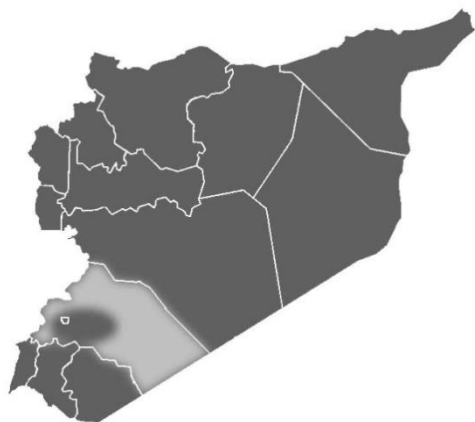


## The *Muhafaza* of Rural Damascus



This *muhafaza* includes the rural areas surrounding the city of Damascus and occupies an area of 17654 square km. Most of the population of this *muhafaza* work in agriculture while some have industrial or service occupations. It includes eight sections and twenty one areas, but I have included only Mouadamieh and the Ghouta.

### Mouadamieh

Mouadamieh lies in a wide plain surrounded by mountains, and used to be one of the most beautiful villages of the Ghouta before large cement buildings sprouted there. Nevertheless, doctors still recommend its dry air for their patients that have diseases of the chest.

### A Folktale from Mouadamieh: “*Nuss-insais*” or “Tiny”

Once upon a time, there was a man who had three wives but no children to fill his life with happiness. One day, while the man was sitting at the doorstep, a street peddler passed by calling: “Mountain apples for pregnancy!”

The man rushed towards the peddler and bought three apples. He called his three wives and gave them each an apple.

His first and second wives ate their apples, while his third wife just ate half of it and left it on the window sill.

Later on, a donkey passed by and ate it. Soon the three wives were pregnant and in a matter of months they had three healthy sons. The first and the second wife named their sons Mohammed and Hassan. The son of the third wife was so small that they called him Nuss-insais, or “Tiny”.

When the three boys grew up, their father asked what they wanted him to buy them.

“We each want a horse and a gun!” said Mohammed and Hassan.

“What about you, Nuss-insais, don’t you wish for something?”

“O, yes,” answered Nuss-insais, “I want a mule and a long stick!”

His two brothers laughed at Nuss-insais’s wish and made fun of him. Ever since Nuss-insais was a child; his brothers had always teased him about his small size.

“Someday I will show them all what I can do!” said Nuss-insais as he shook his head determinedly.

One day, the three boys went out hunting. Nuss-insais caught many birds with his long stick, while his two brothers couldn’t kill a single bird with their guns.

On their way back home they got lost in the desert. Suddenly they saw an old ugly woman standing at the foot of a hill.

The old woman smiled at them and said: “I’m your old Auntie... don’t you remember me?”

“We have no Auntie” said the three boys. “Our father has no sisters!”

“What!” croaked the old woman “Your hard-hearted father didn’t tell you about me! Come in my dear nephews and I’ll feed you something good to eat!”

The three boys went into the cave and were properly fed. Then the old woman asked them: “What do your horses and mule drink?”

“Milk!” said Mohammed and Hassan.

“Water!” said Nuss-insais.

Mohammed and Hassan were touched by the old woman’s special treatment and said to each other, “Only a true aunt would receive us so warmly!” But Nuss-insais shook his head and said: “Wouldn’t we have heard of her from our father?”

As night fell, the boys were led to a big bedroom to spend the night. Somehow Nuss-insais couldn’t go to sleep; he kept hearing strange loud howling from a distance.

Nuss-insais crept outside the room and peeked at his aunt. To his horror, his so-called aunt was a terrifying *ghouleh* (a kind of a witch). Her hair was wild and her eyes were blazing red.

At dawn, when the *ghouleh* went out to the well, Nuss-insais woke up his brothers and told them what he had seen. At once they jumped on their horses and ran away.

When the *ghouleh* finally came back, she found their room abandoned. She fell into a rage, and howled so loud that the walls of the cave rang. Then she ran outside and said out loud:

“O my milk, steam and bubble  
Hold up their horses on the border”

The horses of both Mohammed and Hassan stopped at once. However, Nuss-insais’s mule hadn’t drunk milk and it kept on running. The two brothers jumped off their horses and ran after Nuss-insais.

When the three brothers finally reached home, they told their father about their adventure.

“I want a big wooden trunk!” said Nuss-insais.

“What on earth are you going to do with a trunk?” asked his father.

“I want to get rid of the *ghouleh* for once and for all!” said Nuss-insais.

