



## Spotlight Halal: **CHRISTOPSOMO** (Greek Christmas Bread)

Spotlight Halal is a collection of food and ingredient articles from IsItHaram.com.

This article can be found online at: <http://www.isitharam.com/features/christmasbread.jsp>

### WHAT IS IT?

Greek Christmas Bread, also known as *christopsomo* (Χριστοψωμο, pronounced hree-STOHP-soh-moh) or "Christ's Bread," is a round Greek sweet bread that is prepared in Greek Orthodox homes for the Christmas celebrations.

It is a sweet, buttery brioche bread, similar in flavor and texture to the Turkish *çörek*. However, unlike most other sweet breads, *christopsomo* is decorated with an early form of the Christian cross with ends that split and curl into circles. It can be flavored and scented with **red wine-soaked** figs, **brandy** and spices such as anise, orange and *mastika* (mastic gum).

### HOW IS IT MADE?

A bread dough is made using flour, yeast, **red wine**, **brandy**, orange juice, and orange peel. After rising, the dough is blended with sugar, raisins, walnuts, pine nuts, mastic gum or anise, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg. The dough is formed into a ball and then decorated with the Greek Orthodox cross and, often, **wine soaked figs** and walnuts.

Baking *christopsomo* is considered a **sacred task** in Greek Orthodox homes. Careful preparation of this bread is said to ensure the well-being of the home in the year to come. The cook crosses himself and **consecrates the bread in the names of the Christian Trinity** before baking begins. Families leave pieces of bread on the table as a food **offering to Jesus**, believing that Christ will come and eat them during the night.

-- Try our *halal* Turkish Anise Sesame Sweet Bread recipe for a delicious winter treat. --

### WARNING LEVEL: LOW

*Christopsomo* is served in Greek Orthodox homes only during the Christmas festivities. If you are an invited guest in a Greek home during this season, please enjoy other delicious Greek dishes so long as they are made without **wine** or **pork**. But avoid *christopsomo*, whether it is made with or without **wine** or other forms of **alcohol**, as the rituals associated with its typical preparation render it 'food of *shirk*.'

Similar spice breads sold in Greek and Italian bakeries may contain **red wine**, but are unlikely to have been consecrated. Be sure to ask your baker, or check the product ingredients for **wine**, **brandy** or a flavored **liqueur** like fruit flavored **schnapps** or anise-flavored **sambuca**. **Brandy** is a **spirit**, a **distilled alcoholic beverage**, produced from **wine**. **Brandy** contains **36%–60% alcohol by volume**. A typical **wine** contains **12% alcohol by volume**.

### WHAT ARE FOODS OF SHIRK?

Foods of *shirk* (Ta'am ash-shirk, طعام الاحتفالات الدينية) are those foods which fit the category of 'ma ouhila li gheir iLahi bi' (ما اهل لغير الله به) [Quran, Surat Al-Ma'idah 5:3]. These are foods that have been **consecrated** — **made or declared sacred** and



## ALCOHOL, SHIRK

Christopsomo is adorned with **wine-soaked** figs. It is **consecrated**, then offered as a food for the Christ on Christmas Eve.



A loaf of *christopsomo*, "Christ's Bread"

**dedicated to the service of a deity or a person** — to any one other than to Allah, in direct conflict with the Islamic principle of *tawheed* (the Oneness of Allah / monotheism). Food produced or slaughtered in such a manner is rendered as *ta'am ash-shirk*, thus religiously unclean and forbidden for Muslims to eat. This is true regardless of whether or not that food contains any *haram* substance and, contrary to popular belief, applies to all foods, not simply to meat.

Muslims are permitted to eat food that has been consecrated, sacrificed or slaughtered according to Jewish ritual because the monotheistic nature of that religion and belief in the same God does not conflict with *tawheed*. In general, Muslims are permitted to eat food of the "People of the Book," Christian and Jews, so long as the food itself comes within the limits of Islamic permissibility.

-- For more information on food of *shirk*, see: [http://www.isitharam.com/our\\_criteria/prohibited/shirk.jsp](http://www.isitharam.com/our_criteria/prohibited/shirk.jsp) --

## **ALCOHOL AND COOKING**

AMNA classifies any food that has been made with an **alcoholic product** as **ALCOHOL**, even if it has been sautéed, simmered, baked or set on fire. The conventional wisdom accepted by just about everyone is that all the **alcohol** you add to a dish evaporates during cooking. It's wrong.

In fact, according to a study conducted by the US Department of Agriculture's Nutrient Data Laboratory, you have to cook something for a good three hours to remove virtually all traces of **alcohol**. After it has baked for an hour, **25% of the alcohol** from the **wine** remains in the Christmas Bread – **around a quarter of a cup**, depending on the recipe.

-- Learn more about Alcohol cook-off times on the AMNA web site at:  
[http://www.isitharam.com/our\\_criteria/prohibited/alcohol\\_cooking.jsp](http://www.isitharam.com/our_criteria/prohibited/alcohol_cooking.jsp) --

## **CAN MUSLIMS USE KOSHER SYMBOLS TO KNOW IF A HOLIDAY SPICE BREAD IS HALAL?**

YES & NO. Like Islamic law, **kosher law forbids the consumption of any foods that have been consecrated to a deity**. However, the consumption of **alcohol** is not counter to kosher law. Therefore, while you will never find a *christopsomo* that has been certified kosher, you may find other kosher-certified spiced sweet breads that have **alcohol** mixed into the dough.

-- View a comparison of Jewish and Islamic dietary law on the AMNA web site at:  
[http://www.isitharam.com/shopping\\_tips/using\\_kosher/kosher\\_halal.jsp](http://www.isitharam.com/shopping_tips/using_kosher/kosher_halal.jsp) --



## RECIPE: HALAL ANISE SESAME SWEET BREAD (*Tahinli Ekmek ve Anason*)

This Turkish version is our *halal* twist on similar sweet dough spice breads you'll find at Greek and Italian bakeries during the Christmas holiday season. Our version omits the **wine, brandy** and other **liqueurs** often found in these types of breads.

The anise-scented slices are delicious toasted and spread with butter and honey. Use the 'dough' setting of your bread machine to mix, knead and rise the dough.

### *You Will Need:*

- 2 packages dry yeast
- 1/2 cup warm water
- 1/2 cup milk
- 3/4 cup butter (melted)
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 1/2 teas. toasted sesame oil
- 2 teas. crushed anise seed (*yansoon*)
- 1/2 teas. salt
- 5 cups unsifted all-purpose flour
- 2 Tbsp. sesame seeds

### *Instructions:*

1. DISSOLVE yeast in warm water.
2. MELT butter into milk. Pour into mixing bowl, mixing in sugar.
3. MIX IN the yeast mixture, anise seeds, sesame oil, salt and 2 cups of flour.
4. BEAT on medium speed, gradually adding in remaining flour.
5. KNEAD dough on lightly floured board until smooth (around 10 minutes).
6. PLACE in bowl, lightly covering the top with melted butter and cover. Let dough rise in a warm place until doubled (1 1/2 hours).

[ Bread machine steps end here. ]

7. KNEAD lightly. ROLL, then SHAPE into spiral, around 9» in diameter.
8. TOP with sesame seeds, in a pattern.
9. COVER loaf lightly and set in a warm place until almost doubled (1 hour).
10. BAKE in a 325 degree oven (165 degrees Celcius) for 50 to 55 minutes, or until golden brown.

