

# Handmade Musical Instruments Production in Turkey: An Historical Analysis on Cymbal Producing Businesses

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**Abstract** Depending on the geographical richness of Turkey, it can be seen that the music culture took place here highly immense. This richness make producing musical instruments with different types and schemes possible and by enabling production of these materials, high quality hand-made musical instrument production becomes highly feasible. The leading product in the world in this sector is considered as cymbal. This research, aims to grasp how a little local business becomes a big leading international business when it comes to producing cymbal. The main purpose of this commitment is to analyze historically how hand-made cymbal producers grow and endure their living. In this context, Istanbul Mehmet Cymbals and Bosphorus Cymbals businesses are contacted and obtained information are analyzed. Regional distribution information of hand-made musical instrument producers are also tried to be given in this perspective. It can be seen from the gathered information that to endure their living, producers in Turkey needs to take a lot of conditions into consideration, nevertheless, again can be seen that eligible products were brought to the future under the names of different brands.

**Keywords** Musical Instruments, Handmade, Cymbal

## 1. Introduction

Hand-made style of production is the oldest kind of production and therefore craftsman are the first producers. Craftsman, by passing through a freshman period, become masters and make productions on demand, usually they make their own products and sell the things they made themselves. Craftsman, obtain their raw materials and produce alone, and by processing the material in every single production procedure, get the ultimate product. In this era that employee numbers were limited, production processes were long, ultimate product numbers were countable and therefore costs were high, production on demand, was more accessible for prosperous people [7, 12,

3]. Piano and violin kind of instruments that are made on demand can be given as example for this way of production that is still on agenda [8]. Primarily historical evolution of hand-made musical instrument production in the world, then the situation in Turkey was taken into consideration.

### 1.1. Hand-made Musical Instrument Production in the World

After industrial revolution, while there was instruction of mass production systems in economically prosperous countries, handmade musical instrument production kept going on in certain limits. When it comes to the production of the best qualified hand-made musical instruments in the world, the ones made by Cremonian instrument producers Amati, Guarnerius and Stradivarius during 1600 and 1700 were to be praised. The excelling of violins each passing day with the continuous production of violins started around 1600 in Italy [9]. Amati produced dark sound instruments with the best tone and softness of his time. Stradivarius violins, on the other hand, with their transparent polishing, strong and nice high-pitched sound reached perfection [14]. With their mastership in producing qualified hand-made instruments, Germany, France and Italy are of primary importance in the world in music and musical instrument production sectors with their qualified hand-made violins. Being produced during 1600s in the western world, violin reached its final form thanks to Italian masters Amati, Guarnerius and Stradivarius [4].

Despite given low priority by music making processes and its unpopularity in musical instrument production phases when compared with popular and solo instruments, Turkey is the only place where the only hand-made production of cymbal is made, which is quite beneficial when making music, which also has the ability to considerably alter the feeling that music makes us feel, with the musical tones it creates for unity and harmony, is not only a necessary instrument for the world, but also something of its own. At the beginning of 1900s Zilciyan

family, which is the only family in the world to produce cymbals, moved to USA and started producing cymbals on a larger scale, a kind of mass production scale, which they were doing locally back in their atelier in Samatya, Istanbul. Therefore, the traditional hand-made cymbal production continued only on Turkey in the world, until the family's last living member on earth, Mikael Zilciyan passed away in 1978. Nevertheless, master Mikael apprentices grasp the tradition back in their hands and they kept the tradition going on.

## 1.2. Hand-made Musical Instrument Production in Turkey

Musical instrument production in Turkey takes place on industrial level locally. All kinds of unindustrialized musical instrument production takes place on atelier level. Since there is a high demand for sectoral products, while production keeps going on in hand-made way, the production of highly qualified and rarely used instruments is done on demand. The production of the instruments based on individual choices can also be analyzed in the scope of only on demand kind of method.

