

A Syrian-Lebanese Functional Food

Dr. Mohamad Nizar Hamad*

Consultant of Arab Federation of Food Industries, Syria

***Corresponding Author:** Dr. Mohamad Nizar Hamad, Consultant of Arab Federation of Food Industries, Syria.

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Shankleesh (Shanklish)

Shanklish (Figures 1 and 2) is a type of cheese common to Syria and Lebanon and is made from milk obtained from sheep, goat or cow that is inverted to a clot locally called Areeshe.



Figure 1: One unit of Shanklish.



Figure 2: A ready-to-eat Shanklish dish.

The so-called Areeshe product is formed into small balls and left to dry and age. The fresh version of this type of cheese (Areeshe) tastes mild with a soft texture, while the firmer aged shanklish virgin has a pungent odor and noted for its persisting taste. Shanklish balls are often covered in za'atar (thyme) mix along with other spices. Materials composing Shanklish may be prepared and sold as a mass having no definite shape the product is then locally called in said both countries as: Areeshe. The process of making Shanklish requires an intensive manual labor as well as plenty of time meanwhile trying to adopt a program characterized with lowest cost of ingredients. The said process starts with a fresh milk to be fermented into yogurt, then- after applying other basic processes:

- 1- Milk is heated and brought to a boiling status, with continued stirring for about ten minutes (pasteurization).
- 2- The milk is left to cool at room temperature.
- 3- A half cup of yogurt (a starter) is added and thoroughly stirred in upon the attainment of temperature between 49 and 54°C.
- 4- The pot is covered and topped in a way to keep it warm.

Sumac	1/4 cup
Thyme	2 tablespoons
Roasted sesame seeds	1 tablespoon
Marjoram	2 tablespoons
Oregano, dried	2 tablespoons
Coarse salt	1 teaspoon

Table 1: Composition of Za'atar (thyme) mix.

The whole set-up is left aside for a period of about twelve hours. The obtained product is a delicious fresh yogurt.

The next step to follow is lowering the temperature of the fully fermented yogurt product by placement in a refrigerator. The so far prepared yogurt is available for direct consumption within three to four days.

However, to make Shanklish there are other processing steps to follow: Even though there is no available information as per any date defining the start of making the said product, one can stipulate that there had been so many decades if not.

Most likely there are so many centuries elapsed since this happening used to take place at home. However, it should be emphasized that the following steps are stipulated in order to describe the old- traditional method by which Shanklish used to be obtained until the period of the first half-period of last century. Such a process is not practiced now a-days.

- The already obtained yogurt is poured into an elongated container with two sided holdings (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Separation of fat by jerking yoghurt in a goatskin sac or a clay jar.

- A capable member of the family-usually a woman sits on the floor holding the two sided rings of the said container that is about two-thirds filled with fresh yogurt. In case of use of a clay jar the opening of which is tightly topped with a washed covering made of a dehydrated goatskin.
- The woman should move the said yoghurt container, jerking it front to back and the way around. This jerking process is continued until a separation of a fatty material (butter) is seen at the top of a residual liquid. It is worthwhile to note that the noted jerking operation is the method usually followed to get a real wholesome and long-remembered tasty butter. The residual liquid called Shaneanah is practically fat free.

- The said jerking process is usually continued for about ten to fifteen minutes at the end of which two separate layers are seen: a fat-free bottom one topped with a second made of *butte being* covered with skims.
- The said process shall be continued until attainment of about half separation of the butter. Upon attainment of said stage, the yogurt shall become by-then low in fat (partially skimmed).

One important aspect should be emphasized indicating that the commercial shanklish product is usually prepared starting with an almost completely skimmed milk.

- The process of shaking the above-described set-up is usually continued until attainment of a complete separation of contained butter.
- The skimmed yogurt (called Shenineh) is poured into a cooking pot and gently heated until a complete co-angulation to take place, ending thereby with a bluish liquid at the top and a residual white substance (the clot) settled at the bottom.
- Once the said set-up cools down, the resulting liquid is discharged through a piece of cotton cloth. Said piece of cloth is usually white and had been previously boiled and left to drip- dry into a sink.
- After the elapse of about twelve hours, most of the contained water in the resulting product should be by then drained off meanwhile one single constituent is left at the top, which is a clot. This said clot material is what is termed in Syria and Lebanon by: Arishe.
- Salt is added to the recovered Arishe maintaining thereby a content of 1.5 - 2.0%. The salted Arishe product is then rolled out into balls similar in both size and shape to those used in tennis.
- Dehydrated red pepper granules are incorporated at this stage into the mix, enhancing thereby the taste, flavor and color of the finished product. The scattered red spots appearing at the surface of each of the performed units ads to the final look of the finished product.
- The prepared balls are placed on top of a piece of an already boiled and dried piece of cloth and left there-by exposed to sunshine for about ten days (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Balls made of salted Arishe exposed to sunshine.

By the end of the noted period, the prepared sun- exposed balls of the product should be -by then- sufficiently dehydrated and might have some rot at the exterior exposed surfaces.

The next step includes a clean- scraping of surfaces of each of the already sun-exposed product globules. The so-far sun dehydrated globules are usually dipped to cover the surfaces with the previously specified Za'ater (thyme) mix. Meanwhile it is of importance to emphasize the attainment of a complete coverage of all product globules with said mix. The attributes noted for said application of thyme mix are as follows:

- An addition to the flavor of the finished product,
- Preventing sticking of the performed Shanklish units with each, and there-by,
- Enabling the attainment of a complete separation between the Za'ater treated units.

