
Century-Old Ottoman Companies Serve Generations Of Today With Pride

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Century-old companies established during the late-Ottoman era that still survive to this day continue to serve the country's economy while carrying on traditional brands for future generations to embrace, according to the book "Age-Old Companies of Turkey and İstanbul" released by the İstanbul Chamber of Commerce (İTO).

Research shows that contrary to the common belief that Turkish companies fail to survive for long, 99 companies that are at least 90 years old were found to still be operating in Turkey to this day. These companies were established sometime between 1777 and 1923, operating mostly in the food sector.

The oldest company, a confectionary, was established back in 1777 and was originally called "Bekir Efendi." Back then, confectionary businesses were mostly carried out by families who came from the province of Kastamonu, like Bekir Efendi (Sir Bekir) himself. His business, which distinguished itself from its competitors by offering different varieties and ingredients from what was typical, had won the hearts of Ottoman İstanbulites, and he was also appointed the "chief confectioner" of the Ottoman palace by the sultan of the time due to his well-deserved fame. The company changed its name to "Hacı Bekir" (Pilgrim Bekir) after Bekir Efendi went to Mecca on pilgrimage. The company has continued to pass on its Ottoman tastes to new generations.

Another age-old company called Hamidiye (which now sells bottled water) was established in 1902 to bring an end to İstanbul's water crises as the city was constantly challenged by dried-up fountains. At the time, water for use in daily life was not only scarce but drinking water was limited, too. A commission appointed by Sultan Abdülhamid II searched all over İstanbul looking for water and they discovered about 60 springs in the Kağıthane district. With expenses covered by the sultan, the company began serving people. It was operated by the İstanbul Municipality, which still runs the company.

At the time when another entrepreneur, Hacı Sadık, moved to İstanbul from Albania, boza was a very popular winter drink. The boza-making business was mainly run by Armenian immigrants, and so Hacı Sadık started working as an apprentice to one of them. However, not too long after, Hacı Sadık believed the taste of boza had room for improvement and started his own boza-making business, "Vefa Boza," in 1876. The company, which he expanded with his son, is now 137 years old and still operates from the same location in İstanbul's Vefa neighborhood.

Yıldız Entegre, which puts Turkey's medium density fiberboard (MDF) production at second place in the world, is also a decades-old company, as it was established in 1890 by Hasan Efendi, who was a timber trader. The business of Hasan Efendi -- who would take such care as to only cut down trees he manually selected to avoid cutting ones that were too young -- took a turn for the better in 1930 when he moved to Samsun from Trabzon and expanded his trade. Yıldız Entegre, which became a corporation in 1972, is

now the world's biggest integrated MDF company and is operating from Kocaeli.

In 1893, another entrepreneur, Ahmet Ağa would bring salt from Tuz Gölü (Salt Lake) in central Turkey to Konya on his carriage. However, when World War I broke out, he moved from Konya to İzmir, where he started transporting goods such as tobacco, cotton, fig and grapes, and his family expanded the business. Eventually theirs became the first company to use trucks in İzmir's transportation sector. The company has carried on its business to this day under the name of Tuzcuoğlu Nakliyat and has been operating for about 120 years.

Other old companies that are still serving today's generations include: Ziraat Bankası, which was established in 1863 by Mithat Paşa; Hafız Mustafa, a confectionary founded in 1864; Kurukahveci Mehmet Efendi, a famous Turkish coffee-maker that started in 1871; and Hacı Şakir, originally a soap maker in 1889 that now offers a variety of bath products.

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