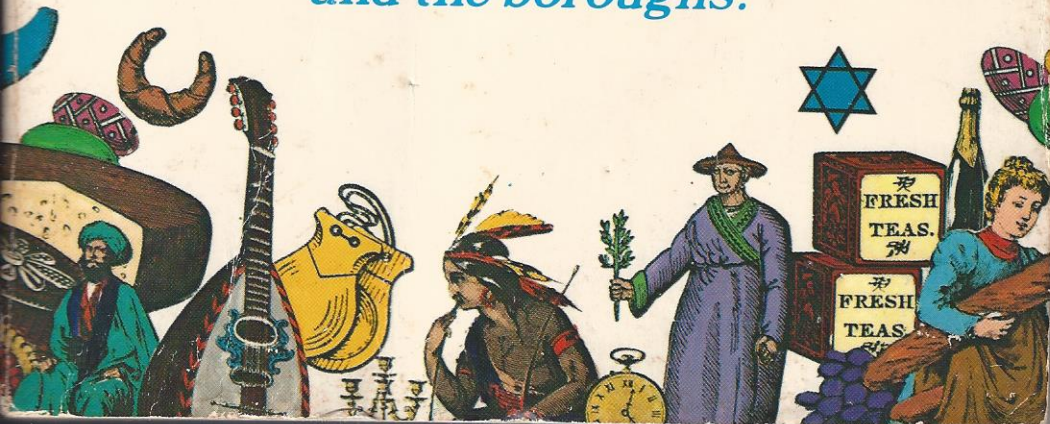


The Complete Guide to

Ethnic New York

by Zelda Stern

*With
information
and recommendations
on the restaurants,
sights, shops, food, festivals,
musical and cultural activities
of ethnic neighborhoods
in Manhattan
and the boroughs.*





ARAB NEW YORK

Arab Atlantic Avenue

Just across the East River from Manhattan, a small Arab oasis flourishes on Atlantic Avenue between Court and Clinton streets, on the southern border of Brooklyn Heights. No date palms grow in this part of Brooklyn, no rose gardens perfume the evening air and the only caravan ever spotted on the horizon is the line of traffic on the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway.

But never mind. Inside the Lebanese and Syrian stores that form a block-long bazaar on both sides of the avenue, you will find huge mounds of sticky dates from the palm trees of Iraq, coils and coils of Turkish Delight redolent of attar of roses and lines of customers wending their way to the cash register, arms laden with exotic foodstuffs from every corner of the globe.

Strolling down this part of the avenue is an exercise in temptation. Shopfront windows are an irresistible jumble of gleaming brass narghiles, fringed Syrian lamps, Egyptian *durbek* drums, sequined belly-dancing costumes and large trays bearing innumerable little bowls of spices, nuts and dried fruits to suggest to the passerby the vast selection to be found within. Bakeries send forth aromas of desert bread and display trays of *baklawa* and other butter-laden, nut-filled, syrupy sweets just waiting to be enjoyed with a demitasse of thick, cardamom-scented Arab coffee or a cup of tea made fragrant with cinnamon and mint. Arab restaurants—there are about a dozen in the area—post menus in their windows that beckon with promises of baba ghanooj, hommos, kibbee and shish kebab. Why even try to resist such enticements, especially when prices are so low?

New York's Arab community goes back to the 1870s, to the "Syrian Columbus," Moses David, a trader thought to have been the first Arab settler in New York. Other Syrian and Lebanese traders soon followed Mr. David's example, but the 1890s brought the first real wave of Arab

immigration, when many Syrians fled Ottoman rule. After World War I, the upheavals of war and economic problems in Lebanon brought a second wave of Syrians and Lebanese. Palestinians (refugees from Jordan and the West Bank after the Six-Day War in 1967) and Yemenis (who have been coming in a steady trickle since about 1970) are relative newcomers to the city's Arab community, which also includes a sprinkling of Egyptians, Iraqis, Jordanians and Arabic-speaking Armenians from Lebanon.

In Arab New York, the earliest immigrants—the Syrians and the Lebanese—are also the most numerous. Fred Koury, editor of the city's oldest Arabic newspaper, *Al Hoda*, estimates the Lebanese population at about fifty-thousand, of which about 95 percent are American-born. No figures are available for the Syrian community, but it is sizeable.

Although in the Middle East, Christians are a minority, in New York's Arab community, they are the majority and include Maronites, Melchites and Syrian Catholics. The city's Yemenis are largely Muslim. The bond of language unites all New York's Arabs no matter what their religion or nationality, but the Lebanese and Syrians have especially close ties over and above this common denominator.

