


Determining The Characteristics of Cheese Halva in Turkish Cuisine: A Study on Gelibolu Cheese Halva

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Abstract

This article focuses on identifying the unique characteristics of various cheese halvras produced in different regions of Turkey, with particular emphasis on the preparation methods specific to Gelibolu cheese halva. The research was conducted using a qualitative descriptive design, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 14 participants selected through purposive sampling. The interviews were carried out face-to-face between October and November 2024 using an interview form developed based on literature and expert review. This study contributes to the limited literature on cheese desserts by documenting traditional knowledge and production practices of a geographically indicated regional product. According to the findings, the production process typically begins with fresh cheese and continues with the addition of flour and sugar. The interviews also revealed that obtaining a geographical indication has not had a significant impact on the popularity or sales of Gelibolu cheese halva. A review of the existing literature showed that no previous study has specifically aimed to determine the distinctive characteristics of Gelibolu cheese halva.

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INTRODUCTION

Turkish cuisine can be described as a repository of the riches spanning from Central Asia to Europe. The Central Asian Turks, residing in proximity to China, migrated to Anatolia and established Anatolian Turkish states. Subsequently, these states expanded to North Africa, the Middle East, and the Balkans, engaging in interactions and incorporating gastronomic elements such as ingredients and dishes from these regions while introducing their own culture (Demirgöl, 2018; Güldemir, 2015; Roden, 2006). As a result of these interactions, one of the dishes that became integrated into Turkish cuisine is halva, influenced by interactions with the Arab world.

The term “halva”, which means “sweet” in Arabic, is derived from the plural form “hulviyyat”, meaning “sweets”. Halva is primarily consumed in regions inhabited by Turkish, Arab, and Jewish communities today. Turkish people became acquainted with halva upon embracing Islam (Sevimli & Sönmezdağ, 2017). Halva is known by various names in different languages, such as halva, halava, and helva and is recognized as a distinctive dessert in the Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean, Central Asian countries, African nations, and Turkey (Birer, 1985; Şavkay, 2007). In this article, the term ‘halva’ will be used to refer to this product.

One of the various types of halva made with different ingredients and techniques is cheese halva. The “Kitâbü’t-Tabbâhîn,” believed to have been written by Mehmet Kamil in the 19th century, is a cookbook from the Ottoman era that contains recipes for dishes prepared during that period (Güldemir, 2010). It is thought that Mehmet Kamil, the author of the first printed Ottoman Turkish cookbook, “Melceü’t Tabbâhîn”, published in 1844, had previously written the work titled “Kitâbü’t-Tabbâhîn” (Güldemir, 2015). The cheese halva recipe found in the book “Kitâbü’t-Tabbâhîn” demonstrates the long-standing tradition of consuming cheese halva as a dessert. Various types of halva containing cheese are specific to the cities of Çanakkale, Tekirdağ, Diyarbakır, Malatya, Erzurum, Gaziantep, Çorum, Antakya, and Urfa (Ulu, 2019). Especially in Çanakkale and Tekirdağ, cheese halva is produced industrially and sold, in addition to small businesses (Şener et al., 2010). In Çanakkale, cheese halva is produced in both baked and unbaked forms. The main ingredients include unsalted white cheese, sugar, and flour, with some recipes also incorporating semolina (Ulu, 2019). In Tekirdağ, cheese halva is made using unsalted cheese, white sugar, wheat flour, egg yolk, and/or coloring agents (Tekirdağ Peynir Helvası, n.d.).

Upon reviewing the relevant literature, particularly within the field of social sciences, no study aimed at identifying the characteristics of cheese halvass has been found. Therefore, this research aims to determine the characteristics of cheese halva produced in the Gelibolu district of Turkey and examine the production processes involved. The research questions that the study focuses on are listed below:

- What are the cheese halva desserts in traditional Turkish cuisine?
- What are the characteristics and production methods of Gelibolu cheese halva dessert?

