



Ottoman empire

A gastronomic dynasty that began with a Wimpy bar in 1960 has never lost touch with its Turkish-Cypriot roots. **Chris Arnot** joins four generations at a family feast fit for a sultan. Photographs by **Jasper James**

It is Friday lunchtime and we are contemplating ladies' thighs in Kazan, the Hassan brothers' opulent Ottoman restaurant near Victoria Station in London. They are plump thighs, to be sure. 'In the days of the Ottoman empire, the sultans liked their ladies on the large side,' Bulent Hassan, 33, muses before pronging a kadinbudu kofte, as these delicately spiced concoctions of ground lamb are known in Turkish.

We are sampling a few mezzes, or starters, to keep us going until the main culinary event of the day, the customary Friday-evening family meal attended by four generations descended from the Hassans' grandfather, Salih Djevdet. Now 77, Djevdet came to Britain in 1955 to earn the money to buy a tractor for his farm near Pafos in pre-partition Cyprus. 'He finished up buying a Rolls-Royce instead,' Bulent's older brother, Levent, 35, says. Djevdet began by washing up in the Lyons Corner House in Piccadilly Circus, and rose through the ranks to become manager. With money borrowed from friends in the Turkish-Cypriot community he opened his first Wimpy burger bar in 1960 (Lyons owned the licence for the brand in the UK); before long he had an empire of 14 outlets across London, from Lewisham to Ruislip.

Wimpys were as synonymous with the 1960s and early 70s as Watney's Red Barrel and Mateus Rosé. 'Then McDonald's came along and blew them out of the water,' Bulent says. Wimpy continued trading for a while, albeit under different names; the restaurant where we

Above Serin, two, and four-year-old Atay await the traditional Friday-night feast with varying degrees of patience. **Top right** kadinbudu kofte – 'ladies' thighs'

Stuffed artichokes serves 4

4 medium artichokes
juice of 2 lemons
200g minced lamb
100g rice, washed
1 medium onion, chopped
7-8 stems each of parsley, dill and mint, chopped
½ tsp cinnamon
60g butter

Prepare the artichokes by removing the stems, pulling off the outer leaves, cutting off the top third and rubbing the flesh with the lemon juice. Boil in salty water for five minutes and refresh in cold water. Scrape out the hairy chokes and rinse thoroughly.

Combine the lamb, rice, onion, herbs and cinnamon in a bowl with a teaspoon each of salt and pepper and 130ml of water. Knead well. Stuff each artichoke with the mixture, leaving a centimetre gap at the top.

Place the artichokes in a large pan, half filled with water, add the butter and bring to the boil. Cover, turn down the heat and simmer for 45 minutes or until the leaves are tender; the rice is cooked and the liquid has reduced to an oily consistency.

Gently remove the artichokes from the pan and serve with the remaining reduced liquid.

Kadinbudu kofte (ladies' thighs)

serves 4

1 medium onion, finely chopped
500g minced lamb
4-5 tbsp boiled rice
6 tbsp chopped parsley
½ tsp allspice
5 tbsp plain flour
3 eggs
approx 1 ltr sunflower oil for deep frying

Cook the onion for a few minutes in a frying-pan over a moderate heat, stirring frequently, add half the mince and cook for a few minutes. Take the pan from the heat and let the meat and onion cool.

In a large bowl combine the cooked meat and onion with the remaining raw mince, boiled rice, chopped parsley, allspice and a teaspoon each of salt and pepper, and knead thoroughly. Moisten your hands and take small pieces of the mixture and flatten into patties in the palm of your hand, one at a time.

Pour the flour on to a plate and lightly beat the eggs in a small bowl. Roll the kofte in the flour and dip them in the beaten egg. In a deep pan bring the oil to a simmer and carefully add the kofte and fry until golden and crisp. Drain on kitchen paper and serve hot or cold.

Hamish Anderson's wine choice

2006 Y Series Shiraz/Viognier, Yalumba, South Australia £6.64, Waitrose.

Shiraz (or Syrah in France) is a wonderful grape to match with spicy food. These kofte only have the addition of a small amount of allspice, hence choose a lightweight version of the grape, such as this aromatic, peppery, raspberry-infused bottle from Yalumba.



are was once known as Jenny's Burgers and run by Atay Hassan, Salih's son-in-law. 'He wanted us to go in with him or at least open a kebab shop,' Levent recalls. 'But by the time I came out of catering college, I could see that the trend was for healthier, more upmarket food.' So the brothers opened a sandwich and salad bar across the road from their father, who kept a proud but wary eye on them. 'Before long, he started putting salads and juices on his own menu,' Levent goes on. Sadly, however, Atay died of a heart attack in 1999.

This evening's meal is to be held at the substantial semi near Richmond Park where Atay's widow, Ishil, still lives. Not that she is very often

alone – two of her sisters live in nearby East Sheen in the same road as Levent, his wife, Aliye, and their children, Atay, four, and Serin, two.