When the art of musical instrument production is analyzed in the scope of Anatolian history, the earliest information about this art branch traces back to Ottoman sources. In the Ottoman era, the instruments used in harem were purchased by chief armourer or chief harem eunuch and they got them repaired by masters outside the palace. It is known that in the time of Fatih the Conqueror there was a lute player called Şîrmerd and there was a zitherist called Ishak in the palace. In the archives of artisans of Ottoman Empire, there was a January 1526 registered record about a tanbur player/ maker called Muslihiddin, which was chosen among other instruments producers and employed to the palace in return for 12 coins. This record shows that in the time of Fatih, there were paid instrument artisans and musicians in the palace [1]. In "seyahatname", when mentioning about craftsmanship in Istanbul, Evliya Çelebi emphasized that there were instrument artisans called janissary band member or chief zurna player [5]. In addition, some records show that at the beginning of XIX century, there were some instruments ateliers in the palace and some of the masters worked for the palace [13]. However, no concrete proof about sectoral structure of instrument artisans, training, master and apprentice relationship is available [1].

Since there is no system of mass production and fabrication of musical instruments in Turkey, nearly all of the production is hand-made locally by using additional production equipment. In different regions of Turkey, production of specific musical instruments are made locally in small ateliers and consequently marketing procedures of some of those produced instruments are done and they are sold abroad. Efforts of mass production

can be seen on small scales; however, since there is limited number of masters trying to do that, no significant improvement can be made.

Because of the dominant musical culture in Turkey, it can easily be seen that the highest produced musical instrument, which is also one of the major instrument of Turkish folk music, is "baglama". Even though baglama, which has a history of nearly 5000 years in this territory, has a richer sound than most of the western musical instruments, the reason why it is not well-known around the world can be that it is not integrated enough to the world music, it is not mass produced until this day in Turkey. Nonetheless, lately baglama production, in addition to being more wide-spread than other instruments, is made in large or small scales with different qualities. Today, most baglama players produce small amounts of baglama even though they made it for themselves. There are particular names in Turkey when it comes to baglama production. Being trained as instrument artisan in Istanbul Technical University conservatory, one of our master artists, the one who introduced fretless classical guitar to world, also known for his baglama and lute making skills, Erkan Oğur can be a good example.

Instruments production can be divided into two types as hand-made and mass production. Mass production is generally made abroad and hand-made is generally done locally in Turkey. However, there are also some businesses that mass produce violin and baglama. Nearly %80 of masters who generally hand-made their products work alone, in other words employ no single employee. The reason why instrument master employ no personnel even though there is a high need for it can be that there is a skilled personnel problem in this sector. Despite this situation in the past, to meet the skillful personnel demand of sector, commitments like instrument making programs are conducted in universities and instrument production departments are gradually established in ministry of education high schools [16].

Turkey is a dependent country in terms of raw materials of instruments. The raw materials necessary for local instruments are obtained from Turkey, on the other hand nearly all of the materials necessary for western music are imported abroad. Generally, materials that are necessary for local instruments are grown inside Turkey and can easily be gathered when needed. The ones necessary for western instrument production are also no longer hard to gather. This convenience is paralleled by the development of furniture sector because those materials and woods used in instrument making are also the main materials in furniture production. Because furniture sector is developed in a systematical scheme in Turkey, importing raw materials in large scales in a swift way made instrument producers' job easier and easier day by day. Even though these materials are imported not for instruments but furniture, instrument artisans are trying to overcome providing material problem and trying to make

the best out of it.

An instrument may be born somewhere but has no land or country [15]. If a classification wants to be made in terms of musical instrument production, the only possible way of doing it depends not on regions but on different production types of instruments regarding their eastern and western way of production [16]. In terms of production classification, it is hard to classify instrument production into regions in Turkey. For example, baglama has its own unique way of production in each region of Turkey. It can be seen that in general it is hard to make classifications depending on local instruments; however one can say that the situation can change for western instruments [15].

