The Turks who invaded the Near East in the tenth century were herdsmen, not farmers, and they have often been pictured living entirely off their flocks, possibly supplementing a diet of yogurt and shishkebab with wild fruits and herbs. In fact, grain foods were already their staple diet.

When Mahmud of Kashgar compiled his dictionary of Turkish dialects in 1073, he recorded native Turkish words for sowing, the plow, several grains, and a number of grain foods, 15 of which are still current in one or another Turkish language (a like number of terms has died out; see the Addendum). Another nine words are attested by the end of the fourteenth century or can be assumed to be of comparable antiquity because of their distribution. These range from simple porridge and toasted grain to noodles, breads, and pastries, one of which is certainly the ancestor of that layered pastry Westerners know as filo or strudel dough. Turkish grain cookery has had wide influence in Eurasia, even as far as Hungary and North Africa, as the presence of these words in non-Turkish languages can attest.

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

More than 2000 years ago Chinese chroniclers begin to mention the nomadic peoples living to the north and west of China whose predatory raids were only to be brought under control by the building of extensive frontier fortifications and the maintenance of grand armies. By the time of Mahmud of Kashgar, two languages dominated the steppe, Turkish and Mongolian, whose speakers lived in close contact and shared not only a common culture but a large vocabulary relating to steppe life. The fact that they herded domestic animals such as sheep,
APPENDIX TWO

Goats, and horses shows that the ancestors of at least some of them had contact with the settled populations which were the original domesticators of these animals at an early date. Even if knowledge of grain had died out, or never arisen, in particular nomad groups, there was probably always some grain on the steppes, as plunder or trade goods, grain by the locals in some cases. The Turks also spread west in several waves, both peaceable and warlike, to grain-growing regions. By the beginning of our era skeletons of the Mongoloid physical type begin to appear in the Minusa Basin, an area west of the Altai Mountains where Europeoids had practiced agriculture since 1500 BC.

In the fourth and fifth centuries AD, the westernmost Turks entered European history in various Hun, Avar, and Bulgar kingdoms. Somewhat later, in the sixth and seventh centuries, the Turks remaining in Asia were involved in the large, loosely organized steppe empires of the Kök Türks and the Uighurs which extended at times as far as the Aral Sea in the west and Manchuria in the east. These empires controlled the Silk Road, and contact with Iran and China accelerated during this period.

In the eighth century, many of the Turks who had wandered west and begun to annihilate or absorb the Iranian nomads who had formerly dominated the Central Asian steppes converted to Islam and thereby came into closer contact with the settled, agricultural population of Iran’s outlying northern and eastern provinces: Khwarezm, Transoxiana, and Khorasan. Around the same time the Uighurs gave up nomadism and adopted the way of life of the Iranian- and Tokharian-speaking natives of the Tarim Basin. The Uighurs’ conversion to Manichaeism and later to Buddhism imposed a vegetarian diet on at least their priestly class and committed them to agriculture.

However early some Turks were familiar with grain, it may be that systematic trade, making it the staple of their diet, only began with the conversion of the Uighurs. At any rate, some of the Turkish grain foods made by toasting or boiling, such as talqan and butqa, may originally have been made from wild grass seeds or roots (lily root is commonly used for butqa by the Yakuts of Siberia), and therefore may date from a period even before acquaintance with domestic grains. Those based on milled flour probably reflect some degree of Iranian or Chinese influence. For instance, in a ninth century text from Turfan, in the very easternmost part of the Tarim Basin (Xinjiang Province, China), we find laqsha, the ancient Persian word for noodle.

During the ninth and tenth centuries, Turkish mercenaries became