Chicken Algeria Couscous Soup

Couscous is a staple food that requires very few utensils to prepare. It is an ideal food for both nomadic and agricultural peoples. The preparation of couscous is one that symbolizes “happiness and abundance,” and in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Tripolitania couscous is a staple. Couscous is served with meat, fish, vegetables, and spices. Cooked simply with sour milk and melted butter, it left the hungry traveler feeling full and was the traditional food of the poorest.

For centuries, black African women were employed as couscous cooks, a phenomenon that might indicate the sub-Saharan African origins of couscous. Even today in Morocco the dada—young Saharan and black sub-Saharan women who serve as domestics, especially as cooks—are often employed to prepare couscous.

In Algeria, couscous is called kiskū or ṭa'am, meaning “food” or “nourishment,” indicating the importance of couscous as a daily staple. There is mounting evidence that the process of couscous cookery, especially steaming grain over a broth in a special pot, might have originated before the tenth century in the area of West Africa.