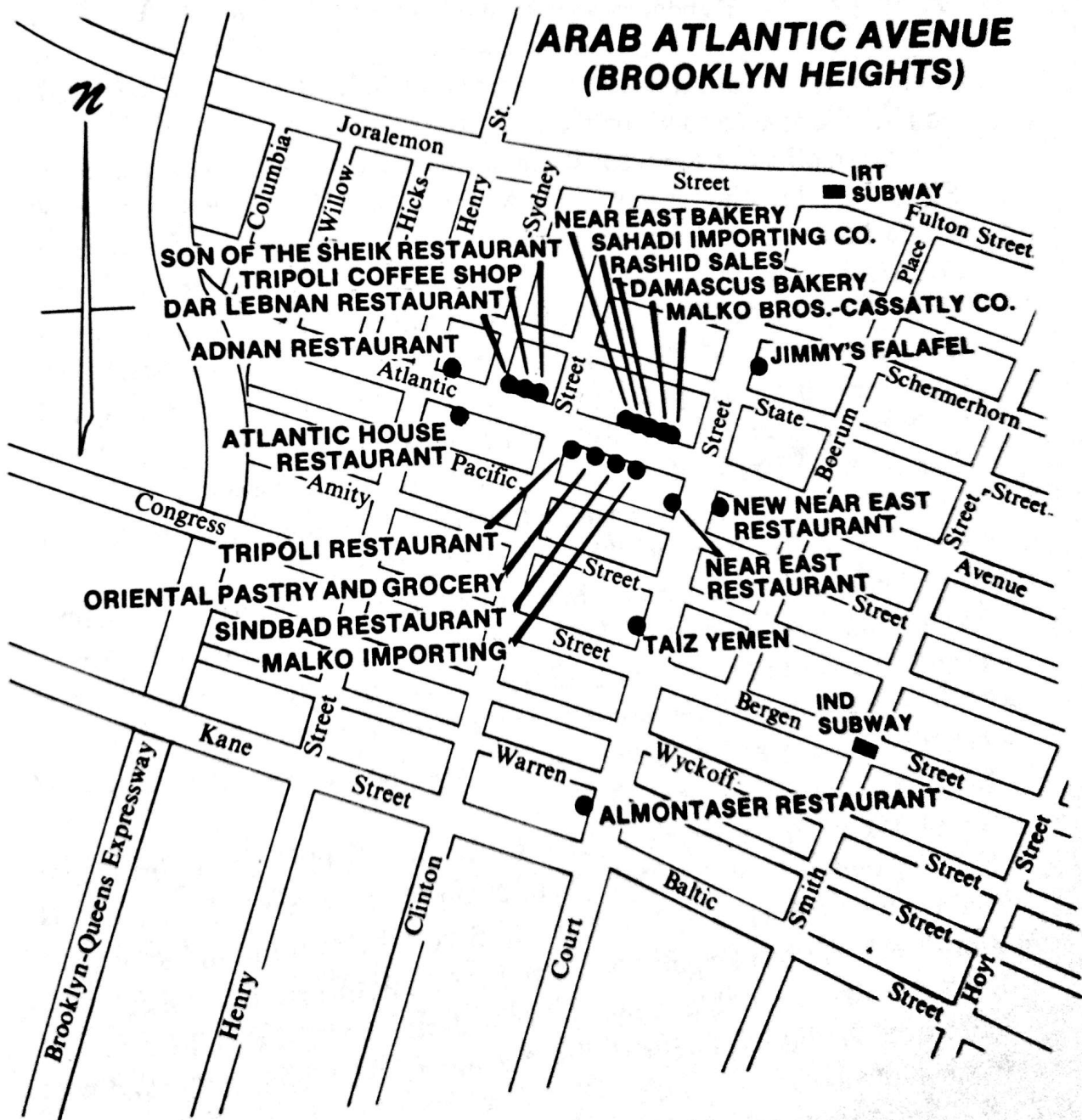
The first Arab neighborhood in New York (Atlantic Avenue is the second) was established in Lower Manhattan in the 1880s, on Washington Street from Rector Street to Battery Place—a stone's throw from Castle Garden, where all immigrants to the city landed before 1890. Little Syria, as the colony was known, lasted over a half-century, and in its heyday—the 1920s—was a center for expatriate Arab intellectuals and writers (among them the poet Kahlil Gibran), who used to meet in the coffee houses on Washington Street.

Despite its location on the shoulder of Wall Street, Little Syria managed to stave off urban development until the 1940s, when, displaced by construction of the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel, many Arabs from Little Syria moved to Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn. (In the days when ferries plied the East River, Atlantic Avenue was the first stop on the line after the boat left Battery Park—the park was just below the Arab quarter—and many Arab families had already settled there.)

Most of the present shopkeepers and restaurant owners on Atlantic Avenue are the children and grandchildren of those who made the move from Little Syria. They grew up on Atlantic Avenue and have watched it change over the years—from Italian to Arab, from Arab to polyglot, from poor to prosperous. In recent years, Atlantic Avenue has benefited from the resurgence of Brooklyn Heights, which, with its blocks of

handsome old brownstones and proximity to Manhattan, has become one of the most fashionable residential areas in the city.

Though many Arabs now live in Bay Ridge and Prospect Park, Atlantic Avenue remains the Arab shopping center of New York. Visitors to the avenue (it's only a half-hour subway ride from Manhattan) can combine shopping for exotic foods and dining on shish kebab with a tour of the old buildings and churches of Brooklyn Heights or perhaps a stroll along the Promenade with its splendid views of the Manhattan skyline (only ten blocks from the Arab shopping area). Arab Atlantic Avenue is worth a trip anytime of the year, but it is especially lively on the third Sunday of September, when it becomes an outdoor Arab bazaar for the annual Atlantic Antic.



HOW TO GET THERE

By car from Manhattan: Brooklyn Bridge to Adams Street, Adams Street to Court, Court to Atlantic Avenue. **By subway** from Manhattan: *Seventh Avenue IRT* #2 or #3 to Borough Hall; or *Lexington Avenue IRT* #4 or #5 to Borough Hall; *IND F* train to Bergen St.

SAHADI

The undisputed sultan of Atlantic Avenue's food stores is **Sahadi** (nos. 187-189, Court-Clinton Sts., 624-4550).