When the way western instruments like guitar and violin are produced is analyzed, it can be seen that more production is being made on western parts of the country, and when one goes to the eastern part of the country, he/she can easily see that production tendency moves more towards local instruments. If hand-made instrument production is classified as eastern and western in Turkey, then it is possible to classify the sector as three major cities Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir on one side and others on the other side. The main reason for this situation is that cities like Istanbul are centers of all kinds of sectors in the country and they are also port cities which make them highly viable when it comes to importing materials and equipment.

In terms of reaching raw materials, masters in big cities and port cities hold an advantageous position in producing western instruments and therefore make instruments on a national scale (In terms of marketing and opportunities).

If closeness to raw materials is taken into account, calabash is grown more in Mediterranean and Mediterranean side of Aegean region, which may make us presume that rebab production is made more in these regions. The reason why once upon a time inexpensive and considerable number of musical instruments made from beech trees and hornbeams in Black sea region is that these trees were significantly wide-spread on this region. The regions where leather production is wide-spread, there may be more production of percussion instruments. The cities where industry is developed, there may be a possibility of production of music wire, which is not normally produced in Turkey. The port cities such as Istanbul and Izmir, where imported woods easily reach, instruments made up of those woods may have a little bit of front position [15].

## 2. Strategy of the Research

The research is made with leading cymbal manufacturers in Turkey and in the world, Istanbul Mehmet Cymbals and Bosphorus Cymbals. Before meeting was arranged with the firms, ready question forms

were used and additional information was tried to be reached. Establishment, development, competitiveness and performance related information about these firms were aimed to be analyzed and were addressed.

The type of this research is descriptive research and multiple sampling case study was made. Case study was made in terms of qualitative research and meeting was chosen as data collection technique. Case study especially goes from questions to answers, regulates and analyzes findings and implications regarding the case, gives the best possible answers to research questions and summarizes everything in harmony [6]. According to Yin (2003), case studies must be made, where questions of how and why weighs, where researcher have no chance of affecting the case, which is present at real, but where there is not much research was done [10].

The absence of academics and sectoral research on cymbal production in Turkey both curtails the information about the sector and makes it hard to reach information about firms. It is considered highly appropriate to meet firms face to face in order to obtain required information. Question forms were prepared for the firms to be met, and in order to analyze the sector and question general state of the firms, by grouping questions under five categories as establishment, development, market and competitiveness, performance and general assessment, sub-questions were prepared.

Upon creating question forms, the process continued with choosing companies to be met. Five leading firms were contacted for the meeting. Istanbul Mehmet Handmade Cymbals, which comes from Zilciyan tradition, and which is owned by the last living member of that tradition, and Bosphorus Cymbals, which especially deserves a special place in the world for jazz cymbal production, which is also known for Whiplash, 5 times Oscar nominee in 2015 Oscars in Hollywood since their cymbals were used in that movie, accepted the meeting offer enabling an effective meeting. Starting from the question forms that would make us evaluate and analyze firms according to appropriate criteria, by following content analysis process, categories were determined and coding processes were determined according to them. At the last stage, by explaining obtained data meaningfully, correlation among findings was concluded and explanations were given.

Quantitative researchers conceptualize variables as a part of assessment procedure and refine these concepts. On the contrary, qualitative researchers, creates new concepts or refines concepts that are dependent on data. Conceptualization is an important part of data analysis and starts during data collection. Therefore, conceptualization is arranging data and concluding meanings out of them by qualitative researchers [11]. A code arranged according to the theme is a code that protects qualitative richness of the phenomena. This code can be used in analysis, evaluation and presentation of the research [2]. In order to code data according to themes, researcher must first see or learn

themes in data. Seeing themes depend on four different skills: (1) recognizing patterns in data; (2) thinking in terms of systems and concepts; (3) having the ability to have necessary information that are not expressed or to have background information (for example, knowing things about Greek myths helps one to understand Shakespeare's plays); and (4) to have related information (for example, in order to code themes of a rock concert, one must know about rock musicians and rock music itself) [2].