Conceptual Framework

Halva

Halva, as a part of Anatolian culinary culture, represents an important heritage passed down from the Middle Ages to the present day. Over the years, it has been prepared and served as a treat on special occasions. The term “halva” is known to have derived from the Arabic word “hulv”, which means “sweet” (hulviyyat). When

examining sources like Evliya Çelebi's travelogue and references that document Ottoman culinary culture, it is evident that the term "halva" is used for "any type of dessert made from flour/starch, oil, honey, or sugar" (Yerasimos, 2002). In another definition, halva can be described as a dessert prepared by roasting flour, semolina, starch, or rice flour with oil and adding sweeteners like honey, molasses, or sugar for flavor (Halıcı, 2013; Özbil, 2011). However, not every halva may contain rice flour or semolina, nor does it necessarily include honey or molasses. Fundamentally, it can be defined as a type of dessert made with a grain flour, oil, and a sweetener, with the option to incorporate various other ingredients.

Halvas is a significant dessert that has been frequently consumed not only by the local population but also in palace kitchens (Gülser, 2015). In the Ottoman palace kitchens, various types of sweets, including halvas, jams, syrups, and pastes, were prepared in kitchens known as "helvahane". The Helvahane, constructed during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566) by the architect Mimar Sinan, represents a separate section of the Topkapı Palace kitchen, referred to as "matbah-ı amire". It is a two-sectioned space with four domes. In the mid-18th century, the staff working there consisted of six masters and more than a hundred apprentices specializing in halva production (Geduk et al., n.d.). The title "Helvacıyan-ı hassa" was used for the palace chefs responsible for making sweets, and they were the ones who prepared halvas in the palaces (Samancı, 2017).



Figure 1. Helvahane in Topkapı Palace (Geduk et al., n.d.).



Figure 2. Halva serving pot (Geduk et al., n.d.).

The prevalence of a higher number of personnel in this section compared to other kitchen units and the encompassing of two divisions within the palace by this section in the Ottoman era reflects the significance attributed

to desserts. In this section dedicated to the preparation of sweets, alongside halvras, various desserts such as kadayıf, baklava, zerde, and paluze were prepared. However, both the designation of this section as 'helvahane' and the information from the Helvahane Registers make it evident that the most important desserts prepared in this section were halvras (Yerasimos, 2002). Table 1 lists specific types of halva found and consumed in Turkish cuisine. Some of these halvras listed, which are consumed in households, are also commercially produced and sold (Kaymaz, 2020).

Halvas remains a sweet dish prepared and shared on special occasions such as birth, farewell to soldiers, pilgrimage departures and returns, and religious holidays. In contemporary times, the halva ritual is most commonly associated with death. It is a continuing tradition in our culture to roast halva on specific days following the passing of an individual. It is believed that by offering a meal, preparing roasted halva, and reciting prayers, the deceased's suffering in the grave will be alleviated. Participants contribute to the making of the halva, distribute it, and partake in the event by helping with the ingredients (Samancı, 2017).

Table 1. Certain halva varieties that are commonly produced and consumed in Turkey.

Çakal halva	Yumurta halva	Bal (honey) halva	Ovma halva
Reşidiyye halva	Helva-yı Hakani	Tahin (tahini) halva	Koz halva
Pamuk halva	Köpük halva	Susam (sesame) halva	Çekme halva
Pirinç (rice) halva	Kar halva	Yaprak halva	Kağit halva
Pışmaniye	Pekmezli un (molasses and flour) halva	Peynir (cheese) halva	İrmik (semolina) halva

Note: In the table, the English equivalents of halva varieties that are named after their primary ingredient are provided in parentheses.

