

## MESİR FESTIVAL WITH AN ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*Mesir is a big festival which has been celebrating for 500 years in Manisa. This festival is famous with a traditional paste. This special paste is very well known especially in Anatolian area. This paste is healthy, delicious and prepared with 41 different spices. Because of that Mesir Festival is related with both health and religion tourism. This paste saved magnificent Suleyman's mother Hafsa Sultan's life when he was a crown prince in Manisa. Since that special day this paste accepted as a special treatment.*

*In this article; Anatolian people deep belief, historical and methodical parts of the festival tradition will be discussed in the first part. Tourism capacity of Manisa area, considering this festival as a regional tourism investment, would be stated at the end of the article. For example, total cost of the festival was 1.575.000 TL in 2011(471st celebration of the festival). It is very rare in the world that big budget festivals which based on local people beliefs.*

**Keywords:** *Mesir, Manisa, festival, Ottoman, culture, religious tourism, health tourism, tourism, festival costs and economy*

### EKONOMİK BAKIŞ AÇISIYLA MESİR FESTİVALİ

#### ÖZ

*Mesir 500 yıldır Manisa'da kutlanılmakta olan büyük bir festivaldir. Bu festival geleneksel macunu ile ünlüdür. Bu özel macun bilhassa Anadolu'da çok iyi bilinmektedir. Bu macun sağlıklı, lezzetli ve 41 farklı baharattan hazırlanmıştır. Bu nedenle Mesir Festivali hem inanç hem de sağlık turizmlerinin her ikisi ile de ilgilidir. Bu macun muhteşem Süleyman'ın Manisa'daki şehzadelik günlerinde annesi Hafsa Sultan'ın hayatını kurtarmıştır. O günden bu yana bu macun özel bir tedavi yöntemi olarak kabul edilmiştir.*

*Bu yazıda; Anadolu insanının derin inancı, festival geleneğinin tarihi ve yöntemsel parçaları ilk bölümünde tartışılacaktır. Bu festival bölgesel bir turizm yatırımı olarak dikkate alınırsa, Manisa bölgesinin Turizm kapasitesi de makalenin devamında belirtilmiştir. Örneğin, festivalin toplam maliyeti 2011 yılında (festivalin*

471. kutlama yılında) 1.575.000 TL oldu. Bu büyüklükte bütçeye sahip bir festival olarak Mesir festivali, dünyada çok nadir olarak karşımıza çıkan, yerel halk inançlarına dayanan geleneksel bir yapıya sahiptir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Mesir, Manisa, festival, Osmanlı, kültür, inanç turizmi, sağlık turizmi, turizm, festival maliyetleri ve ekonomisi*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Manisa is one of the eldest cities in Anatolia. Mesir has been celebrated since 1540 in this city. Mesir is not only a very old festival but also it has a special therapeutic paste. Its rarity is based on those two specific topics and an old mental hospital (darüşşifa). This hospital was opened in 1540. Since then it has been represented this special opening because of the historical importance of the hospital and its foundation. This foundation has its own sources for the ceremony.

## **II. THE HISTORY OF THE FESTIVAL**

The Mesir tradition revives the feeling of solidarity and festivity in Manisa, one of the earliest historical towns in Anatolia –the cradle of civilization. Mesir, initially used for purposes of treatment before becoming a tradition, entails a series of beliefs regarding how it came to be.

It is known that Hafsa Sultan (Manisa 1999), wife to Sultan Selim the grim and mother to Sultan Suleyman the lawful and magnificent, spent 8 years of her life in Manisa. Like her beauty, Hafsa Sultan was also famous for her charity and she ordered the building of the Sultan Mosque along with its facilities; the madrasah, the juvenile school, alms house and shelter, all of them completed in 1522 (Manisa Halkevi 1945, Acun 1999) and the hospital's construction was completed in 1540 (Aksakal 2012).