### 3. Findings

Obtained data as a result of the meetings were expressed by dividing into categories. Four categories in this research are; establishment, development, market and competitiveness and performance. Firstly findings about Istanbul Mehmet Cymbals and then Bosphorus Cymbals were stated.

#### 3.1. Istanbul Mehmet Cymbals

According to the establishment information obtained from the firm; hammer Agop Tomurcuk and turner Mehmet Tamdeğer who were working for Zilciyan atelier until 1978, after the atelier were closed down, started working for sectors that were closer to their craftsman (Mehmet for jewelry store as a teemer, Agop for auto garage). Agop and Mehmet, learnt the formula secretly by watching master Mikael Zilciyan when they were working for the atelier, the formula that only Mikael Zilciyan knew and they kept this as a secret till master Mikael passed away. The formula of Istanbul cymbals was kept secret for centuries and only Zilciyan family knew of was also known by Agop and Mehmet. They decided to their own job after a while, and started their own atelier and started producing cymbals again. Upon the death of Agop, Istanbul Cymbals were divided into two. Agop's children

started as Istanbul Agop with their own share, and the last living cymbal master Mehmet Tamdeğer started as Istanbul Mehmet.

Mehmet Tamdeğer's wife Ayla Tamdeğer from Istanbul Mehmet Cymbals were met and interviewed according to pre-prepared question form and related categories.

When looking at the historical development of the firm, after Mikael Zilciyan's death, Mehmet Tamdeğer and Agop Tomurcuk decided to keep this business going. Because, since their childhood, they were in this business, they got nothing more to do. As of 1981, cymbal production in Istanbul started again. In 1996, upon Agop Tomurcuk's death, Mehmet Tamdeğer and Agop Tomurcuk's children ended partnership and by protecting the Istanbul brand, decided to divide the firm into two as Istanbul Mehmet ve Istanbul Agop. The position of cymbal master Mehmet Tamdeğer in the sector is quite divergent. The firms coming after him in this sector, except for Istanbul Agop, are the firms that worked for Mehmet Tamdeğer and then started their own businesses.

As well as internal marketing of cymbals, external sales of them are also of great importance. Nearly all of the firms that produce cymbal for the needs of domestic market are also selling products abroad. Product demands coming from abroad and the way they are met, which ways are used, were explained by Ayla Tamdeğer as; "External sales are made by contacting 50 countries in the world as distributors. In addition, all the foreign drummers coming to Turkey, come to the ateliers to see how cymbals are made, join in a factory tour and buy cymbals in the end. By making connections between foreign endorsers and distributors in their country, endorser sales took place. In addition to this, online sales are made."

In addition to this fundamental information, conceptualized sub-categories related to this interview is shown below.

Table 1. İstanbul Mehmet Cymbals

İSTANBUL MEHMET CYMBALS				
THEME	MANUFACTURE		PROMOTION	
CATEGORY	<i>Establishment</i>	<i>Expansion</i>	<i>Market(ing) &amp; Competition</i>	<i>Performance</i>
<b>CODES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reasons of Organization</li> <li>Method of establishment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Billy Hart's arrival to the atelier</li> <li>Job-order production</li> <li>Necessary financing only available from sales</li> <li>Master – apprentice relationship</li> <li>Production according to rising styles musician demand</li> <li>Accounting work, within company</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sales price to market conditions, competition conditions competitive price</li> <li>R &amp; D (Research &amp; development)</li> <li>Sales in the World Marketing</li> <li>Endorsing</li> <li>Use of social media, participation in fairs, advertising to sector publications</li> <li>Labor issue and raw material access</li> </ul>	Moderate - High

### 3.2. Bosphorus Cymbals

They started producing cymbals by establishing their own atelier after they left Mehmet Tamdeğer and Agop Tomurcuk’s atelier in 1996. In time, they started becoming masters of some different kinds of cymbals, especially like the ones used in jazz music. Bosphorus Cymbals was established by three partners Hasan Şeker, İbrahim Yakıncı and Hasan Özdemir, who kept working for the same atelier for 16 years. They all committed in this business. The founders of this business have been friends since their childhood, who grew up in the same neighborhood. They all were sent to work for the atelier in their neighborhood when they were children [17].

