The Great Doughnut Schlep

You know the basic Sunday School version: the oil in the besieged Temple lasted eight days instead of one, and now we eat things fried in oil. But did sufganiyot take off in Israel, while the latke commands the American Hanukkah market? And why sufganiyot, anyway? Why not fried chicken or mozzarella sticks or deep-fried Twinkies?

**Germany, c. 1500**
The jelly doughnut as we know it can be traced to 15th-century Germany. The first known recipe for a gefilte krapfen (a stuffed hater) appears in the German cookbook Kuchenmeister, and involves putting jam between two rounds of yeast dough and frying it in lard.

**Middle East, c. 200**
Sufganiya appears in the third-century compilation of the Mishnah (Ona Tokei), in the discussion of what constitutes chamel. Sufganiya were some kind of spiny cake. Perhaps sufganiyot were handed down at Sinai after all?

**Spain, c. 1100**
Rabbi Maimon ben Yosef (Haim- mishna's father, c. 1100 in Muslim Spain), wrote that on Hanukkah it has become custom to make sufganiyot, known in Arabic as asfurah. This is an ancient custom, because they are fried in oil, in remembrance of God's blessing.

**France, c. 1100-1200**
The Tosefot, the 12th-13th-century commentary on the Talmud composed in France and Rhineland, explains the word sufganiot as a dough "fried in oil" and "called in French Jeune," in medieval French, doughnut =青年. Sufganiot likely led to modern doughnuts.

**Provence, c. 1300**
In the early 1300s, the philosopher and translator Kalonymus ben Kalonymus wrote about Hanukkah: "The women take the dough and make different kinds of tasty food from the mixture, and above all they should take fine wheat flour and make sufganiot and sufganiot and sufganiot [water] from it."

**Spain, c. 1200-present**
Frying dough in fat is a cooking method as old as pottery. By the 13th century, Spanish Jews were eating denvia ("lumps"), dusting them in sugar or covering them in caramel. Bitamak (also called burmula) evolved as a Sephardic Hanukkah staple.

**Israel**
Polish Jews brought the custom of eating sufganiot on Hanukkah to Israel, where they took on their new, Hebrewized name, sufganiyot, based on the ancient spiny cake called sufganiot.

But how did it become the iconic Israeli Hanukkah treat? For that, we can thank the pre-state labor group, the Histadrut, which sought to build employment in the winter when jobs lagged. By promoting sufganiyot, which are hard to make at home, as a symbol of Hanukkah, the Histadrut could create more jobs.

**TIME TO MAKE THE DOUGHNUTS**
William Rosenberg, the son of Jewish immigrants, founded Open Kettle doughnut shop in 1948 in Gluck, Massachusetts. In 1950 he changed the name to Dunkin' Donuts.

**Europe, 1600-present**
Once the price of sugar dropped in the 16th century, this sweet treat made its way around Europe as knofel (Austria), berleina (Germany), loczci (Poland), and poronki or puski (Russia). "Yiddish-speaking Jews called them poncheski. Whatever happened to poncheski?"

**Italy and Sicily**
In medieval Italy, Jews were dipping raisin-stuffed fritule in honey on Hanukkah. In southern Italy and Sicily, zeppole di San Giuseppe are a popular sweet fried dough for the festival of St. Joseph. Zeppole comes from za'kalys, which is another way to say "spunge" in Arabic. Today, zeppole are also called sfoghi — linking back to the word sufganiot.

**EPILOGUE**
Today Israelis eat more than 11 million sufganiyot around Hanukkah — that's around 2.25 doughnuts per citizen — and the IDF buys more than 50,000 doughnuts each day of Hanukkah to boost morale. Put that in your ponchok and eat it — EA.

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