The story of Mesir Festival starts with an order. According to written resources the story of that order mostly depends on the effects of festival on economic and social life of Manisa people. When Sultan II. Murat built a big palace in Manisa (Sarayı Amire) in 1445, for the crown princes education. During the 175 years of its position (between 1444-1595) as district of princes, Manisa (Saruhan throne) developed as the center for arts and culture as the second throne of Ottoman Empire.(Emecen 1989) The princes spent their time in Manisa as governors of the district; they affected the initiation of a vivid cultural life. (Uluçay 1941) Before that festival arrangement in Manisa, the town was built slope of the Spil Mountain. (Köklü 1970) At the time of Prince Suleiman, he wanted to invite the people to settle near the palace. When his mother recovered this unlucky illness his aim was to celebrate her wellness and encourage people to live around the palace peacefully. Therefore the first festival arranged on his order.

One such belief states that Sultan Hafsa, wife to the Ottoman Sultan Yavuz Selim and mother to Sultan Suleiman –more popularly known as Magnificent Suleiman- fell ill during her visit to Manisa. As head of the Sultan Mosque Madrasah once contracted by the Sultan who lay devoid of any cure to

her disease, Merkez Efendi prepared a paste composed of herbs and spices. Revived to her health after eating this paste, Hafsa Sultan asked that this paste made up of 41 kinds of spices and be distributed to the people. Unable to meet the tremendous demands from the public, Sultan ordered that the paste be wrapped in paper and distributed to the public from the dome and minarets of the Sultan Mosque that has been built by Hafsa Sultan. Thus the tradition was born in 1539 and starting with that day, every year 21st of March the public started meeting annually in front of the Sultan Mosque. At the 17<sup>th</sup> century (4<sup>th</sup> Mehmet times) 800 coins spent for the ceremony. Also in 19<sup>th</sup> century (5<sup>th</sup> Mehmet times) the allocations was enhanced from 1200 coins to 3200 coins. 200-250 gold coins was spent for the rest of the years during 20<sup>th</sup> century. After all 500 TL spent in 1951 and 6.000 TL in 1958. (Tuser 1958)

### **III. THE MENTAL HOSPITAL (DARUSSIFA)**

Ottoman Empire has built 5 hospitals in 16th century. All of them around historical peninsula, in İstanbul, except the one in Manisa (Saruhan Throne). Hafsa Sultan ordered the building of the Sultan Mosque along its facilities and the hospital. There is only one record about the mental hospital in Manisa history. This record had written in 1671 by Evliya Çelebi. The famous traveler Evliya Çelebi mentioned this hospital in his book “Seyahatnâme” and described the hospital’s general surgeon as a skillful person. The fact that there were only two sentences about the hospital which were describes this hospital as a medical faculty. There were the students take classes and visitation study two days a week. It was also stated in that book they were given different colors and variety of pastes to patients in this hospital as a treatment. (Köklü 1970) This can be stated as a start point of health tourism because it was the first medical faculty in Anatolia at that time. The importance of the hospital makes this event unique.

Merkez Efendi was very famous in 16th century. As far as the people described Merkez Efendi prepared the paste for Hafsa Sultan. Old records show that, as he had significant moral influence upon the public, he was appointed by Sultan Suleiman the lawful to the Korfu expedition to strengthen the morality of the soldiers who attend the campaign. When Hafsa Sultan had an incurable disease and any medical intervention could help to recover that illness, Merkez Efendi made that paste from 41 different kinds of spices. Treatment with pastes was very well known since Indian, Egypt and Mesopotamia civilization times in Anatolia. On demand of Sultan Suleiman, Merkez Efendi candied this paste for Hafsa Sultan. When her illness was recovered by this special paste Hafsa Sultan granted them to the people. Since then, people gathering around Sultan Mosque each year in Manisa. (Manisa 1999, 2005)

### **IV. ABOUT MESIR PASTE**

The general features of the Mesir Paste are its pleasing taste and aroma. Also known as "power gum", among its other features, we may list top five; its use against pains, aches, colds, indigestion, loss of appetite and bad breath.

Recognized by large masses as a means of treatment, the Mesir paste is popularly accepted to have some amazing feats: anyone who devours the paste will not be bitten by poisonous animals for the duration of one year. When practiced on the day of Newroz, even the most critically illness will be cured. Maidens who eat the paste will be married before the turn of the year. Couples who cannot have children will be parents if the paste is applied. Last but not least, it is popularly believed that the paste is helpful in treating childhood diseases.

