CHAPTER 13

Dried-Apricot Compote (naqūʿ al-mishmish)

(435) Recipe for naqūʿ al-mishmish al-lawzī (compote of sweet apricots)¹
Take [dried] mishmish lawzī, wash them very well to get rid of all the dust, and pour over them water of blue Egyptian lotus (māʾ al-laynūfar),² borage water (māʾ lisān al-thawr), and rosewater.³ Squeeze on them (114r) fresh juice of sour pomegranates, and add some sprigs of mint. Sweeten the mix with white sugar, and set it aside until the apricots are moistened and infused with the flavors (yantaqiʿ), but still firm. Put the mix in a vessel infused with smoke of amber-gris, and it will be delicious.

(436) Another recipe for [dried] mishmish lawzī, to be eaten while imbibing alcoholic drinks⁴
Take rosewater and musk, and dissolve excellent sugar and some water in them. Let the washed apricots steep in this liquid, but do not keep them for too long, lest they become mushy (yataharraʾ). Take them out while they are still firm, and once again let them dry in a clean vessel—but they should not become too dry. They are the best and the most delicious food to have as naql (mezze).

(437) Another recipe for [dried] apricots, stuffed (mahshū)
Wash [dried] apricots, wrap them in a cotton cloth, and set them aside from evening till early morning. Remove their seeds.

Start boiling sugar syrup (jullāb) on the fire.
Steep ½ dirham (¼ teaspoon) of saffron in rosewater of Nuṣaybīn,⁵ along with half a lump of musk.

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¹ Lit., ‘almondy apricot,’ so-called because the kernels are as sweet as almonds. See also n. 11 below. The first two recipes in this chapter are also available in Wuṣla ii 507 and al-Ghuzūlī, Maṭāliʿ ii 89. Here I used them to amend the edited text.
² The flower is more properly known as naylūfar.
³ These are all distilled waters. See recipes 684 and following. Also, see glossary 9.2, s.v. taṣʿīd.
⁴ Yutanaqqalu bihi. See glossary 5, s.v. naql.
⁵ Nuṣaybīn was a city in upper Mesopotamia, now in the Turkish province of Mardin. It was renowned for its orchards and gardens. Roses named after it are pinkish in hue.
Continue boiling the *jullāb*; for each *raṭl* (pound) of it, add 1 *ūqiyya* (2 tablespoons) rosewater—other than the rosewater-saffron prepared above. For each *raṭl* (pound) of this *jullāb*,⁶ scald and skin (*yusmat*) 1 *ūqiyya* (1 ounce) almonds. Color them yellow with the [steeped] saffron mentioned earlier in the recipe, and set them aside.

[Now back to the boiling *jullāb*.] Skim its froth. When it has boiled enough, add the steeped saffron to it, and let it boil until you feel the stickiness of the syrup between your two fingers.⁷ For each *raṭl* (pound) of the *jullāb* used, add 1 *ūqiyya* (2 tablespoons) wine vinegar, which has been distilled in a cucurbit (*qarʿā*) and alembic (*inbīq*).⁸ Let the vinegar boil in the syrup, and stir until it is thick enough.

Take the pot off the heat, and sprinkle it with 10 *dirhams* (1 ounce) *aṭrāf al-ṭīb* (spice blend). (114v) Continue stirring the pot, [even] while it is on the floor, to prevent the syrup from sticking to the pot. Continue doing this until it is cool enough.

Now, take a wide-mouthed jar (*barniyya*), either porcelain (*ṣīnī*) or ceramic (*qīshānī*); wash it very well, dry it, sprinkle it with musk and rosewater, and then infuse it with the smoke of aloeswood and ambergris—tie the mouth so that the smoke penetrates well into the vessel. Put in it the things you prepared [i.e., the syrup, and the apricots, which have been stuffed with the colored and skinned almonds].⁹ Top them with a bit of white sugar, and sprinkle them with musk and rosewater.

Cover the opening of the jar with a clean linen cloth, top it with another layer of a thin sheet of leather (*riqq*), tie it with a thread, and stow it away until needed. Serve it [in a bowl along with other goodies, both imbibed and eaten] in a sukurdān.¹⁰

The cooking [of the syrup] must be done in a soapstone pot (*qidr birām*).

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6  Here, based on context, I replaced the word ‘saffron’ in the edited text with ‘jullāb’; otherwise, a pound of saffron sounds quite unrealistic.

7  The Arabic expression is *يتدبّق بين الاصابع*. One of the ways of testing that the syrup is done is to put a drop of it between the tips of the thumb and the forefinger, to feel its stickiness.

8  For distilling, see glossary 9.2, s.v. *taṣʿīd*. The vinegar is distilled so that it becomes colorless.

9  The recipe’s title promises stuffed apricots, but it neglects to mention what is to be done with the softened pitted apricots and the skinned almonds.

10  This is a large tray, in which varieties of delicious small dishes are served as snacks to nibble on during social gatherings, including those involving drinking alcoholic beverages. The word is said to be a combination of the Arabic *sukr* ‘imbibing alcoholic drinks,’ and the Persian *dān* ‘vessel’ (al-Khafājī, *Shifāʾ al-ghalīl* 182).