Cheese

Cheese is a fermented dairy product produced worldwide, exhibiting a wide range of tastes and forms. While the primary purpose of cheese production is to preserve the fundamental components of milk, cheese has evolved into a gourmet product due to its high nutritional value and its ability to cater to people's tastes (Fox & McSweeney, 2017). Cheeses hold a significant place among dairy and dairy products due to their extended shelf life (Saygili et al., 2020). Turkey is one of the cheese-rich countries, and there are approximately 130 different cheese varieties in Turkish cuisine (Kamber, 2015). The word "peynir," used to denote cheese in Turkey, is known to have been borrowed from Persian into Turkish, and it is first seen in Turkish dictionaries during the time of the Mamluks in Egypt (Ünsal, 2003). Turkish Patent and Trademark Office has registered 27 different cheese types as geographical indication (13) and country of origin (14) (Çakmakçı & Salik, 2021).

The variety of cheese in Anatolia has enabled cheese to be used in various recipes and has affected the increase in the variety of food. Desserts are also foods that contain cheese, and there are assorted cheese desserts unique to the region and regions in Anatolia. Cheese halva, Höşmerim, Kemalpaşa dessert, Hayrabolu dessert, Künefe, Biga dessert, and Lor dessert comprise this variety (Ulu, 2019).



Figure 3. Fresh unsalted cheese used in the production of cheese halva. (Gelibolu, 14.08.2024)

Çanakkale Cheese Halva

To make Çanakkale cheese halva, it is essential to start by obtaining unsalted cheese. For cheese production, warm milk is combined with rennet and water and left to rest for 2 hours. At the end of this period, the cheese is stirred to allow it to settle at the bottom, with the watery part remaining on top. The material is then strained through a cloth. The cheese, still slightly moist and not fully solidified, is used for making halva. Subsequently, the cheese is mixed with semolina and flour, and after kneading, it is left to cook over low heat for 10 minutes. After this duration, sugar and egg yolk are added to it. Following an additional 5 minutes of mixing all these ingredients outside the heat, it is placed on the stove and cooked for another 10 minutes (Çanakkale Peynir Helvası, n.d.). Çanakkale cheese halva can be served in this manner or, if desired, it can be baked in the oven. When prepared in this way, it is referred to as "baked cheese halva." (Fig 3).



Figure 3. Unbaked and baked Çanakkale cheese halva (Çanakkale, 09.08.2024)

Gelibolu Cheese Halva

Cheese halva produced in the Gelibolu district of Çanakkale differs in that it is prepared without the addition of semolina and eggs (Ulu, 2019). For Gelibolu cheese halva, unsalted white cheese is first melted in a pot, then mixed with flour, and sugar is added to achieve the desired consistency. As shown in Figure 4, its texture also has a fibrous structure. Therefore, Gelibolu cheese halva can be considered as a type of cheese halva that is similar to Çanakkale cheese halva but distinct. A cheese halva producer in Gelibolu has reported that cheese halva is a dessert that Turks brought with them when they migrated to Rumelia and has a history of approximately 700 years. It is known to have been consumed by shepherds in the region in the past and is also known by the name "shepherd's dessert" (Gelibolu Peynir Helvası, n.d.-a). Gelibolu cheese halva has received a geographical indication mark from the Turkish Patent and Trademark Office in 2024.



Figure 4. Gelibolu Cheese Halva production (Gelibolu, 09.08.2024)

Tekirdağ Cheese Halva

Tekirdağ cheese halva is a type of halva that has received a geographical indication mark from the Turkish Patent and Trademark Office. This halva, closely associated with the Tekirdağ province, is produced using unsalted cheese, white sugar, wheat flour, and either egg yolk or a food coloring agent (E160a). Tekirdağ cheese halva has a glossy yellow color, a homogeneous and fibrous texture. It is essential that the sugar used in halva production does not have a crystallized structure. The intensity of the heat and the duration of cooking play a role in the formation of the fibrous structure. Unsalted cheeses prepared from raw milk are mixed with sunflower oil, a food additive (colorant) or egg yolk for acquiring the yellow color, followed by the addition of wheat flour, and finally, white sugar is incorporated. No preservatives are used in the production of Tekirdağ Cheese Halva (Tekirdağ Peynir Helvası, n.d.)

