

Excerpt from *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food*

KOUCLAS

Kouclas is a dumpling cooked in Sabbath stews.

Origin: Maghreb

Other names: *boulette, coclo, kora, kouclas.*

When the Sephardic Sabbath stew reached the Maghreb, it took on many new names, including *dafina, frackh, and skhina*, and new dimensions, including the addition of various dumplings called *kouclas*. Moroccan Sabbath stews are much more liquidy than the Ashkenazic type; the various components are frequently served separately and the dumpling is cut into slices. Every family and community has its own type of dumpling. The most widespread recipes contain rice or ground beef or a combination of both (*kouclas bi ruz*), which is akin to a sausage. Another type is made from bread crumbs (*kouclas bi khobz*) or, on Passover, matza. In Algeria, the meat dumpling is known as a *bobinet*, while a beef and egg hash dumpling is a *megina*. Historically, the dumpling was wrapped in a piece of cloth, but some cooks today use a large piece of aluminum foil or an empty tin can.

MOROCCAN RICE AND MEAT DUMPLING

(KOUCLAS BI RUZ/RELLENO DE ARROZ)

1 small loaf [meat]

1 cup long-grain rice

4 ounces ground lamb or beef

½ cup (2 ounces) ground walnuts or 3 tablespoons raisins

½ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

2 large eggs, lightly beaten

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

½ teaspoon ground nutmeg or a pinch of ground ginger

About ½ teaspoon salt

Ground black pepper to taste

In a large bowl, combine all the ingredients. Wrap loosely in a piece of cheesecloth and tie securely. Or wrap loosely in a piece of aluminum foil and poke several small holes to vent. Place in the center of a *hamin/adafina* (Sabbath stew) and add more water to the stew to account for absorption.

KREPLACH/KREPL

Kreplach/krepl is a filled pasta triangle, most often served in soup.

Origin: Eastern Europe

Before the advent of Yiddish around 1250, the common language of the nascent Ashkenazim in northern France was a form of Old French, as evidenced in the names of early Ashkenazic dishes, including cholent (Sabbath stew), *fluden* (layered pastries), *oublies* (waffle wafers), and *krepish*. First recorded in the twelfth century, *krepish* consisted of a small piece of meat

wrapped in a thin sheet of pastry and fried; the dish was somewhat similar to the later eastern European knish. The name of this very popular treat came from the Old French word *crêpe* (curly/wrinkled), which much later also gave rise to crepe, the word for the thin French pancake, and is related to the English word crisp and the German word *krappen* (fried). Eastern Europeans innovated with a cheese filling, as Rabbi Isaac ben Moses of Vienna (1180–1260) made a point of noting. He commented, “Jews in the Slavic lands also made *krepish* with cheese.” Around the sixteenth century, eastern Europeans, about the same time that they ceased making *krepish*, began making filled pasta; this practice may have been a by-product of Tatar incursions from Asia or may have been introduced from Italy, or both. This was a dramatic innovation in northern Europe, since boiling food in water was far cheaper than frying it in fat. Poles called their filled pasta *pierogi*, while in the Ukraine, they became known as *varenikes*. The predominant eastern Ashkenazic name for filled pasta became *krepl* (or *kreplekh* plural). *Kreplach*, like all Ashkenazic noodles, are made from wheat flour bound with eggs, not the semolina conventional in the Mediterranean. Originally, *kreplach* were filled with chopped cooked meat, which was typically a way of stretching and enhancing leftovers or a tight budget. Lung and chopped liver were once particularly widespread. After a meat shortage befell Europe in the sixteenth century, fruit and nut fillings also became popular. For dairy meals, a little soft cheese was substituted. Other standard fillings included cabbage, kasha, mushroom, and, in the mid- nineteenth century, potato, although meat remained the most popular.

Kreplach are rarely eaten plain: Meat types are most commonly served swimming in chicken soup, while cheese or potato are typically bathed in sour cream or, like many dumplings, lightly fried after boiling and paired with sautéed onions.

Kreplach quickly became a much- beloved Ashkenazic delicacy and an integral part of Jewish culture. A popular Yiddish expression for “too much of a good thing” is “*Kreplach esn vert oykh nimes*” (One even gets tired of eating *kreplach*). Isaac Bashevis Singer, in his 1956 short story “Gimpel the Fool,” wrote, “One night, when the period of mourning was done, as I lay dreaming on the flour sacks, there came the Spirit of Evil himself and said to me, ‘Gimpel, why do you sleep?’ I said, ‘What should I be doing? Eating *kreplach*?’ ”