A Lebanese trader, Abraham Sahadi, established the first Sahadi store in 1895 on Washington Street in Manhattan's Little Syria. In the 1940's, Abraham's nephew opened a branch store on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn; today this Sahadi's, owned by Abraham's greatnephew Richard, is the largest direct importer and wholesaler of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean foods on the East Coast.

A small store for what it carries (there are plans for expansion), Sahadi's is bursting at the seams with goodies. As you enter, rows of old-fashioned apothecary jars catch the eye. These hold a golden array of dried and glazed fruits: Turkish apricots (much plumper than the commercially packaged kind), huge Turkish raisins, white Turkish mulberries (use as you would raisins), fat Smyrna figs, quinces, peaches, pears, nectarines, papayas, pineapples, bananas, shiny dates from Iraq and California and tart little dried cherry apples from the People's Republic of China. Other jars hold nuts: almonds, pistachios, walnuts, pignoli—some with the shell, some without; some salted, some plain—all very fresh and usually priced well below average retail.

Among the best bargains in the store are Sahadi's own brand items: Sahadi *halwa*—plain or studded with nuts (the same stuff sells for \$1 more a pound in Manhattan gourmet shops), Sahadi *tahini* (add lemon juice, garlic and a little water to make *taratour* sauce for *felafel*; add mashed chick peas to the *taratour* and you have *hommos*), and Sahadi Middle Eastern-style honey.

Look in the refrigerated case for *lebany*, a kind of yogurt cream cheese (with one third the calories of cream cheese) that is delicious as is and even better when sprinkled with olive oil and mint and spread on Arab bread. If you like goat cheese and you're not worried about calories, try some of the double-cream feta, without doubt the richest feta in existence. And don't overlook the Armenian string cheese flecked with black caraway.

Antique wood-and-glass cabinets hold whole cardamom, black

caraway, tart red sumak (mix with thyme and stir into lebany) and dried Syrian mint. Barrels on the floor hold California-grown bulgur wheat (*burghul* in Arabic) in medium and coarse cuts, couscous (semolina pasta), fragrant *basmatti* rice from Pakistan, and fifteen different kinds of olives from Greece, Syria, Peru and Morocco, as well as vine leaves packed in brine for stuffing with rice or ground lamb. Elsewhere in the store, you'll find little bundles of dried eggplant (when soaked, these expand to many times their size), frozen filo dough and frankincense and myrrh.

Amid the wonderful confusion of smells at Sahadi, the delicious aroma of roasted coffee beans draws one like a magnet to the coffee grinder in the middle section of the store. The coffee beans—100 percent South American—are ground to order, and one of the most frequent orders is for fine Turkish grind (in which the beans are almost pulverized) used to make Turkish—also known as Arab—coffee.

Sahadi's is always crowded, but the staff is always helpful, if rushed. *Open Mon.—Fri. 9 A.M.—7 P.M.; Sat. 8 A.M.—7 P.M. Cl. Sun.*

OTHER FOOD STORES

Although Sahadi's prices are very reasonable, if you enjoy bargain hunting, you can often find even lower prices in other stores on Atlantic Avenue. One shop where items are frequently cheaper is **Malko Brothers—Cassatly Co.** (no. 197, Clinton—Court Sts., 855-2455), a small store that nonetheless carries all the staples of Middle Eastern cuisine. Malko Brothers is also open on Sundays, when Sahadi's is closed. *Open daily 9 A.M.—9 P.M.*

Across the street from both Sahadi and Malko Brothers—Cassatly Co. is **Malko Importing** (no. 182, MA 4-2049), an old-fashioned, exceptionally tidy store, from its regimented lines of spice jars to its evenly laid out rows of fresh and very appetizing homemade pastries. Owner George Malko carries all the basics, along with a few specialties like Persian leaf tobacco from Iran (for water pipes), Syrian brass water pipes, belly dancers' *zills* (finger cymbals), Egyptian henna in three shades, vanilla and pistachio ice cream flavored with imported Syrian essences and rosewater-flavored apricot sherbet. You'll also find a large selection of sweet syrups here—almond, tamarind, pomegranate, rosewater—which can be mixed with water or soda for summer drinks or poured over shaved ice for Persian sherbet. *Open daily 9 A.M.—9 P.M.*

The tantalizing buttery smells of baking pastry at **Oriental Pastry and Grocery** (no. 170, Clinton—Court Sts., 875-7687) pull you in by the nose the minute you open the door. The pastries—*baklawa*, birds' nests,

ladies' fingers and other many-layered, syrupy delights—are all made in the back of the store. If you would like to try your hand at making some of these yourself, you can also get homemade *filo* dough here—unbelievably thin dough which you can layer with nuts for *baklawa*, stuff with spinach for spinach pie or fill with sliced apples and roll into strudel.

True to its name, Oriental Pastry and Grocery also carries a full line of imported Middle Eastern foods. Among the foods carried here that I did not see elsewhere are Syrian pickled turnips in red beet juice (a favorite Arab appetizer) and cans of date jam, rose jam and fig jam.

Oriental Pastry and Grocery, is owned and run by a Syrian family, K. Moustapha and Sons. *Open daily, 10 A.M.—8:30 P.M.*

BAKERIES

“We’re the Rolls-Royce of the Middle Eastern bakeries,” says Eddie Alvarado of **Near East Bakery** (183 Atlantic Ave., Clinton-Court Sts., TR 5-0016), whose mother is Lebanese and whose father is Hispanic. “We bake our bread in the original brick ovens that were here over eighty years ago. Our products contain no preservatives, no additives. Everything is fresh.”