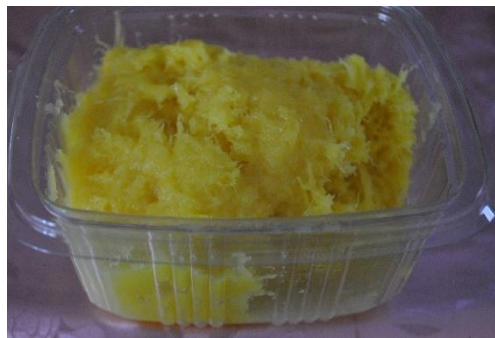


Figure 6. Tekirdağ cheese halva (Tekirdağ, 20.07.2023)

Erzurum Cheese Halva (Horis)

Erzurum cheese halva is a type of halva prepared with raw cream, flour, civil cheese, and salt. To prepare it, the cream is set to boil, and after a certain period of boiling, salt is added. Subsequently, flour is added, and it is roasted until it reaches a sticky consistency. The preparation concludes with the addition of civil cheese to the halva, ensuring thorough mixing (Sengul & Ertugay, 2006). What distinguishes this type of halva from others is its preparation without sugar. This sugar-free product with a dominant cheese flavor is consumed at different times of the day in Erzurum (Aydın, 2022).



Figure 7. Moist and dry forms of Erzurum cheese halva (horis) (Erzurum, 20.07.2023)

Semolina Halva with Cheese

Semolina halva, made by roasting semolina with butter and then adding syrup, is one of the Turkish street desserts easily prepared today and offered to consumers by many establishments, both in its traditional form and in its cheesy variation (Tariñç, 2019). For the regular semolina halva, after roasting semolina with butter, syrup is added, and the dessert is ready when the semolina absorbs the syrup. In the case of the cheesy version, fresh unsalted cheese is added to the semolina halva in the final stage to prepare cheesy semolina halva. While semolina halva is prepared in every region of Turkey, cheesy semolina halva is traditionally consumed in Kilis, Hatay provinces, and the surrounding areas (Köklü, 2018; Peynirli İrmik Helvası, n.d.). It can be served with a sprinkle of cinnamon and powdered pistachios.



Figure 8. Semolina halva with cheese (İstanbul, 08.09.2023)

Höşmerim

Höşmerim, a type of dessert with a geographical indication certificate and a prominent place in Turkish cuisine for over 500 years, has become closely associated with Balıkesir (Seçim & Uçar, 2017). According to Evliya Çelebi's travelogue, höşmerim is first documented to have appeared in Trabzon, then made its way to Balıkesir (Dağlı, 2005). Unsalted cheese, semolina, egg yolk, sugar, and saffron are the primary ingredients of Balıkesir-specific höşmerim dessert (Şahan et al., 2006). Höşmerim is produced in various provinces, and as a result, the methods of production can vary significantly (Şahan et al., 2006). The höşmerim dessert unique to the Gediz district of the Kütahya province is prepared by forming a dough from fresh cheese, vegetable oil, flour, semolina, and baking powder, baking it in the oven, adding syrup, then applying a second round of baking, and finally cooling it (Gediz Cuisine, n.d.).



Figure 9. Balıkesir hoşmerim dessert (Balıkesir, 03.03.2024).