Some of the 41 spices are still used in the preparation of the Mesir paste are as follows (Yörükoğlu 1985): Cinnamon, black pepper, clove, mustard seeds, anise, coriander, ginger, turmeric, cinnamon flower, coconut, fennel, senna, vanilla, cardamom, lemon peel, saffron, potion, cumin, gum, licorice honey, indigo and orange peel.

The main production types of Mesir are as listed (Manisa 2005);

- *Classic Mesir*: 10 cm, 20 gr (0,7 ons), 5 pieces in the one pocket, total 100 gr. The original size at the last day of the festival is to be scattered to the public at the distribution ceremony. Price: 5 TL
- *Classic Mesir Gift Packages*: 7 gr (0,24 ons), easy to consume, 48-50 pieces in a pocket: 12 TL, 23-25 pieces in a pocket: 9 TL.
- *Sphere Gift Packages*: 7 gr (0,24 ons), easy to consume, 150 pieces in a pocket. Price: 30 TL
- *Mesir in Jar*: 220 gr, ideally suited for breakfast. 7 TL and 400 gr 8 TL.
- *Mesir Delight*: One form of a feast day sugar, daily use for healing purposes to help you make fit and happy. 250 gram (8,8 ons) 8 TL, 400 gram (14 ons) 10 TL; wooden box: 20 TL.
- *Mesir Tube*: For consumption of children, especially eating more comfortable in this type. 40 gr.
- *Mesir Tea*: Blended spices and herbal tea, 20 small pocket teas, 5 TL.

## V. FESTIVAL ACTIVITIES IN MANISA

When compared to some of the lost customs and traditions as well as some of the national cultural values that are being abandoned, the Mesir paste stands steadily in its place. It is within this context that the festival should be assessed, not in terms of festivities and recreation. (Özbalcı 2009) The Mesir paste is not only specific to Manisa but rather a national event that is focused within Manisa. Undoubtedly, the Mesir has a significant value for Manisa and its local tourism. By means of the festivities, Manisa finds the opportunity to publicize its local cultural characteristics and this in turn encourages us to further put forth our existing values. (Aksakal 1987)

In accordance with the old historical tradition, the festivities are initiated annually with the Newroz Festival. Starting with the Mixing Ceremony on the 21st of March, the festivities last a week. On the Sunday at the end of the

week, the festivities ending with the “Mesir Distribution Ceremony” held from the Sultan Mosque dome and minarets. As part of the festivities, culture, art and sports activities such as public concerts by popular artists, oil wrestling, kiting, folk dancing shows, the trade and industry fair, crafts and arts fair and shows, as well as cooking competitions are held in Manisa in this festival week. (Manisa 2009)

Since the first order, tens of thousands of people meet in front of the Sultan Mosque and witness the waking of nature, the start of spring and the beginning of abundance and prosperity. Today, various cultural and sports activities take place during the festivities and coinciding with this event, the Mesir Industrial Fair revitalizes the economic and social life of Manisa. (Aksakal 2006, 2012)

According to H. Tuser’s records, this festival was very important in 1952. The very first day of the festival was designed for “economic events”. Domestic agricultural crops take place at Manisa bazaar. There would be also art products from Kula, Demirci, Gördes for example carpets and fabrics. Organized exhibitions can be very effective for local merchants. In the second and third day of the festival week there would be folk art concerts and performances during all day long and in the evening. 4<sup>th</sup> day of the week sport activities, like football, wrestling, tennis, athletics will be entertaining the participants of the festival (Tuser 1958).

## **VI. MAIN COSTS OF THE FESTIVAL**

Manisa and Mesir Publicity Foundation –established in 1959 with the aim of maintaining this tradition- serves the Manisa public by participating in the organization activities of the Mesir Festivities organized to publicize Manisa and Mesir paste. First of all, on behalf of the Manisa people, the governor, the mayor starts the Mesir Mixing Ceremony. This ceremony is held on the 21st of March every year in line with the traditions. They celebrate Newroz Festival and the Mixing Ceremony in the same day. 21st of March, in the early morning, Manisa protocol starts attending the activities. The activities are jump up fire, clinking eggs, sword forging, saluting the people with Mehteran (the ottoman military band team). After these activities Manisa protocol comes through the city streets accompanied by Mehteran and arrives to the historical hospital building. In this building they start to mix 41 different spices symbolically. Beyond the mixing ceremony, 15 Manisa women package those pastes with prays by handmade. Those pastes are preparing adhering to the original and getting ready for the distribution ceremony. Starting with this day festival activities are begun to celebrate with all over the city.

