generous pair even tried to catch their only goose to serve to the visitors, but the goose escaped and would not be caught. In the end, the gods rewarded the couple with riches and granted their wish that they would die in the same hour when the time came (Ovid 2004, 291-92).

For countless generations, the Italians have been dedicated gardeners, having learned to successfully grow fruits and vegetables in their homeland. It was logical that they should continue to do the same thing in the United States. Joel Denker, who wrote *The World on a Plate: A Tour through the History of America's Ethnic Cuisine* (2003), stated, "Fig trees and grapevines grew in the backyards of many an Italian immigrant. Italians clung tenaciously to their eating habits, persisting even in the face of the suspicious attitude of locals" (Denker 2003, 5). Italians in the United States were prompt to enter the food marketing industry from coast to coast, and before long there were Italian enclaves in most of the large cities.

In St. Louis, Missouri, there is an Italian settlement called the Hill. It is near the highest point in the city and was so nicknamed. Italians from northern Italy began to settle the area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Near, well-tended homes and shops line the streets of the Hill, and the population is still 75 percent Italian. In order to protect the ethnic flavor, homes are seldom listed on the open market. The Hill has changed little over the years. St. Ambrose Catholic Church still serves as the community center, and in this region of the city there are still many Italian food bakeries, trattorias (restaurants), and import markets that carry cheeses, seasonings, and myriad Italian food specialties. There are shops that offer fresh fish and favorite cuts of meat, and on today's Hill there continues to be a serious consciousness to preserve a way of life too valuable to let go.

This neighborhood is the original home of Yogi Berra, manager and catcher for the New York Yankees; Joe Garagiola, famous catcher for the St. Louis Cardinals; and Jack Buck, a well-known U.S. sports announcer. These three men grew up near one another on Elizabeth Avenue, and their proud Italian families, friends, admirers, and supporters will keep their memories alive as long as the Hill remains the Italian center for St. Louis. At Rigatzi's restaurant on the Hill, there are signed photos and trophies from Berra and Garagiola and other local Italian heroes as well as signatures of famous visitors from the worlds of politics and show business. There is a spirit of Italian tradition in the restaurants there that is fun for the whole family—good food and excellent service.

One more thing of particular foodways interest concerning the Italian Hill in St. Louis is a favorite local dish called toasted ravioli:

St. Louisans may take Toasted Ravioli for granted, but it is actually a strictly St. Louis phenomenon. Out-of-towners have never heard of Toasted Ravioli. There are several versions of the origin of the dish. Here's one from local newspaper files.

Jacqueline S. Thursby
"Foodways and Folklore"

Mickey Garagiola, of Ruggieri's on the Hill . . . , claims to have been present the night Toasted Ravioli was born. The event wasn't at Ruggieri's, but down the street at a long-gone restaurant called Oldani's, which was one of four Italian restaurants on the Hill in the late 1930s. Louie Oldani employed a German cook named Fritz who was, according to the story, "feeling a bit under the weather" and accidentally dropped a boiled ravioli into hot grease. When the dumpling came to the top, he dropped in a few more, then sent a plateful to the bar. The customers loved them and asked for another order. The Toasted Ravioli was born. (Osman 1984, 11)

MIDDLE EASTERN AMERICAN EXAMPLES AND TEXTS

Some stories are meant to be didactic. That is, they teach a moral or principle that is not clearly spelled out. The reader or listener comes to a conclusion and a lesson is learned if he or she understands. The ancient cultures in the Middle East, educationally sophisticated for thousands of years, have many such stories that have been told over and over through the millennia. Further, the Middle East, like the United States, is made up of great mixtures of ethnic heritages and religions, particularly Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This region has served as a crossroads between East and West, and stories that are found there came from many other parts of the world.