Figure 10. Gediz hoşmerim dessert. (Gediz, 30.02.2024)



Figure 11. Map of Türkiye showing the provinces where desserts are famous

a. Gelibolu cheese halva b. Tekirdağ cheese halva c. Çanakkale cheese halva d. Hoşmerim e. Gediz hoşmerim dessert f. Semolina halva with cheese g. Horis

Methodology

The current study aims to identify the characteristics of Gelibolu cheese halva, a specific product in Turkish cuisine, and to examine its production phases. The study focuses on gathering insights from individuals who are knowledgeable about the production and cultural significance of Gelibolu cheese halva in the region. To achieve this, the research employs a purposive sampling technique (Büyüköztürk, 2017). Although scholarly discussions on the definition and assessment of data saturation continue (Low, 2019), in this study saturation was considered to be

reached after the 14th interview. While some participants are working in the halva producers, some participants are housewife who know and prepare the dessert for a long time. The main criterion for inclusion was actively producing Gelibolu cheese halva for a minimum of five years and having learned the method through traditional or professional channels.

The data were collected through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews conducted between October and November 2024. Each interview lasted between 20 and 40 minutes and was conducted in the participants' homes or production spaces. With participants' consent, audio recordings were taken to ensure accuracy in data capture. Written and verbal informed consent was obtained prior to each interview. All audio files and transcripts were securely stored in password-protected digital folders accessible only to the researcher. An interview form was developed by the researcher based on relevant literature and field observations. To ensure content validity, the form was reviewed by four academic experts in gastronomy and food culture. Based on their feedback, revisions were made to improve the clarity of the questions. The interview form used to collect data includes questions such as: How long have you been producing Gelibolu cheese halva? From whom did you learn to make it? What type of milk do you use? What type of cheese do you use? What are the steps involved in its preparation? During which meals do you consume Gelibolu cheese halva? What do you serve as a side when serving and consuming it? And what other types of cheese dessert do you produce? Did the geographical indication have an impact on product popularity? Participants are also encouraged to share any additional information they have about Gelibolu cheese halva. The study uses a qualitative research method to explore and obtain detailed responses to these questions (Storey, 2007).

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive analysis, a method that enables researchers to summarize participants' responses within predetermined themes aligned with the research questions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). In line with the qualitative descriptive analysis approach, the interview transcripts were systematically reviewed and summarized in accordance with the main research questions. Rather than generating new themes from the data, the findings were organized by grouping participants' responses directly under the question-based categories to ensure a clear and structured presentation. Since descriptive analysis does not require a detailed coding procedure, the data were interpreted within a pre-established analytical framework based on the interview questions. To enhance credibility, the analytical summaries were reviewed by two academic experts, and their feedback was incorporated into the final presentation of the findings. Created research questions are presented below:

1. How long have you been producing Gelibolu cheese halva?
2. From whom did you learn how to make Gelibolu cheese halva?
3. What type of milk do you use when producing Gelibolu cheese halva?
4. What type of cheese do you use when producing Gelibolu cheese halva?
5. What are the stages involved in its preparation process?
6. During which meals do you consume Gelibolu cheese halva?
7. What do you serve alongside it when preparing or consuming it?
8. What other types of cheese-based desserts do you produce?
9. What other products or variations can be made using Gelibolu cheese halva?

Based on the thematic categories and research questions guiding the study, the interview data were organized to reflect the core dimensions of Gelibolu cheese halva production and consumption. The first theme, production experience and knowledge transmission, encompasses participants’ accounts of how long they have been producing the dessert and from whom they learned the practice, highlighting intergenerational continuity and culturally embedded culinary knowledge. The second theme, ingredient preferences, includes variations in the types of milk and cheese used during production, revealing localized material choices shaped by availability and tradition. The third theme, traditional production stages, covers participants’ descriptions of the preparation and cooking steps, illustrating the technical process that defines the product’s characteristic qualities. The fourth theme, consumption practices and serving styles, reflects when the dessert is typically consumed and what it is served with, offering insights into its cultural positioning within daily food routines. Finally, the fifth theme, product range and innovation, captures participants’ experiences with producing other cheese-based desserts as well as their ideas on alternative uses or new variations of Gelibolu cheese halva. Together, these thematic categories provide a structured and comprehensive framework for presenting the findings of the study.