Making noodles by hand was a *potchke* (bother), so historically Ashkenazic housewives prepared them only once a week or less. Filled pasta required even more effort, meat for the filling was typically expensive and rare, and *kreplach* could not be stored for any length of time. Therefore, *kreplach* were generally reserved for special occasions and for four specific holidays: Yom Kippur eve, Hoshanah Rabbah, Purim, and Shavuot. At the meal before the fast of Yom Kippur (*Seudah Mafseket*), meat *kreplach* are traditional in chicken soup, as the mystics compare the wrapping of dough with the divine envelopment of mercy, kindness, and protection demonstrated on Yom Kippur. Hoshanah Rabbah (the seventh day of Sukkot) is regarded as the day on which the verdicts of judgment delivered on Yom Kippur are sealed and, accordingly, traditional Yom Kippur eve foods are served. Another symbolic meaning of *kreplach* is that the filling is “beaten” (i.e., minced), just as willow branches are beaten on Hoshanah Rabbah, Haman was “beaten” on Purim, and sinners theoretically deserve to be beaten on Yom Kippur. All three of these occasions are also days when work is permitted, and the *kreplach* with their concealed filling have been said to remind us of the days’ hidden

holiness. Cheese *kreplach*, with either a savory or sweet curd filling, are often customary on Shavuot. Dairy *kreplach* were also once served as an occasional weekday treat during the spring and summer when fresh cheese was plentiful.

By the seventeenth century, *kreplach* were becoming traditional Purim fare among eastern Europeans as well; they were served filled with meat and floating in chicken soup. If featured for dessert, they might contain cherry, plum, or strawberry preserves. *Kreplach* also came to represent the three- cornered hat or ear ascribed to the villainous Haman.

Kreplach, spelled *creplich*, was first mentioned in English in Israel Zangwill's *Children of the Ghetto* (London, 1892). A recipe for "Creplech" appeared in the first edition of *The Settlement Cook Book* (Milwaukee, 1901).

Meat *kreplach*, called "meat balls with sport jackets" and "the eternal triangle" by humorist Sam Levenson, became standard at Jewish delis, while hearty cheese ones were a mainstay of Catskills hotels and Jewish dairy restaurants. As a result, cheese *kreplach* with sour cream was adopted as movie star Jimmy Cagney's favorite nosh, which he enjoyed at various Jewish eateries. Mel Brooks, in one of his 2000-Year-Old Man routines, said about the secret to his longevity: "The major thing is that I never eat fried food. I don't eat it, I wouldn't look at it; I don't touch it. Except maybe once in a while a little schnitzel, a few blintzes, a plate of *kreplach*." *Krepl* and *kreplach* even became geometric terms for a type of triangle. Yet *kreplach* never achieved the prominence in mainstream American gastronomy as ravioli or wontons, remaining primarily an iconic Jewish food.

(See also Lokshen, Pirog, and Varenik/Varenikes)

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EASTERN EUROPEAN FILLED PASTA TRIANGLES (KREPLACH)

about thirty-two 3-inch dumplings [meat]

Filling:

2 tablespoon vegetable oil or schmaltz

1 medium onion, chopped

1 pound ground beef chuck

1 to 2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley or dill

About 1 teaspoon salt

About ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper

1 recipe (1 pound) Egg Noodle Dough (page 368), prepared according to directions below, or 32 wonton wrappers

1. To make the filling: In a large skillet, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté until soft and translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the beef and sauté until the meat loses its red coloring, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the parsley, salt, and pepper. Let cool.

2. After kneading the dough in Step 2 of the Egg Noodle Dough recipe, cover and let stand at room temperature for 1 hour. Divide the dough in half. On a lightly floured surface, roll out each piece into a rectangle about 1/8 inch thick. Cut into 2½- to 3-inch squares. Reroll any dough scraps.

3. Place 1 teaspoon filling in the center of each 2½-inch square or a heaping teaspoon in the center of each 3-inch square. Brush the dough edges with a little water to moisten and fold

over diagonally to form a triangle, pressing out any air. Pinch the edges or press with the tines of a fork to seal.

4. Place on a lightly floured surface or a kitchen towel, cover with a kitchen towel, and let stand until the dough begins to feel dry but is still supple, about 30 minutes. The pasta may be prepared ahead up to this point and refrigerated for up to 1 week or frozen for up to 3 months until ready to use. Do not thaw before cooking, but increase the cooking time by about 5 minutes.

5. In a large pot, bring lightly salted water to a rapid boil. In several batches, drop the pasta into the pot, reduce the heat to medium, and cook, uncovered, until the kreplach are tender but not mushy, about 15 minutes. With a slotted spoon, remove the pasta and drain.

6. Add the kreplach to hot chicken soup or fry in a little schmaltz or vegetable oil until golden brown, 2 to 3 minutes.

variations

For the meat filling, substitute about 2 cups Ashkenazic pastry filling, such as potato or cheese (page 197), or Pirogen filling (pages 465–466).