One old tale is about a caldron. The narrative appears in many cultures and was probably carried from place to place by travelers or merchants, perhaps along the Silk Road, and it emerges in story collections from the Middle East, Turkey, Persia, Palestine, and China, possibly other places, too. The essence of the story is that one neighbor borrows a fine, valuable caldron from another. When he returns it, he tells the owner that the caldron has given birth to another smaller caldron, and the owner should keep the small one, too, because mothers and children should not be separated. The owner concludes that his neighbor is probably crazy and is happy to keep both pots.

A little time passes, and the neighbor asks to borrow the caldron again. The owner loans it to him, thinking that maybe two pots will come back to him like the last time. This time, the neighbor never returns the caldron. Upon inquiry, the owner is told that the big pot had died and was buried. In some versions, the neighbor has sold the pot; other versions do not explain what happened to it. Upon pressing for an explanation, the neighbor suggests that if the lender could believe a pot could have a child, then it should not be too hard to believe that the pot could die! The purpose of the tale is to expose stinginess or selfishness on the part of the lender (Hanauer 1907, 66–67; Mardrus 1964, 296, 299; McCullagh 1914; "Uigher People, Vernacular Tale" 1957, 141–44).

The story also reminds us of the importance of the caldron in these cultures as well as in the ongoing foodways of Middle Easterners in the United States. In one U.S. cookbook I checked for Middle Eastern cookery, *The Frugal Gourmet*

on *Our Immigrant Ancestors*, the first thing listed in the first recipe was a six-quart kettle (Smith 1990, 474)! Another excellent cookbook and discussion of Middle Eastern foods, *The New Book of Middle Eastern Food* (2001), was written by Claudia Rodin, and it includes a treasure trove of folklore and foodways along with hundreds of delicious tips and recipes. In a passage about soup, often called *shorba*, Rodin stated:

Soup is eaten for breakfast, lunch, or supper and also represents a meal in itself, accompanied by bread. Vendors sell soups from great caldrons in the street in the very early hours on winter mornings to catch those who want to fill themselves up before getting to work. Some play a part in the rituals of religious festivals, and are known as festive or wedding soups, and there are famous Ramadan specials prepared during the Muslim fasting month. (Rodin 2001, 142)

From lemon and egg varieties to heavy meat soups, almost like stew, Middle Easterners from Lebanon to Egypt enjoy good soup. Rodin writes in her text, "With the exception of sweets, every kind of food was cooked in broth. Besides the meat used for consumption, meat for broth was provided in every palace and konak (a large and luxurious mansion) . . . No one would have dreamt of cooking with plain water" (Rodin 2001, 159).

Foods like yogurt, pita bread, and hummus have become everyday staples for many Americans, but there was time, not really very long ago, when most Americans did not use these foods. Joel Denker, in his chapter in *The World on a Plate* (2003) called "From the Fertile Crescent: Yogurt Peddlers and Falafel Kings," describes the efforts of an Armenian couple and their sons in the 1950s, Rose, Sarkis, Bob, and John Colombosian, who hoped to expand their yogurt market beyond the Middle Eastern community where they had been selling the product to customers long fond of this product. The word *yogurt*, Denker explains, came from the Turkish word meaning "to thicken." In the Old Country, nomadic herdsmen found that fermented milk was much more easily transported and lasted longer than fresh milk.

The Colombosians were dairy farmers in Massachusetts, and when they realized they were producing more milk than they could use or sell, they decided to make yogurt for the Syrians, Lebanese, Greeks, and Armenians who were on their dairy route. Slowly, their product began to be marketed by ethnic food shops, and a breakthrough came when yogurt became known nationally as a health food. Soon, health food shops picked up the product as well as other yogurt derivatives. In a short time, Colombo Yogurt (the name shortened to make it easier to pronounce) was found in supermarkets. After their father's death, Bob and John took over the business, and catering to U.S. tastes for sweet foods, they added fruit preserves to the bottom of their individual cartons and a little sweetener to the top. In 1993, General Mills acquired their firm. As you can imagine,