Ethics committee permission was granted regarding the interviews held on 08.10.2024 by the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of İstanbul Bilgi University for conducting interviews with the participants (Project Number: 2024-40140-166).

Research questions

Results

Demographic information regarding the participants of the research study

The demographic characteristics of the participants who fulfill the condition of having knowledge about the production of Gelibolu cheese halva and its features in the local cuisine culture are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Education	Profession
P1	Male	71	Elementary	Producer
P2	Male	32	Bachelor	Producer
P3	Male	34	High school	Producer
P4	Female	48	Elementary	Housewife
P5	Male	61	Elementary	Retired
P6	Female	63	High school	Housewife
P7	Male	42	High school	Retired
P8	Female	76	Elementary	Producer
P9	Female	78	Elementary	Housewife
P10	Female	64	Elementary	Housewife
P11	Male	47	High school	Producer
P12	Female	55	Elementary	Housewife
P13	Male	56	Elementary	Retired
P14	Male	41	Bachelor	Producer

Opinions of the individuals participating in the study

Production Experience and Knowledge Transmission

Participants reported diverse experiences regarding how and when they began producing Gelibolu cheese halva. A considerable number (P1, P2, P3, P5, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13) stated that they had been involved in production

since childhood or early adulthood, typically learning the craft from parents or elder family members. This reflects a strong intergenerational transmission of culinary knowledge. In contrast, several participants (P4, P6, P8) indicated that they began producing the dessert after marriage or within the past 10–20 years, suggesting that the practice is also adopted later in life, independent of early familial teaching.

Ingredient Preferences

All 14 participants consistently emphasized the use of unsalted fresh cheese as the defining ingredient of Gelibolu cheese halva. However, preferences regarding milk type varied more widely. Some participants (P1, P3, P4, P7, P9, P14) preferred cow's milk, while others (P2, P5, P6, P10, P11) used sheep's milk. A smaller subset (P8, P12, P13) reported using a mixture of both types of milk or selecting milk based on seasonal availability and fat content. These ingredient choices illustrate localized production practices shaped by tradition and access to regional resources.

Traditional Production Stages

Participants' descriptions of the production process were highly consistent across the sample. All indicated that the preparation starts by melting the cheese, followed by gradually adding wheat flour and cooking the mixture until it turns yellow. Sugar is then incorporated to complete the process. These accounts align closely with the production steps described in the geographical indication registration certificate for Gelibolu cheese halva, confirming the continuity of traditional methods among local producers.

Consumption Practices and Serving Styles

Regarding consumption patterns, most participants (P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P13) stated that they primarily consumed Gelibolu cheese halva during lunch or dinner, usually as a dessert. Others (P3, P5, P11, P12, P14) reported consuming it at any time of day based on personal preference, illustrating its flexibility within daily eating habits.

Serving preferences also varied. Several participants (P1, P2, P5, P7, P10, P11) preferred pairing the halva with ice cream, whereas others (P3, P4, P6, P9, P13) enjoyed it with Turkish coffee. A smaller group (P8, P12, P14) indicated that they consumed it plain without accompaniments, suggesting that while pairing options exist, they are optional rather than essential.

Product Range and Innovation

When asked about additional cheese-based desserts they produced, the majority (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14) indicated that Gelibolu cheese halva was the only cheese dessert they prepared. Only two participants (P4 and P9) mentioned also producing H \ddot{o} şmerim and Lor tatlısı, showing limited diversification beyond the primary product.

Participants were additionally asked whether the geographical indication had influenced product popularity. Non-producer participants indicated limited knowledge on this matter. Producers, however, generally stated that the geographical indication had not significantly increased demand (P1, P2, P3, P8, P11). They noted that initial media attention faded quickly and sales quantities remained unchanged. Nevertheless, one participant (P14) believed the geographical indication did positively influence consumer interest, noting that some customers asked about it and that displaying the label on the shop door was beneficial.