The fact that most important moment is gathering for the distribution ceremony. There are two main reasons enough to call out all over the city for this moment. First reason is the customs in the ceremony. They are just as same as with the traditional dresses in old ottoman times. The other reason is only monitoring the crowd for a while.

The Manisa and Mesir Publicity Foundation is funded the festivity costs from selling mesir pastes. As the main income of this festival, promotion of this paste for tourism is very important for the city. The foundation rules are so strict about the production way of pastes. Some innovative types attached on the product list by the time. This product is guaranteed for all varieties of technique, taste and tradition in their own made, presented to the world.

3,5 million tons of Mesir paste distributed freely to the public from the tops of Sultan Mosque at the distribution ceremony in 2011 (This equals 875.000 pieces of classic 4 gram Mesir paste and every piece of part 1 TL). Thus the first cost of this ceremony: 875.000 TL. There were also other expenses (city mayor, provincial administration, and other professional associations and civil society organizations) around 700.000 TL at 471<sup>st</sup> Mesir Festival (Aksakal 2012).

## **VII. TOURISM ACTIVITIES IN MANISA**

The Ministry of Tourism was established in 1965 but its impact was relatively minor until the passage of the Tourism Encouragement Law of 1982. During the planned economy years (between 1960-80), in the “First Five-Year Economic Development Plan” tourism was recognized formally as an important sector and it had four pages out of a total 472 pages in this Plan. This was accepted as a good start for Turkish tourism. It was emphasized in the plan as the main principle of Turkish tourism that to attract the tourist potential to Turkey in as short a time as possible by making the necessary investments. As much attention should therefore be given to publicity and promotion, provision of services and the souvenir trade, as to overnight accommodation. Tourism demand was started to improve since that period. However, from 1975 to 1980, Turkish tourism was more or less stagnant. Turkey entered the 1990’s with impressive tourism statistics. (Var 2001) Those improvements are affected Manisa tourism activities in last decade. Table 1 shows the numbers of the domestic and foreign tourists in Manisa between 1985 and 2005. (Manisa 2007)

Manisa has been regarded as a touristic city which has not yet opened its doors to tourism sector. This formation has been explained in terms of three effects in 1970’s. Those effects can be listed as follows; insufficient presentation of historical and touristic values; inadequate accommodation provided for visitors; closeness to İzmir which is a highly developed city in terms of tourism. (Manisa 2007)

**Table 1: Number of the Tourists for Manisa City Center (1965-2005)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Local</b>	<b>Foreign</b>
1985	31.074	16.632
1986	21.119	16.707
1987	19.835	23.584
1988	31.039	21.782
1989	29.427	25.512

<b>Year</b>	<b>Local</b>	<b>Foreign</b>
1990	32.946	30.413
1991	48.100	26.905
1992	51.497	27.649
1993	58.750	30.413
1994	77.195	32.194
1995	88.930	33.183
1996	93.316	36.690
1997	94.942	37.283
1998	99.741	48.672
1999	88.276	33.690
2000	104.017	44.869
2001	97.799	61.039
2002	99.426	50.207
2003	85.345	32.948
2004	96.577	43.715
2005	134.087	56.830
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.483.438</b>	<b>730.917</b>

In the organized tours, only a few of the visitors stay in the hotels located in provincial center of Manisa. The period of accommodation has generally been 1 or 2 days. The visitor who mostly visit Manisa have been declared as Germans, Italians and English, others are generally from other European countries. Since an adequate research which would have reflected the touristic actions in Manisa hasn't been done, there is no sufficient information about the ages and genders of the visitors, the places that desire to see, their expectations and whether they are satisfied with the service given to them.