The story of the Near East Bakery tells the story of Atlantic Avenue. The shop, which is in the basement of an old building, was originally an Italian bakery. When the Italian family moved out, an Armenian family took over. Eddie’s uncle, Bob Kanatous, used to work for the Armenian family, and so when the Armenians left, the Kanatous family took over. Now two generations of the family work here—often for thirteen or fourteen hours at a stretch.

From the customer counter, you can see the machines used to mix and cut the dough as well as the eighty-year-old brick oven into which Bob Kanatous and his brother-in-law Arbeeney, using long-handled paddles, place the individual loaves. The *pita* bread that comes out is flat, round and hollow—a convenient pocket for *felafel* or *hommos*.

The Near East makes several varieties of *pita*: whole wheat, *zahter* (sprinkled with thyme, sumak, sesame seeds and oil), *simson* (large *pita* coated with sesame seeds) and *macook* or desert bread—the oldest bread in the world, according to Eddie Alvarado, who says that in biblical times, these very large, round, flat loaves were baked on top of hollowed-out rocks that held a fire.

The little triangular spinach pies here—made with fresh spinach—are hands down the best in town. (They can be frozen; just heat in the oven when you want to serve.) And the toothsome sweet *filo* pastries—*baklawa* and cashew-and-almond-filled *kul wa-shkur* (literally, “eat and

praise")—stay fresh for three or four months without refrigeration because they are made with clarified butter, which doesn't spoil (just keep away from extreme heat). *Open Tues.—Sat. 8 A.M.—4:30 P.M., 6:30 P.M.—5:30 A.M.; Sun. 8 A.M.—1:30 P.M. Cl. Mon.*

You will find the largest selection of Arab pastries on Atlantic Avenue at **Damascus Bakery** (no. 195, Clinton-Court Sts., 855-1456), a family-run business founded in 1930 by Henry Halaby from Damascus, Syria. The tremendous variety of pastries at Damascus seems confusing until you realize that most are variations on two themes: syrup-soaked filo pastry layered or stuffed with nuts (*baklawa*, ladies' fingers, birds' nests), and pastries made with semolina flour (honey-soaked cake or *hariset*, sesame cookies or *barazet*, cupcakes impressed with a design from a wooden mold called *mammoul* when filled with nuts, *ajweh* when filled with dates). Triangles of *filo* filled with custard are *fatir bil ishta*; shredded dough combined with syrup and nuts becomes *knafe*; plain butter-cookie rings are *goraybe*.

All the pastries at Damascus are made downstairs, but the bread—*pita*, *macook*, *simson* and *zatar*—comes from the Damascus plant in another part of Brooklyn. *Open daily 8 A.M.—10 P.M.*

GIFTS, MUSIC, AND A COFFEE SHOP

Next door to Sahadi Food Imports is the **Sahadi Gift Shop** (no. 187, 624-4550), crammed with inlaid backgammon boards and tables from Lebanon and Syria, clay or brass hand drums from Syria and Egypt, enamel pots for making Arab coffee, porcelain demitasse coffee sets, handleless Turkish tea glasses, leather hassocks from Istanbul, brass trays from Syria (these make wonderful table tops when supported by wooden stands, which are also sold here), Middle Eastern cookbooks, wooden *mammoul* (cupcake) molds, and—one of the most popular items in the store—belly-dancing costumes. A complete outfit—gold- or silver-sequined bra, hip belt, and gauze skirt—is only about \$30.

Sahadi's Gift Shop is officially *open only on Saturday, 8 A.M.—7 P.M.* but if the salespeople in the grocery next door are not busy on other days, they will open the gift store on request. *Cl. Sun.*

Brass lamps, brass trays and backgammon boards can also be found in many of the Arab groceries on Atlantic Avenue.

Rashid Sales (no. 191, Court-Clinton Sts., 852-3298) specializes in Middle Eastern music: tapes and recordings of popular Middle Eastern singers, records to belly dance to and albums of instrumental music featuring the *oud* (lute), *kannon* (zither), *durbek* (drum) and tambourine. The store also carries some of these instruments. One section of Rashid's

serves as a small bookstore of Arabic publications. Also a distributor of Arab films made in Egypt and Lebanon, Rashid's sometimes presents Arab movies in local auditoriums. *Open Mon.—Sat. 9 A.M.—7 P.M., Sun. 12 noon—5 P.M.*

If, after an hour or two of shopping on Atlantic Avenue, you need a place to sit, head for the **Tripoli Coffee Shop** (no. 163, Clinton–Henry Sts., no phone). Here you can revive yourself with a cup of Turkish coffee and a piece of *baklava*, homemade Lebanese ice cream (in flavors like cashew and apricot) or a bowl of refreshing, unsweetened milk pudding sprinkled with honey and nuts. Though it is a far cry from the coffeehouses of Manhattan's old Arab quarter, where men sat for hours sipping coffee and smoking narghiles, the Tripoli, with its minaret-shaped "windows" framing scenic murals and its tree-slab tables, is a pleasant place to while away some time. Tripoli (which is under the same management as the Tripoli Restaurant across the street) also sells dried fruits, glazed fruits, candied orange slivers, pumpkin seeds, pistachio nuts and homemade yogurt to go. *Open daily, noon—midnight.*

RESTAURANTS

Except for an Egyptian *felafel* stand called Jimmy's, all the Arab restaurants on or near Atlantic Avenue are owned by Lebanese or Yemenis. Most of the Lebanese restaurants specialize in Middle Eastern food, while the Yemeni restaurants (all owned by various members of the same enterprising Almontaser family) serve both Middle Eastern and Continental cuisine. Both the Lebanese and the Yemeni restaurants are modestly furnished and inexpensive. None have liquor licenses, but all allow you to bring your own beer and wine.