The so far treated Shanklish balls are moved indoors and placed in an air-tight container, better yet, covered with a piece of cloth and left for a further slow fermentation process to continue in the dark. The said fermentation period has an important effect on the sensational quality of the for-seen outcome product.

The white and high-quality finished product (Shanklish) may be consumed at any time after the elapse of one week of the date of end of preparation. However, it may take about one month or so for the finished product to acquire the characterized hard texture as well as a dark surface appearance. The finished product should have - by then- acquired both characteristics of an alluring smell as well as an appetizing taste. The obtained small ball-shaped Shanklish units are usually kept for some time to age thereby enabling the development of an appetizing flavor and noted delicious taste.

The obtained product is usually served with virgin olive oil, fresh onions and a cup of coffee or tea. For a further addition for the faint of heart, the finished product (Figure 5) is eaten with the hand along with a freshly baked Tannour* loaf of bread (Figure 6).



Figure 5: A cut in a Shanklish globule.



Figure 6: Bread baked in Tannour*.

Therefore, by now, one probably knows why it is so difficult to find the connoisseur version of Shanklish in your local supermarket. The process requires both of a continued attendance as well as of persistent follow up.

When you try Shanklish, you shall become a gourmet especially when eaten with a freshly baked tannour* loaf.

Ingredients

- 1-cup Mediterranean thyme.
- 1/2 cup Mediterranean sour sumac.
- 1/4 cup ground toasted chickpeas.
- Three tablespoons toasted sesame seeds.
- One-tablespoon ground rosemary.

*A tannour is a fireplace set-up mainly used for baking bread and/or cooking other types of food.

Salt to taste (about 2.0 - 2.5% of the whole set-up).

Preparation

- 1- Mixing all the ingredients (Table 2).

Material	Quantity (Grams).
Anise seeds (<i>Pimpinella anisum</i>).	25
Chickpeas (<i>Cicer arietinum</i>) boiled, dehydrated and grinded.	50
Coriander (<i>Coriandrum sativum</i>).	25
Cumin seeds (<i>Cuminum cyminum</i>).	10
Fennel seed (<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>), var. dulce.	50
Fine sumac (<i>Rhus typhina</i>) powder.	50
Green Thyme leaves * (<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>).	50
Peanuts (<i>Arachis hypogaea</i>), roasted and coarsely grinded.	50

Table 2: Components of Za-atar mixture used in topping of Shanklish globules.

* Prior to use thyme leaves should be thoroughly washed, dehydrated and powdered.

- 1- Spreading the mixture on a cookie sheet and placement in an oven at 170°C (350°F) for 5 minutes.
- 2- Removal from oven and allowing the mixture to cool prior to use or storage.
- 3- For use as a dipping oil mixture olive oil is added to Za-atar (1: 2).

Functional and Health Properties

The functionality of the final product Shanklish is characterized with a collective set of properties. The specified characteristics are due to the components making the said product. As previously stated the components of Shanklish includes two sets of materials: the fermentative protein of a dairy type origin (Arishe), as well as the covering layer of Za-atar mixture that adds to a further functionality of the finished product.

The best source of essential amino acids required by the body are included in the fermentative milk proteins composing the bulk material of Shanklish. The product is high in branched chain amino acids – leucine, isoleucine, and valine: being the best source of essential amino acids required by the body. Ongoing research shows benefits of milk proteins in following aspects: weight management, lean body mass, lowering blood pressure, preventing Sarcopenia and in a healthy aging. Furthermore, research proved more benefits attained because of consumption of milk and derived milk products:

- 1- Epidemiological evidences claim that consumption of beta-casein A1 milk is associated as a risk factor for each of the following health problems: type-1 diabetes, coronary heart disease, arteriosclerosis, sudden infant death syndrome, autism, schizophrenia etc.
- 2- **Fennel seeds:** Contain numerous flavonoid anti-oxidants (like kaempferol and quercetin). This nutrient group is most famous for its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory health benefits, as well as its contribution of vibrant color to the foods we eat.
- 3- **Anise seeds:** Improve digestion as well as sleeping disorders (Insomnia), if used after meals or even before going to bed. Moreover, said seeds help in cases of convulsions, microbial infections and diseases.
- 4- **Coriander seeds:** A great source of potassium, iron, vitamins A, K, and C, folic acid, magnesium and calcium that can heal many health issues.
- 5- **Cumin seeds:** Possess anti-carcinogenic properties and the relief of digestive disorders.
- 6- **Green Thyme leaves:** These leaves are characterized of being one of the richest sources of the following metallic nutrients: potassium, iron, calcium, manganese, magnesium, and selenium.
- 7- **Chickpeas:** In addition to being a rich plant source of proteins, they do lower cholesterol, promote weight loss and provide skin protection ; all along with the noted function of being an immune booster.
- 8- **Sumac:** The dried and powdered fruits (berries) are used as a spice in Middle Eastern cuisine. The berries are used there- in to treat diabetes, constipation and women disorders.

Shenineh: This product is prepared by shaking laban in a special bag made of goat skin. It has a sour taste and a very strong aroma and is very popular in the villages.

Shenglish (Sorke): It is made from laban and is considered as a fermented milk but the dry matter is very much higher (45 - 50 per cent). Spices are added to give it its special chilli taste.

Keshkeh: This product is made by mixing laban with fine wheat. The mixture is dried and ground into a powder.

Shanklish: Shanklish is a cheese common to Syria and Lebanon and made from sheep's or cow's milk. It is commonly formed into balls, then allowed to dry and age. The cheese can be eaten fresh or aged. Fresh cheese tastes mild with a soft texture, while a firmer aged shanklish has a pungent odor [1-10].

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