Traditional production phases of Gelibolu cheese halva

One of the interview questions (Q5) asked participants to describe the stages involved in the preparation of Gelibolu cheese halva. Participants' descriptions of the production process were highly consistent with the traditional method documented in the geographical indication registration (Gelibolu Peynir Helvası, n.d.-b).

According to geographical indication registration method, the longest stage in the production process of Gelibolu cheese halva is the preparation of cheese suitable for halva making. The main ingredients used in the halva are unsalted fresh cheese, white granulated sugar, and wheat flour. For every 1 kilogram of fresh cheese, 250 grams of wheat flour and 750 grams of sugar are used. To produce the cheese, fresh milk is first pasteurized and then coagulated using rennet. The resulting curd is pressed to form the cheese. For optimal flavor, it is important that the milk used is high in fat content. Once coagulated, the cheese is cut, strained using cheesecloth, and placed into a mold to set its shape. The fresh cheese, after draining excess liquid and taking shape, is then ready for use (Gelibolu Peynir Helvası, n.d.-b).

To cook the cheese halva, the fresh cheese is placed into a cooking vessel and stirred over low heat until it releases its moisture. As the cheese melts and releases its liquid, wheat flour is gradually added in several stages to achieve a homogeneous mixture. When the mixture turns yellow in color, sugar is added and stirred until it is completely dissolved. Once the sugar has fully melted, the halva can be served (Gelibolu Peynir Helvası, n.d.-b).

Most participants (P1, P2, P3, P5, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13) described the process in a way that mirrors the traditional method recorded in the geographical indication documentation. For example, P1 summarized the production steps as follows: "First, we melt the fresh cheese until it releases its water. Then we slowly add flour and keep stirring until it becomes yellow. After that, we add sugar and cook it until everything melts together." Similarly, P3 stated: "We always begin by heating the cheese. Once it softens, we add flour slowly. When the mixture turns golden, sugar is added. This is how we were taught by our elders."

Some participants added additional practical details. For instance, P7 emphasized the importance of texture control: "You need to add the flour gradually; too much at once will make it lumpy. You check the consistency with the spoon." P12 highlighted the significance of cheese quality: "The cheese must be fresh and unsalted; otherwise, the taste will not be right." P8 also noted the gradual reduction of moisture: "The cheese must lose enough water before you add flour; if not, the halva becomes too wet."

Although the core stages were highly similar across participants, minor differences were observed regarding the timing and heat level. For example, P14 mentioned: "I cook it a bit longer at low heat because it gives a better flavor and prevents burning." Meanwhile, P5 adjusted the sequence slightly by stirring the flour longer before adding sugar: "I cook the flour more to get a better aroma before I put in the sugar."

The steps outlined above closely align with the accounts of all interviewed producers, who similarly emphasized melting the cheese, gradually adding flour, and incorporating sugar as the final stage. Participants also highlighted practical details that reinforce the traditional method, such as the importance of using unsalted fresh cheese and adjusting the flour amount based on texture during cooking. These parallels indicate that local producers follow the traditional recipe almost identically, confirming strong continuity between documented production standards and current practices. Fig 11 shows the flowchart of cheese halva production.

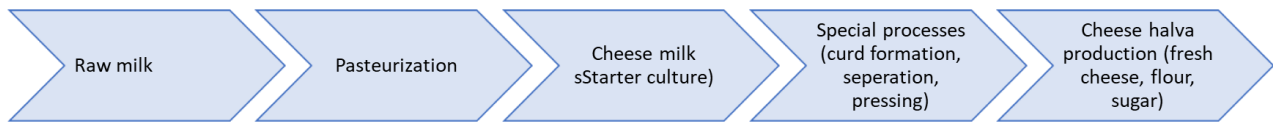


Figure 11. Basic flowchart of cheese halva production.

