

MISNOMERS GALORE

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By **Jirair Tutunjian**, 8 September 2014

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One nation which has been particularly lucky in the misattribution game is Turkey. Because of historic circumstances, ignorance, or sheer luck, a number of products are wrongly assumed to be of Turkish origin.

Take "Turkish" coffee. Coffee was discovered in Ethiopia by a shepherd who noticed that when his goats chewed on a wild berry they became livelier. Ethiopians soon began to grind and boil the berries to make a refreshing brew. The drink was called coffee because the berry was discovered in a place called Kaffa. From Ethiopia the coffee crossed the Red Sea to Yemen and then north to the Middle East. Armenian merchants, from the Ottoman Empire, introduced the drink to Vienna, Paris, and London. Because the Armenians came from the Ottoman Empire, Europeans wrongly assumed that they were Turks and the coffee a Turkish product.

"Turkish Delight" is of Iranian origin. A 19th century British tourist discovered the soft candy in

Constantinople and shipped home a number of boxes and named them "Turkish delight". The name stuck. "Turkish Delight's" Iranian name is ahbisa. Arabs called it "rahat el hulkum" (contentment/rest of the throat). From "hulkum" we get "lokhum" sweets. Lokhum is, of course, another word some assume to be Turkish.

The semi-precious turquoise is not native to Anatolia. In the 16th century a French merchant imported the blue-to-green stone from Turkey and named it turquoise. The "Turkish" stones came from the Khorasan province of Iran. Iranians call it "phirouzeh" meaning victory. The Armenian version is "perouz". Pharaohs imported the gem from Monitu in the Sinai peninsula. In recent years Turkish tourism promoters have began calling the Mediterranean shores of Asia Minor "Turquoise Coast".

The footstool called "ottoman" is so-called because Napoleon's soldiers saw it for the first time in Egypt, then officially part of the Ottoman Empire, although the ruling Memlukes didn't pay much attention to the sultan in Constantinople. The ottoman was a traditional Middle Eastern stool and had nothing to do with the Ottomans or the Turks.

Everywhere in Germany, almost as popular as the bratwurst, is the doner sandwich. Because doner was introduced to Germany by Turkish immigrants, Turkey claims the sandwich is of Turkish origin, although it existed in the Middle East centuries before Turks showed up from Central Asia. The roasted meat on the vertical spit is known as gyro in Greek. Gyro is the Greek word for turning. The Armenians call the same dish "tarna" (turn). "Doner"/"donneur" means turning in Turkish.

Of course, being the origin of a popular product carries a lot of cache. In addition to prestige, it can have commercial benefits. Thus France has acquired international copyright for the Champagne and Cognac names. Non-French manufacturers of sparkling wine and brandy can't call their drinks "champagne" or "cognac" which are French place names. In the past decade Cyprus, Lebanon, and several European nations have fought legal battle for the right of using the name "Halloum" for their cheese.

Although it has benefited from the misidentification of coffee, turquoise, and turkish delight, the Republic of Turkey is ever eager to appropriate even more place names, and in so doing distort history to its advantage.

The famed Mount Ararat of Biblical resonance has become Agri Dagh. Historic Cilicia has become Kukurova. Dersim (named after an Armenian clergyman called Der Simon) has become Tunceli. Of course, long ago Constantinople became Istanbul. Embarrassed by its name's association with the large and clumsy fowl, Turkey has unsuccessfully tried to brand itself as "Turkiye". In the past century, Ankara has turkified thousands of Asia Minor place names (from Armenian and Greek) in a well-organized strategy to erase all signs of the original inhabitants of Asia Minor. For a while, it even christened (sorry, we mean re-named) Kurds "Mountain Turks". That campaign also failed. Kurds have asserted their name, their language, and identity.

~~Despite its obsessive efforts to rebrand the topography of Asia Minor and make it wall-to-wall~~ Turkic, Ankara still faces a huge task. Izmir still has echoes of its original Greek Smyrna name, so does Konia (Iconium), Ankara (Angora), and Kayseri (Caesaria). But they say where there's a will, there's a way. One day the ever-diligent Turkish "historians" will go through the vast library of the Wise and Illustrious Sultan Abdul Hamid II and discover that these cities were founded by Turkic tribes thousands of years before Noah's Ark landed on Mt. Ararat...sorry, we mean Agri Dagh. Turkey's notorious "historians" have already decided Anatolia ("Sunrise" "Land of Sunrise" in Greek) derives from the Turkish "Ana Dolu" ("Pregnant Mother"). It was so named by the same...you guessed it...ancient Turkic tribes.

Incidentally, the Turkish yataghan sword is not a borrowed word or weapon. It is genuinely Turkish.

