

# Agoraphilia

## Istanbul, Turkey

AN OCCASIONAL PAPER FROM THE TIME TRAVELING GOURMET



### **The Egyptian Bazaar (Misir Carsısı) Spice Market**

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.



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 Safiye who, as Valide to her son Mehmet III, wielded tremendous power and influence. The complex was to be a true Moslem *külliy*e serving both the religious and



the 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. Safiye 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 Carsisi* (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 *donner 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 (*türbe*) 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.

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**Agoraphilia** (ag'ar-â-fil'-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].