Conclusion

The aim of this study is to determine the characteristic features and production process of a regional dessert specific to Turkey's Gelibolu district, known as Gelibolu cheese halva. In this regard, information was obtained about the production stages of Gelibolu cheese halva, the type of cheese used, and other ingredients. This study is expected to significantly contribute to the literature on cheese desserts because current resources on this topic are scarce and limited.

The findings related to the last research question reveal no discernible influence of geographical indication on product popularity. Although it is known that geographical indications contribute to the popularity of the product and bring different opportunities (Garcia et al., 2019; Török et al., 2020), the fact that the popularity of Gelibolu cheese halva has not increased shows that geographical indication registration alone is not sufficient and should be supported by effective promotion strategies (Malladagudda & R.S, 2025; Nirosha & Mansingh, 2024).

In general, the findings show that traditional methods, intergenerational knowledge and local resources are effectively maintained in the production of Gelibolu cheese halva; however, consumption and presentation practices vary depending on individual preferences. However, it is understood that the effect of quality signs such as geographical indications is limited at the local level and that promotion, awareness-raising and marketing strategies should be addressed in a holistic manner in order for such signs to be effective.

Gelibolu cheese halva can be highlighted as a touristic product by including its traditional production phases in events organized within or outside of the region. Factory tours showcasing the cheese production stages and halva making can be added to the itinerary. These tours could also provide visitors with hands-on experiences, allowing them to participate in the production process, which would enhance their experience and fostering long-term loyalty with brand and products (Di-Clemente et al., 2020). By doing so, it can become a well-known local product that contributes to the economy, supports local artisans, and preserves cultural heritage.

Upon reviewing the literature, no prior study was found that aimed to identify the characteristics of Gelibolu cheese halva. Therefore, it is believed that this study will contribute to the existing literature.

In addition to the cheese halvras described in this study, various cheese desserts such as Arapgir halva and Şenköy halva are also famous regional dessert recipes produced in different regions of Turkey. Due to their technical and material similarities with other cheese halvras, they were not included in this study. Cheese halvras are traditional sweets produced in Turkish cuisine and cherished by the local people. In addition to cheese halvras, Turkish cuisine also includes various cheese-containing desserts like künefe. In Turkish cuisine, cheeses have been creatively adapted and consumed in recipes across all categories, including breakfast spreads, pastries, main courses, and desserts.

Furthermore, among the globally renowned cheese desserts from other countries, we can list popular options like Tiramisu, various types of cheesecakes (such as Basque Burnt cheesecake, New York cheesecake, Japanese cheesecake, Sernik, etc.), and Sicilian cannoli. Effective promotional activities can introduce cheese halvas to different cultures and markets, elevating them to the status of globally recognized and beloved sweets."

This study is limited by its single-region focus, relatively small sample size, and qualitative research design, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could incorporate sensory analysis, quantitative consumer research, and comparative evaluations of halvas alongside other traditional cheese-based desserts to provide broader insights.

Declaration

Ethics committee permission was granted regarding the interviews held on 08.10.2024 by the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of İstanbul Bilgi University for conducting interviews with the participants (Project Number: 2024-40140-166).

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Appendix 1. Ethics Committee Permission**ETİK KURUL DEĞERLENDİRME SONUCU
RESULT OF EVALUATION BY THE ETHICS COMMITTEE**

(Bu bölüm İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurul tarafından doldurulacaktır
/This section to be completed by the Committee on Ethics in Research on Humans)

Başvuru Sahibi/Applicant: Efe Kaan Ulu

Proje Başlığı / Project Title: Peynir Helvasının Özelliklerinin Belirlenmesi: Gelibolu Peynir Helvasının Üzerine Bir Araştırma

Proje No / Project Number: 2024-40140-166

1.	Herhangi bir değişikliğe gerek yoktur / There is no need for revision	X
2.	Ret /Application Rejected Reddin Gerekçesi /Reason for Rejection:	

Değerlendirme Tarihi / Date of Evaluation: 08.10.2024