To start with the exception, **Jimmy's Felafel** (111 Court St., State–Schermmerhorn Sts., 875-9137), owned by Tawfik and Jimmy Shehab from Cairo, specializes in the deep-fried balls of seasoned mashed chick peas and bulgur that are the hamburgers of the Arab world. You eat *felafel* sandwiched in *pita* bread, moistened with *taratour* sauce (sesame-seed paste, lemon juice and garlic) and, if you wish, further seasoned with a dab of fiery hot sauce.

You can get other things at Jimmy's besides *felafel*: *shawerma*, for instance. *Shawerma* (you can see it sizzling in the window) is meat—usually seasoned lamb—cooked on a vertical rotisserie. Jimmy uses breast of veal instead of lamb. Cooked slowly in this rotating manner, the veal acquires the flavor of meat that has been roasted on a spit over an open fire. For a *shawerma* sandwich, slices of meat are carved off the spit, placed on *pita* bread and served with a tasty sauce.

Other dishes always on hand at Jimmy's are *baba ghanooj* (seasoned eggplant-tahini puree), eggplant *munazali* (stew of eggplant, tomatoes, chick peas and onions), and *hommos* (mashed chick peas with *tahini* and lots of seasoning). All are served plain or on *pita* bread. To drink, there is soda, Arab coffee or Lebanese tea spiced with anise and cinnamon.

You can take your order out or eat it at one of the tables in the pleasant little dining area. *Open Mon.-Fri. 11 A.M.-10 P.M.; Sat.-Sun. 1 P.M.-10 P.M.* Free delivery.

The oldest Lebanese restaurant on Atlantic Avenue is **Son of the Sheik** (no. 165, Clinton-Henry Sts., 625-4023, I), a small, cozy place that serves delicious Middle Eastern food with a homemade touch. This Son is actually the second; the first, opened in 1932 by Tony Saïdy, was on Washington Street, in Manhattan's old Little Syria. In that restaurant, a complete shish-kebab dinner cost 65¢. Prices have gone up since then (though not exorbitantly), and Tony has taken in his nephew Dave as a partner, but that's all that has changed. The food is prepared with the same care, and the beaded curtains, posters of Lebanon and old-fashioned air of the place seem to have been transported directly from Little Syria.

Meza—appetizers—are the special glory of an Arab dinner, and Son of the Sheik's menu (with Valentino in sheik's clothing on the cover) lists no less than fourteen different kinds. *Baba ghanooj*, *hommos* and *tabboule* (parsley-mint-bulgur salad) are the old standbys, but you can also get lamb-brains salad if you're in the mood.

The Lebanese national dish is *kibbee*—pounded or ground lamb mixed with bulgur—served in many different forms. At Son of the Sheik, you can get *kibbee nayah* (raw kibbee, an appetizer), baked *kibbee*, and *kibbee* meatballs. Another specialty of the house is shish kebab—not marinated, but simply charcoal-broiled plain, like a good steak. If you like stuffed vegetables, try the Lebanese Assorted Plate—grape leaves, squash, cabbage and eggplant stuffed with rice or lamb, each vegetable's insides delicately seasoned with a different combination of spices and herbs. Nine other combination dinners allow you to sample a variety of dishes in a single meal.

For dessert, there are Arab pastries, apricot sherbet and milk pudding. *Open Tues.-Sun. 11 A.M.-10:30 P.M.; Sat. until 12:30 A.M. Cl. Mon.*

One of the most attractive restaurants on the street is **Sindbad** (no. 172, Clinton-Court, 624-9105, I). Owner Joe Hatoum, a young business-school graduate, has attempted to invest his place with a little more ambiance than most of the other Arab restaurants in the area, while still maintaining a completely authentic menu.

As you walk downstairs into Sindbad, you feel as if you are entering a sultan's harem. On one side of the room, cast-iron pillars form a small arcade, the ceiling of which is draped with a billowing canopy; on the other side, a cast-iron facade outlines minaret shapes on the patterned persimmon-colored wallpaper. Vases of cloth roses on each table and subdued Middle Eastern music add to the Arabian-nights effect.

Munch on the complimentary pickled turnips in red beet juice and hot pepperoncini while you contemplate the menu, and be sure to order the *filo* meat and spinach pie appetizers (the fillings are mixed with pine nuts). Other house specialties are the fresh *tabboule* salad, the shish kebab, the *kibbee* (baked and served with stuffed grape leaves or eggplant and a bowl of homemade yogurt) and the *couscous* (served with a bowl of cinnamon-fragrant chicken, carrots and squash).

The buttery-fresh pastries (everything is made on the premises except the pita bread) are worthy of a sultan's table; if Scheherazade had known how to make birds' nests like these, maybe she wouldn't have had to tell so many tales.

