01/15/12 - Mamoul Cookies

A previous trip to Israel about 6 years ago led us to walk the switchback streets of Haifa from Mt. Carmel on the top, through the many ethnic neighborhoods, Russian, Jewish religious, Palestinian, past the Baha'i Gardens, through an Arab section full of baklava stores, and on down to reach the German Colony near the bottom of the hill before the harbor area.

On our walk I recall stopping for an espresso and an intriguing looking cookie at a coffee shop. The proprietor had lived in the United States for a while and now returned to Haifa to open this little shop. The cookie was a mamoul. Mamoul is a rich butter cookie with an intricate design on the top and inside, to my delight, a filling of orange scented date paste. A wonderful Middle Eastern, Sephardic, classic cookie. Many countries have a version, Lebanon, Morocco, Egypt, Israel; I have purchased glatt kosher mamoul in Brooklyn. Mamoul is a fantastic cookie to put in

In August I had the pleasure to meet fellow blogger and cookbook author Amy Riolo in the Washington DC area. Amy's blog is Dining with Diplomats and is always interesting reading. On that same trip my friend Sheilah Kaufman took me to a local Turkish grocery store owned by an Armenian man. I spotted a basket of hand carved wood molds for making something and when I inquired, the gentleman said, they are molds for mamoul. He gave me a quick recipe, which I copied down on a scrap of paper. So many designs to choose from; I purchased one of each.

Between Amy's recipe in her book Arabian Delights cookbook, the grocers recipe, and a lot of online research I prepared to experiment.

I tried making mamoul with a flour and farina mix and I tried Amy's flour mix of flour and cornmeal. Many recipes called for a semolina mix, but since I didn't have any, I tried farina and cornmeal. I preferred Amy's version with cornmeal. I don't know what a mamoul aficionado would think, but the cookies came out delicious. The tender, buttery, slightly crisp cookie melts in your mouth to give way to the fragrant sweet filling of dates, nuts and orange zest. Give these a try. The market is called Shiraz Market and the proprietor is Narses Khajadourian in Rockville Maryland. He is very happy to ship anything.

Yield 24

Filling:

12 ounces pitted dates (I used Medjool dates)

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, room temperature

1/3 cup walnuts

1 tablespoon orange zest

2 teaspoon fresh orange juice

Dough:

2 1/ 2 cups flour

1/ 2 cup corn meal

1 cup unsalted butter (2 sticks)

1 cup powdered sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 teaspoon rose water

1 teaspoon orange water

Place filling ingredients in bowl of food processor. Pulse until it becomes a chunky paste, not perfectly smooth. Remove filling from food processor and place in a

Measure flour and cornmeal into a medium bowl and set aside. Slice butter into chunks and place into bowl of mixer. Add sugar to butter and start mixer on lowest setting. As sugar is incorporated slowly increase speed of mixer. Thoroughly cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Next, add vanilla, rose water, and orange water, then incorporate. Blend in flour mix and mix on medium low until all combined. Do not over mix. Remove dough from mixer and form 24 equal balls.

Heat oven to 350° F. Form a 2 and 1/ 2 inch circle of dough with each ball. Place approximately 1 tablespoon of date filling in the center of each circle. Close circle around filling and then, roll it back into a ball shape. Place re-rolled ball in mamoul

Tap the mold on the counter to dump out cookie. Set cookie on a parchment lined

Repeat until all of the mamoul are on cookie sheet. Bake for 18 to 20 minutes or until very pale gold. Remove baking sheet from oven and remove cookies to a

cooling rack. Store mamoul in and airtight container. Mamoul may be dusted with

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