**Table 2: Manisa Population (1985-2010)<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Growth %</b>
1985	1.050.130	21,75
1990	1.154.418	18,94
2000	1.260.169	8,76
2007	1.319.920	-
2008	1.316.750	-2,4
2009	1.331.957	11,5
2010	1.379.484	35,06

Most of the hotels and resorts are founded by special Provincial Administration and Majorities are located in the regions close to thermal resources and springs. (Karaköse 2004) Those establishments are unfortunately small. It can be said that most of the resorts in thermal regions are desirable to see.

<sup>1</sup> www.manisa.gov.tr Sayılarla Manisa (29.04.2011)

*The Number of Touristic Establishments:*

- a) Resorts with an Evidence of Touristic Business Administration  
Total Number of Resorts : 10  
Total Number of Rooms : 424  
Total Number of Beds : 1.032
- b) Resorts with an Evidence of Touristic Investment  
Total Number of Resorts : 5  
Total Number of Rooms : 253  
Total Number of Beds : 500
- c) Restaurants with an Evidence of Touristic Business Administration  
Total Number of Establishments : 4  
Capacities : 550
- d) Restaurants with an Evidence of Touristic Investment  
Total Number of Establishments : 2  
Capacities : 550
- e) Touristic Courts Controlled by Majorities  
Total Number of Courts : 42 4 46  
Total Number of Rooms : 718 249 967  
Total Number of Beds : 1.294 656 1.950

The places which are mainly visited by local and foreign touristic groups in Manisa are Museum of Manisa, Muradiye Mosque and Complex, Sultan Mosque and Complex, Niobe, Mountain Spil, Kybele and archeological sites of Aigai and Sardes.

According to Vagobond: "Turkey offers more for the traveler than just about any other country on the planet. Manisa is really an amazing place. It has one of the only protected forest parks in all of Turkey, there are hot springs in the mountains, it has a huge number of historical buildings, ruins, and structures, and it is clean, beautiful, and safe. On top of that it has a thriving Industrial Free Trade Zone, plenty of agriculture, and friendly warm people. Manisa sits surrounded by the cities of the Aegean Coast, the ruins of Sardis and Ephesus are close enough to draw historical tourists, and the city of Izmir is a metropolis seaside playground. If Manisa were not surrounded by so much, it would be one of the top places in Turkey." (Damitio 2011)

**VIII. CONCLUSION: MESIR AND TOURISM**

Mesir paste is a traditional gift for Manisa protocol. It has been introduced to the world by them in their domestic and international trips. This demonstration could be given an idea about its special taste and how its look likes in real. This would not be enough to understand the ceremony and the festival. It can be only a souvenir from Manisa.

Tourists should spend at least a week in Manisa and share the feeling of this ceremony. In the festival week there are some international activities for children. For adults, there are special concerts and competitions during the week. For example 260 foreign visitors attended to the festival in 2011. All the



attendees stated that the organization was very successful and exciting. 45 events planned for the 471<sup>st</sup> festival and 25 of them were musical and dance activity. Four different competitions, two ceremonies and so many exhibitions were held in 2011. Those events were colorful and enjoyable.

Mesir Festival can be titled as a health and religious tourism activity. First of all, the pastes at the mixing ceremony wrapped by women accompanied with praying. After this part, at the distribution ceremony people remove their hands up just like they pray all together for blessing. Thousands of people are gathering around Sultan Mosque every year for this exciting moment. It is not only a tradition; it spreads health and dispenses healing every year in March. There are some other projects proposed for the new generation of the city; medical museum, cultural and pharmaceutical center etc. (Pala 2008)

On the other hand Manisa has an important potential in terms of religious tourism. In Bible, seven cities in Asian State have been mentioned. Those cities are listed as Ephesus, Izmir, Bergama, Thyatira, Sardes, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Manisa city has been included into the list of “Tour Guide for Religious Tourism” in 1996.

In consideration of the tourism advantages and disadvantages of Manisa that could be positively said the city is ready to open its doors to tourism widely. Manisa has all open areas and beautiful nature as other west Aegean side of Anatolia cities. However, Mesir festival would be considered as not only domestic tourism activity but also an international tourism event since 2012. Manisa Tourism Department applied to UNESCO World Heritage List for Mesir in March 2011. 472nd Mesir Festival will be officially celebrated as an international festival this year in March.

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