Arab coffee comes sweet (the sugar boiled with the grounds) or straight as you prefer, and the Lebanese tea is scented with mint and cinnamon. *Open Tues.–Sun. 12 noon–10 P.M.; Fri. and Sat. until 11:30 –P.M. Cl. Mon.*

The menu at **Dar Lebnan** (no. 151, Henry–Clinton Sts., 625-7998, I), one of the newest Lebanese restaurants on the street, boasts that all dishes are prepared by a European chef. Along with its kibbee and kebabs, it lists many Continental dishes. *Open Thurs.–Tues., Wed.; Cl. Mon.*

Across the street is another Lebanese restaurant, the **Tripoli** (no. 160, 596-0461, I), where you dine under an ancient-looking canopy (for some reason this one suggests desert tents rather than harems) and where the waiters wear embroidered vests. Tripoli's menu is completely traditional and includes a few unusual fish dishes (sautéed fish with *tahini* sauce, almonds and walnuts) and half-dozen interesting meatless entrees along with its standard lamb fare. *Open daily, noon–midnight.*

The grandfather of all the Yemeni restaurants on Atlantic Avenue is **Atlantic House** (no. 144, Clinton–Henry Sts., 858-7732, I), founded over a dozen years ago by Mohammad Almontaser. Since its establishment, Atlantic House has spawned six more Yemeni restaurants in the area all owned by the sons and nephews of the founder: the **Near East** (136–138 Court, Atlantic Ave.–Pacific St., 624-9257, I), the **New Near East** (139 Court, 625-9559, I), the two-floor **Almontaser** (218 Court, Warren–Baltic Sts., 624-9267, I), the **Adnan** (no. 129, Clinton–Henry

Sts., 625-8697, I), and the **Taiz Yemen** (172 Court St., Amity-Congress Sts., 625-3907, I).

The prototype for all the restaurants that followed, **Atlantic House** is a small, dark, paneled room furnished with two rows of cloth-covered tables under two rows of Japanese paper lanterns. Almost two thirds of the menu is Continental (Mohammad Almontaser studied at Restaurant Associates), but along with the frogs' legs provencale and the veal francaise Georgia (topped with peaches), there is the standard selection of Middle Eastern fare and two Yemeni dishes: a "ragu" of small pieces of lamb cooked with onions, green peppers and garlic in a spicy sauce and served with yellow rice, and Yemen *fata*—Arab bread in a spicy meat broth topped with lamb chunks in a garlic sauce.

Look hard among the crepes and cheesecakes listed on the menu and you will find two Arab desserts—*baklawa* and *kammer al-din*, the latter a sensational, creamy, translucent apricot pudding made with real apricots and topped with a dollop of whipped cream. The frothy Yemen coffee, spiced with cardamom and cinnamon, is delicious.

With minor variations ("Yemen ragu" becomes "*saba glaba*"), all the other Almontaser restaurants follow the patriarch's lead, down to the paneled walls and paper lanterns. Though it differs very little from the others, for some reason, **Adnan** seems the most attractive restaurant in the Almontaser chain.

All the Yemeni restaurants are *open 11 A.M.—11 P.M. seven days a week.*

Around Town In Manhattan

ISLAMIC CENTER

The main religious center of Greater New York's Muslim community, which includes many Arabs, is the **Islamic Center**, located, until a new mosque on the Upper East Side is completed, in a five-story town house at 1 Riverside Drive (362-6800). The center holds religious services, provides a Sunday school for Muslim children and Arabic classes for adults, and sponsors free lectures on Islam. *Open daily 9:30 A.M.—4 P.M. Cl. Sat.*

RESTAURANTS

New York's Lebanese community is unanimous in agreeing that the best Lebanese restaurant in New York is **Beirut** (43 W. 32 St., Fifth-Sixth Aves., 866-9642, I-M). Serving a largely Arab clientele, Beirut abstains from all Arabian-nights stage props. Instead, the formal color scheme

(deep red walls, black ceiling) old-fashioned button-leather chairs, chandeliers, Middle Eastern background music and above all the patrons, almost all of whom are expatriate Lebanese, make you feel as if you were dining in a restaurant in prewar Beirut, when that cosmopolitan city was still known as the Paris of the Middle East.

Beirut's extensive Arabic-English menu is completely Middle Eastern and completely authentic. While you look it over, order an *arak*. A strong, clear, licorice-flavored aperitif that becomes cloudy when added to water (the Egyptians call it lion's milk), *arak* is the customary drink with *meza*—the appetizers. To start you off, the waiter brings out a complimentary plate of hot peppers, radishes and raw carrots; from here on, the content of your *meza* is up to you. Whatever you order—fluffy *hommos*, smoky *baba ghanooj*, refreshing *tabboule*, creamy *lebany*—it will come with a basket of pita and it will be good.

As in any Middle Eastern restaurant, lamb dominates the menu here, but it comes in so many different forms that the fare actually is extraordinarily varied. The shish kebab (unmarinated, tender lamb chunks served with tiny whole mushrooms and a lovely pilaf) is excellent, as is the succulent breast of lamb stuffed with ground lamb and rice that has been seasoned with cinnamon. And the *kibbee* (ground lamb mixed with bulgur) comes in four or five delicious guises—raw (appetizer), baked, stuffed with pine nuts (*kibbee krass*) or lamb and rice, and topped with yogurt sauce.

For dessert, there are Arab pastries made on the premises (you can also get some at the front counter to take home), *halwah*, Turkish Delight and a cool, sweet (but not cloying) version of Arab pudding, or *mahalabia*. Strong, thick Turkish coffee is the only way to end a meal here.

Prices are amazingly low and service is smoothly professional.
Open daily, 11:30 A.M.—11 P.M.

