Enter here the vibrant world of Turkish cuisine. Enter through a living museum to a culinary carpet of flavors that has been slowly and patiently woven by the nimble fingers of terroir and time.
The second strand looks eastward, born among the nomadic herding tribes of Central Asia who brought with them traditions rich in grilled meats and yogurt-based dishes when they settled in southern China during the 8th Century. Here they encountered a people with an ancient culinary heritage of their own, specializing in filled dumplings and incorporating rice into the daily diet. By the 10th Century several of these tribes, including the Seljuks, were on the move again pushing westward toward Persia (Iran) then famous throughout the Islamic World for its pilafs and rich stews embellished with a variety of fruit. By the beginning of the 12th century other groups of Turkic peoples had begun to penetrate into Anatolia, fanning out into a land that had cherished the olive and it oil for centuries, while the long Mediterranean shoreline introduced them to a variety of fish species that added excitement and depth to their repertoire.

From the 13th Century onward, Ottoman armies pressed increasingly hard against the decaying remnants of the Byzantine Empire and the walls of the city that had been founded almost a millennium earlier by Constantine the Great. The pivotal point came in the year 1453 when Constantinople fell to the onslaught of Mehmet the Conqueror. It was here, in a city renamed Stamboul/Istanbul, that these disparate culinary strands...
came together and were woven into the cuisine of the Ottoman Sultans. In Topkapi Palace, high above the Golden Horn, one can still walk through cavernous kitchens once staffed by over a thousand cooks and culinary technicians, who were able to feed upwards of 10,000 people a day – in utter splendor!

**The Yeni Camii**

As the 16th Century came to a close, a mosque began to rise beside the waters of the Bosphorus, at the Stamboul end of the Galata Bridge. This *Yeni Camii* ("New Mosque"), or more fully the *Yeni Valide Camii* ("New Mosque of the Mother of the Sultan"), was to be a gift to the people by a pious woman named Safiya who, as Valide to her son Mehmet III, wielded tremendous power and influence. The complex was to be a true Moslem *külliye* serving both the religious and philanthropic needs of the community. So, in addition to the mosque, there would be a hospital, a school, a fountain or two, and a mausoleum, while revenue derived from a public bath and a market would provide the necessary funds to maintain the complex. But, for all of her good intentions, construction came to a halt in 1603 when Mehmet died. Safiya faded slowly back into the shadows of Ottoman court life and the unfinished complex fell into ruin.

Then in 1660, the abandoned project found a new patron. She was Turhan Hadice, Valide to young Mehmet IV who had assumed the sultanate at the tender age of six. When completed three years later, the market quickly became the place in Istanbul to obtain the spices from the mysterious East that had been transshipped through the Red Sea ports of Egypt to warehouses along the Golden Horn. Locally the market quickly became known simply as the *Misir Carsısı* (MEE-sir CHAR-shee-si = The Egyptian Market) and it has continued to provide local palates with a wide spectrum of spices, herbs, and other culinary exotica for over 350 years.

**Hungry?**

If the sights, smells, and occasional samples of this bounty make you hungry, don’t despair! The upper level of the building contains two great restaurants, one over each of the massive gates: Pandeli’s over the Galata entrance and the newly restored Bab-I Hayat above the eastern end. Both
offer full course meals on crisp white table cloths, attentive staff, and great views. If lighter fare is desired you are never far from a custom-carved dormer kebab or a simple ear of boiled corn. But if you really want to experience Istanbul, try a fish sandwich from one of the colorful boats tied up next to the Galata Bridge. The fish is cooked on a bobbing boat, placed in a roll with a little lettuce, and then handed ashore to a server who will deliver it to your tiny, quay-side table.

And what of the lady who made all of this possible? Well, Turhan Hadice died in 1683 and was buried in the mausoleum (türkè) of her complex, alongside five sultans, just steps away from her famous market. Her tomb can be visited today.

**AFFIYET OLSUM — BON APPETIT**

The *Time Traveling Gourmet* is, in reality, archaeologist Albert Leonard, Jr., Professor Emeritus at the University of Arizona (Tucson). In addition to his Academic preparation (PhD from the University of Chicago), Al has studied at Le Cordon Bleu (London) as well as the Culinary Institute of America (Napa Valley, CA) where he was partially supported by a Robert Parker Wine Advocate Scholarship. He presently resides in California’s Russian River Valley where he is a member of The Society of Wine Educators and the Northern Sonoma County convivium of Slow Foods International.

© 2012 Albert Leonard Jr.

The concept of *The Time Traveling Gourmet* and the contents of these pages are the intellectual property of Albert Leonard, Jr. who retains all rights to their dissemination.

**Agoraphilia** (ag’är-ā-nil’-ya), n. Culinary. 1. An abnormal interest in, and/or affection for, markets and market places, often accompanied by a wild state of euphoria. 2. The intense and often sensual pleasures derived by many from the sheer beauty of food markets.

[c. AD 2000 – AGORA+PHILIA]