When we look at the historical development of Bosphorus Cymbals, the process begins with three partners working for the cymbal atelier in 1983, then in 1996 they leave Mehmet Tamdeğer and Agop Tomurcuk’s and found their own atelier and in time they become experienced in producing different kinds of musical cymbals, especially jazz music. Since 1996, the company has been in the top three producers of cymbals in the world market. By contacting and interviewing international marketing director, Emrah Sipahi, information was gathered and evaluations were made about both the firm and the cymbal sector.

When the success of hand-made cymbal production in Turkey is taken into account, and when we look at external success and marketing strategies of the firm rather than internal ones, different marketing strategies and retail methods draw attention. Fairs, online merchandising are the tools that are used for promotion and sale. Foreign music bands coming to Turkey for concerts visiting the production facilities and buying cymbals at the same time and touristic tours are also other ways of marketing and in this way contacts are made with 80 countries. In addition to this fundamental information, like the ones above, conceptualized sub-categories related to this interview is shown and summarized below.

### 4. Conclusions and Discussion

When we look at the features of hand-made cymbal producer in Turkey, it can be seen that they carry some region related features and that they have been carried to the future by master-apprentice relationship. It can easily be seen that these little ateliers were hardly ever subjects of research and no records were kept about them. The main focus of this research was to understand how these little ateliers were formed and to find out how these little ateliers were developed and brought to the future, how they earned the international reputation. This research aims to grasp how a little atelier earns international reputation in the context of hand-made cymbal production. The main purpose of this initiative is to historically analyze the development of hand-made cymbal production and its producers in Turkey. Within this context, Istanbul Mehmet Cymbals and Bosphorus Cymbals corporations were contacted and the obtained information as a result of the meetings was analyzed.

Firstly, working principles of corporations were scrutinized and production processes were analyzed and therefore their production levels were tried to be figured out. It can be clearly understood that Istanbul Mehmet and Bosphorus Cymbals use whatever opportunities they have to produce at the highest level and they keep up with the recent production trends in the world to create newer and newer strategies. However, despite all the opportunities they have to produce cymbals at the highest level, because of the sectoral problems and drawbacks, they endure problems from time to time. Expensive raw material problem and deficient experienced employee problem comes at the top of the problems. Since it is a tough job to make hand-made production, employees may quit their jobs, and therefore, since it takes 2-3 years for an employee to get experienced, circulation of employees resulted in insufficient qualified employees. The main factor that determines Turkey’s level at the world stage, and quality, has been kept and should be kept in the future.

**Table 2.** Bosphorus Cymbals

BOSPHORUS CYMBALS				
THEME	MANUFACTURE		PROMOTION	
CATEGORY	<i>Establishment</i>	<i>Expansion</i>	<i>Market(ing)&amp;Competition</i>	<i>Performance</i>
<b>CODES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire to establish a company</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job – Order production</li> <li>• Necessary financing only available from sales and demand study</li> <li>• 100% sales</li> <li>• Experting in jazz cymbals</li> <li>• Accounting work; out of company</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sales price to market conditions, competition conditions, competitive price and promotion visits</li> <li>• High-end Marketing</li> <li>• 60% of world market</li> <li>• Endorsing</li> <li>• Use of social media, participation in fairs, advertising to sector publications</li> <li>• Expansion problem; Lack of human resource</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Between low – Very high</li> </ul>

This research may be taken into account from different perspectives. Nowadays, it can be taken into account from the perspective of culture industry and can be taken into account from the perspective of the community.

## Additional Information

- (1) This study was presented as a draft paper at the 3rd International Annual Meeting of Sosyoekonomi Society April 28-29, 2017 in Ankara, Turkey.
- (2) This research was done by making use of Barış Tektekin's "Handmade Musical Instruments Production in Turkey: A Survey for Cymbal Manufacturer Corporations" graduate thesis with Alper Erserim's counselling.

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