The dishes at **Andrée's** (354 E. 74 St., First-Second Aves., 249-6619, E), a restaurant specializing in Mediterranean cuisine, reflect the multicultural background of founder and chef Andrée Abramoff, an Egyptian Jew born and raised in Cairo who speaks English, Arabic, French and Italian, and whose family has branches in France and Greece.

Among the Egyptian dishes you can get at Andrée's, one—*meloukieh* soup, made with garlic and a green vegetable native of Egypt—dates back to the time of the Pharaohs. Andrée's *filo* pastries—cheese appetizers or pistachio *baklawa*—are extraordinarily delicate and buttery. Her main entrées take you on a tour of the Mediterranean, from Greek *moussaka* to Italian veal and prosciutto to Egyptian squab stuffed with pine nuts and bulgur. Everything is prepared with the finest ingre-

dients and the utmost care and elegance. The perfect Arab coffee that ends the meal is made in a brass coffeepot handed down to Mrs. Abramoff by her grandmother in Cairo.

While Mrs. Abramoff cooks, other members of her family help with the serving, and you feel like an honored guest in the Abramoff home, which indeed you are: the restaurant is on the first floor of the family's town house. All meals are *prix fixe* (\$18 for everything but squab and lamb at this writing); you must make reservations and choose your entrée in advance. Bring your own wine. Mrs. Abramoff also caters and teaches cooking classes. *Open Wed.—Sat. 7 P.M.—9:15 P.M. Wed., Thurs., one sitting; Fri. Sat., two sittings; at 7 and 9:15.*

ARABIAN NIGHTS

Long black hair flowing, belly rippling, eyes flashing and arms raised aloft with finger zills tapping in time to the music of the *oud* and *nai*, the dancer thrusts her hips from side to side, slowly gliding across the floor.

Such doings are a nightly occurrence at **El Sultan** (151 E. 50 St., Lexington—Third aves., 753-3429), a belly-dancing cabaret on the second floor of the Egyptian-owned discotheque Club Ibis. El Sultan's patrons, mostly well-to-do couples from the East side and the Middle East, come to the club to drink, to talk, to eat, to listen to Middle Eastern music, but most of all to watch the belly dancers—four different dancers on Friday and Saturday nights—practice a craft some say goes back to Eve.

Inches from the dancer, who works only a few feet from the tables, the blasé waiters walk back and forth bearing trays of drinks and food without so much as a glance in the direction of the performer. At the end of her act, the dancer circulates among the tables, stopping here and there for tips, which are customarily tucked into her costume.

El Sultan has a three-drink minimum, but no cover charge. *Open seven nights a week, 10:30 P.M.—3:30 A.M.*

Down in what used to be the "Belly Belt"—a strip of belly-dancing nightclubs on Eighth Avenue—a small, old-fashioned club called **Egyptian Gardens** (301 W. 29 St., 560-9535) hangs on. Don't be put off by the upstairs location and the crude painting of a belly dancer on the staircase. Once you get past these, you will find yourself not in a massage parlor as you had feared, but in a charmingly stagy backdrop for a grade-z production of *Casablanca*. Four palm-tree pillars hold up the old tin ceiling, the walls are painted with scenes of desert nomads and Eastern bazaars, and there is something in the still and stuffy air that makes it easy to imagine Sidney Greenstreet ensconced in a rattan armchair in

the corner, swatting a fly or two while perspiring under his fez. The musicians at Egyptian Gardens are good—very good—and they have been playing the same (blissfully unamplified) music for the past thirty of forty years. The belly dancer comes on at 10:30 P.M. *Open Mon.–Sat. nights 10:00 P.M.–4 A.M.* On weekends, there's a moderate minimum.

In Greenwich Village, a Turkish-owned nightclub, the **Darvish** (23 W. 8 St., Fifth–Sixth Aves., 475-1600) features Arab music and Middle Eastern belly dancing. *Open Wed., Thurs., Sun., 9 P.M.–2 A.M.; Fri.–Sat. 9 P.M.–4 A.M.; Closed Mon.–Tues.*

SO YOU WANT TO BE A BELLY DANCER

Some say belly dancing originated with the exercises taught to young Arab girls to prepare their muscles for childbirth; others say the dance goes back to the first woman who wanted to show off her femaleness to man. Whatever its origins, belly dancing in America has come out of the shadows of the circus sideshow where it was relegated for many years and into the sunlight of suburbia and the Y.W.C.A. New York, of course, is the center—one might say the navel—of the belly-dancing fever that is sweeping the country, and many professional dancers in the city now offer instruction in their art. The following are some of the better known.

Cia Cirel Middle Eastern Dance School (317 Sixth Ave., 929-2326) offers dance workshops limited to eight persons. Each month, Ms. Cirel teaches a different dance—one month an Egyptian cane dance, the next month a Turkish dance of welcome and so on—so that by the end of a few months, the dancer has acquired a repertoire.

Serena Studios (138 W. 53 St., 354-9603) operates one of the largest belly-dancing schools, offering two programs—one for fun and exercise, one for professional dancers. Some of the graduates of Serena's professional-level classes perform at El Sultan, and one of her star pupils is now the main attraction at a Cairo nightclub.

Ibrahim Farah of the Ibrahim Farah–Jerry Leroy Dance Studio (743 Eighth Ave., 595-1677), a second-generation Lebanese from Pennsylvania, did a lot of field research in the Middle East and discovered a vast difference between Middle Eastern cabaret dancing and Middle Eastern folk dancing. After studying both intensively, he organized his own troupe, which now performs theatricalized versions of Middle Eastern folk dance and has appeared at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center. Mr. Farah, who also publishes a journal of Middle Eastern dance and culture called *Arabesqué* (1 Sherman Sq., 595-1677), integrates Middle Eastern cabaret style, folk dancing and his own techniques in the classes at his studio.