Preparations are well under way when I arrive at the house at 3.30. Indeed Levent had been slightly late for our lunch appointment, having been dispatched by his mother's cousin Ozgen to find a particular type of Cypriot potato. 'It took me two hours,' he grumbles. 'I said I'd get them from Waitrose but she wouldn't have it.'

Ozgen is not a woman to argue with. She is the conductor of the bustling band of women gathered in the spacious kitchen-diner, keeping them focused on the tasks in hand while ferociously pounding dough, then spreading it across the



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Top Ozgen, far right, rules the kitchen. **Middle** Levent and Bulent Hassan; stuffed artichokes.

Left Salih Djevdet, left, in the first of his Wimpy bars

Roast poussin stuffed with cinnamon rice
serves 12

- 6 poussins
- 400g short-grain rice
- 750g onions, finely chopped
- 3 tbsp pine nuts
- 225ml olive oil
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp allspice
- 3 tbsp young currants (the smallest available)
- 10g mint, chopped
- 10g parsley, chopped
- 10g dill, chopped (optional)

Preheat the oven to 190C/gas mark 5. Wash the rice in plenty of water and set aside to drain. Fry the onions and pine nuts in the olive oil on a moderate heat for about 15 minutes without burning them. Add the rice, cinnamon, allspice, currants, salt and ground pepper, and fry gently for five minutes. Add 225ml of hot water; stir, cover and leave on a low heat for about 10 minutes or until all the water is absorbed. Take off the heat and then mix in all the fresh herbs. Stuff each poussin with the cooled mixture and drizzle with olive oil and season.

Roast for about an hour. For a vegetarian option stuff peppers or tomatoes and roast, but add a cup of water to the dish to stop the vegetables from drying out.

Wine choice 2006 Bourgogne Blanc, Jean-Claude Boisset, Burgundy, France £10.45, Bennetts Fine Wines (01386-840392; bennettsfinewines.com). This wine punches well above its weight – testament to Boisset's brilliant young winemaker Gregory Patriat. Its textured, creamy palate is balanced by a fresh, lemon-infused acidity, while a touch of spice picks up on the cinnamon and allspice in the rice.



worksurface with a lengthy rolling-pin. 'Food is a serious business,' she proclaims before making little parcels of ricotta and mint – Turkish ravioli, or pirohou as the Greeks would call it.

Aliye, meanwhile, has been making dolma with Gulshen, Ishil's youngest sister, wrapping vine leaves around minced lamb with herbs and rice – a traditional Cypriot dish. Mainland Turkish cuisine has different cooking methods using different herbs, pastries and cheeses, while Cypriot food seems to involve a lot of stuffing. The artichokes on tonight's menu are filled with rice, minced lamb and cinnamon. According to island tradition, poussin should be stuffed with rice, cinnamon, raisins and chicken livers, but Ishil prefers to leave out the livers to allow the flavour of the poultry to speak for itself.

The generations begin to assemble: children are fetched from schools; daughters and husbands arrive from work. The only person absent when 21 of us sit down to eat is the originator of this tradition. After 77 years of good health, Salih – the man who made a hard-earned fortune from transatlantic food yet always kept a sacred part of the week free to share the cuisine of the

eastern Mediterranean with his family – has been diagnosed with leukaemia. His pleas with his doctors to be allowed to take his place at the head of the table tonight fell on deaf ears. Even so, he has insisted that we carry on without him. His wife, Vedia, raises a glass of 2004 Meursault to Salih and the toast resounds around the room. 'We're not very strict Muslims,' Levent says, opening bottles of full-bodied Tuscan red. Plates are piled with baked vegetables, rice, poussins,

koftes, ravioli topped with halloumi, bread from the oven and dips, all served together. Still to come are kadayif (pastries soaked in honey syrup with chopped nuts), slabs of vanilla-flavoured cake and homemade ice-cream tinged with rosewater and topped with pomegranate. Nobody could possibly want more.

Kazan, 93-94 Wilton Road, London SW1 (020-7233 7100), and 34-36 Houndsditch, London EC3 (020-7626 2222)



Rose ice-cream

- 1½ ltr double cream
- 2 tsp rosewater
- 8 tbsp dried rose petals
- 170g granulated sugar
- a couple of drops of red food colouring

Combine the cream, rose water, petals, sugar and food colouring with a pinch of salt. Churn in an ice-cream maker and freeze.

Wine choice 2007 late-harvested Orange Muscat & Flora, Brown Brothers, Victoria, Australia £6.16 (half), Waitrose. The Muscat grape exudes the perfume of fresh flowers. This fragrant, honeyed wine is a wonderful partner to the delicate ice-cream.

From top members of the extended family sit down to enjoy poussins, artichokes, dolma, ravioli and, finally, ice-cream flavoured with rosewater