When Nuss-insais got his trunk, he filled it with colorful costume jewelry, shiny glass beads and baubles and dressed himself up as a peddler. He put the big trunk on his mule and went off to find the *ghouleh*.

When the *ghouleh* saw Nuss-insais she was very suspicious of him, but as soon as he opened up the trunk she was taken by the glittering things inside.

“You might find surprising things if you step inside the trunk.” said Nuss-insais.

As soon as the *ghouleh* stepped inside, Nuss-insais closed the lid of the trunk and locked it. Then he carried the trunk back home.

“Hurry up and build up a big fire!” called out Nuss-insais. “This is our chance to get rid of the *ghouleh* and her wicked ways forever!”

People rushed out of their houses and piled up pieces of wood and built up a great fire then threw the wooden trunk in it and that was the end of the terrible *ghouleh*.

From that day on, no one ever again made fun of Nuss-insais for being so tiny.

## Riddle

Four black men

Travelling on a stick

Go to and fro

When the wind does blow

What are they? Answer: eggplants

## Four Recipes from Mouadamieh:

### 1. *Kibbeh Assaferi* or *Bird Kibbeh*

This kind of *kibbeh* is cooked by the wives of bird hunters in Mouadamieh. It has the same ingredients used in the Damascene *kibbeh* mentioned before, and follows the same steps, except that ground-up birds are added to the *kibbeh* shell ingredients.

Method:

- Pluck the birds and cut off their heads and legs.
- Rub with salt and pepper.
- Place the birds in a metal mortar and pound them until they form a solid mixture.
- Mix with the *kibbeh* shell ingredients and continue as in the *kibbeh* recipe for Damascus.

### 2. Stuffed Chicken Necks

Ingredients:

2 pounds of chicken necks.

1 stick of cinnamon.

1 bay leaf and a 2 cardamom pods.

a sprinkle of saffron.

3/4 of a teaspoon of black pepper.

3/4 of a teaspoon of cinnamon.

3 tablespoons of tomato paste.

1 pound of ground lamb.

1/2 a cup of half cooked chickpeas.

1 cup of rice.

2 Maggi cubes.

Method:

- Remove bones and meat from the chicken necks.
- Wash the neck skins and rub with salt and lemon inside and out.
- Sew up one side of each neck with needle and thread.
- Combine the rice, meat, spices and chick peas then stuff the chicken necks.
- Place the chicken meat and bones in a pan then add the stuffed necks.
- Add water, tomato paste, Maggi cubes, bay leaf and cardamom.
- Cook for an hour or until done.

### **3. Potato Pies**

Basic dough – Ingredients:

1 pound of flour.

3/4 of a cup of oil

1 tablespoon of salt.

1 tablespoon of sugar.

1 tablespoon of yeast.

1 and 1/2 a cup of lukewarm water.

Method:

- Combine the ingredients, mix well and knead until smooth.
- Cover and let rest until dough rises.
- Cut into small balls. Then flatten with your hands and make small pies.

Filling – Ingredients:

1 pound of ground beef.

2 pounds of potatoes.

1\3 cup of butter.

1 large onion.

salt and pepper to taste.

Method:

- Peel the potatoes and grate them.
- Add a pinch of salt to take away the moisture.
- Sauté beef in butter.
- Grate the onion and combine with the ingredients and squeeze out all moisture.
- Place the filling on the dough and arrange pies on an oiled baking tray and bake in oven (350) until done - maximum 15 minutes.

#### **4. *Burghol* (cracked wheat) with Meat**

Ingredients:

1 cup of washed and soaked rough *burghol*.

1/2 a pound of lamb cut into 1- inch cubes.

6 cups of water.

1 tablespoon of tomato paste.

1 teaspoon of salt.

1 cup of washed and soaked chick peas.

2 squeezed lemons.

2 cloves of mashed garlic.

fried bread.

Method:

- Cook the meat in the 6 cups of water.
- Add the *burghol*, chickpeas and salt until done.
- Add the tomato paste and cook 15 minutes on a low fire.
- Serve with lemon juice, mashed garlic and fried bread.

***Hadith***

Abu Hurairah says that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) never found fault with any food. If he liked it, he would eat it; if he disliked it, he would leave it.

-Reported by Bukhari and Muslim-

### ***Hadith***

Ibn Abbas relates that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) said: Do not drink water in one gulp like a camel, but take it in two or three sips. Invoke the name of Allah when you start drinking and praise him when you finish.

-Reported by Al Turmithi-