MUSIC

Belly-dancing nightclubs are by no means the only places in town where you can hear the rhythms and music of the Arab world. The **Alternative Center for International Arts** (28 E. 4 St., Lafayette-Bowery, 473-6072) and the **Society for Asian Music** at Asia House (112 E. 64 St., Park-Lexington, PL1-3210) occasionally present concerts of Arab classical and folk music.

EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES

Ancient amulets, scarabs, terra-cotta figures, faience beads and other trinkets from the tombs of the pharaohs are some of the items you will find at **The Secret Eye** (689 Madison Ave. nr. 62 St., 888-0788), dealers in Egyptian antiquities and Middle Eastern crafts. Prices start at \$15 for a Greco-Roman coin and go up, up, up; objects date from the Eighteenth Dynasty to 30 B.C. *Open Mon.-Sat. 11 A.M.-6 P.M.*

New Egyptian restrictions bar the export of museum-quality art, but **L'Ibis Gallery** (667 Madison Ave. at 61 St., 935-0490) has a large collection of fine Egyptian pieces garnered in the '40s and '50s by the current director's French-Egyptian grandfather. *Open Tues.-Sat. 11 A.M.-6 P.M.*

Holidays and Festivals

An outdoor Arab bazaar, camel rides, belly dancing, shish kebab and baklawa are some of the attractions on Atlantic Avenue between Court and Clinton Streets at Brooklyn's annual **Atlantic Antic**, held on the third Sunday in September. For information call Sahadi, MA4-4550.

The biggest holiday of the year for New York's Arab Muslims is **Id al-Fitar**, the feast that marks the end of the month-long fast of **Ramadan**. During the entire month of Ramadan, which commemorates the time when the Koran was revealed to Muhammad, devout Muslims do not eat or drink till nightfall. The dates of Ramadan fall in different seasons because they are determined by the lunar calendar. The Islamic Center of New York (1 Riverside Drive, 362-6800) is the focus of religious activity at this time.

Arab Food

Lebanon's national dish may be *kibbee*, Egypt's may be *foul mudammas*, and Morocco's, *couscous*, but all Arabs share the same basic diet of

lamb, rice, dried beans, bulgur, yogurt, vegetables, nuts and fruit. Olive oil and butter are the main cooking fats. Flat, round Arab bread is eaten with most meals. A special feature of Arab cuisine is *meza*—a course of appetizers that may range from a single dish of pickled turnips to a spread of dozens of dishes. *Meza* is washed down with *arak*, a strong, anise-flavored aperitif.

Arab sweets take the form of syrupy nut-*filo* pastries or milk pudding. A demitasse of thick Arab coffee or a cup of spiced tea ends the meal.

MENU GLOSSARY

(Note: Spellings vary wildly from one restaurant to another; use your imagination.)

ajweh semolina cupcakes with date filling.

arak anise-flavored aperitif distilled from grapes or dates.

baba ghanooj eggplant-*tahini* dip.

baklawa many-layered *filo*-dough pastry filled with nuts and soaked in sweet syrup.

bamia okra; usually refers to a dish of lamb chunks cooked with fresh okra.

bird's nest roll of *filo* pastry in circular nest filled with mound of pistachio nuts and soaked in syrup.

burghul bulgur, or cracked wheat.

couscous tiny semolina pasta served with meat-and-vegetable stew.

coussa see *koussa*.

chawarma see *shawarma*.

felafel or *falafel* deep-fried balls of mashed chick peas and bulgur.

foul madammas or *medammas* boiled, seasoned fava beans.

goraybe butter cookies.

halwa sweet sesame-paste confection, often studded with nuts.

hommos, *hummus bi tahini* chick pea-*tahini* dip.

kafta kebab chopped lamb mixed with onions and spices and cooked on a skewer.

kebab, *kabob* skewered meat.

knafy, *kanafi* shredded wheat pastry.

kibbee, *kibbi*, *kibbeh* pounded or ground lamb combined with bulgur wheat, served raw or cooked, plain or with stuffing—the Lebanese national dish.

kibbee, ares *kibbee* stuffed with lamb meat.

kibbee krass *kibbee* stuffed with pine nuts.

kibbee nayah raw *kibbee* (an appetizer).

koussa stuffed squash.

kul wa-shkur literally "eat and praise,"—a nut-filled pastry.

- leban* yogurt.
- lebany, labanee* yogurt-cheese spread.
- loukoum* see *rahat loukoum*.
- mahalabia* milk pudding.
- malfouf* stuffed cabbage.
- manazali, manazala* baked eggplant stew.
- mammoul, ma-mul* semolina cupcakes with nut filling.
- meloukieh* Middle Eastern vegetable similar to okra.
- meza, mazza* course of appetizers.
- rahat loukoum* Turkish Delight, a soft, chewy sweet, flavored with fruits, nuts or rose water.
- shawerma* chunks of lamb or veal, rotisserie-cooked.
- shish kebab* chunks of lamb charcoal-broiled on a skewer.
- tabboule* salad of parsley, mint, bulgur, tomatoes, onions and lemon juice.
- tahini* crushed sesame-seed paste.
- taratour* sauce made with *tahini*, lemon juice and garlic.
- yabrak* stuffed grape leaves.