

THE FIRST SHOPPING CENTER OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Orosdi Back (Ömer Efendi Store)

by Hakan Yilmaz

The mid-19th century was a period of rise in terms of the vision of entrepreneurs and merchants of the Western world. This rise of the Western world, which created a new demand pattern, resulted in the gradual abandonment of the traditional lifestyle, especially in Istanbul, towards the end of the 19th century. As a result of the close relationship established with the West, consumption habits quickly began to follow Western norms and the newly formed middle-class shaped import habits accordingly. Undoubtedly, large stores played important roles in this process.

Therefore, it can be said that the Ottoman shopping centers, the covered bazaars, were replaced by multi-story stores after the 19th century.



The first store company that we can call a shopping mall (AVM) in the Ottoman Empire, OROSDI-BACK wholesale-retail stores, started its commercial life as a clothing store founded by Adolf Orosdi in Istanbul in 1855, and continued its activities under the name "Ömer Efendi Store" in order to be welcoming to the Ottoman subjects. Orosdi-Back is one of the pioneers of places where most of the necessities of life in the Ottoman Empire were found together and where easy shopping opportunities were widespread.

This store, which has a wide range of products from perfume to ornaments, hardware to toys, haberdashery to laundry, resembles today's modern shopping centers, and after becoming a company,

Adolf Orosdi was a Hungarian officer who had came to Istanbul as an exile in 1855.

The BACK family, a Jewish family of Austro–Hungarian origin located in Istanbul, deals with this store and establishes a partnership with Adolf Orosdi. From this partnership, the OROSDI–BACK company is formed by combining the surnames of Adolf (Leon) **OROSDI** and Herman **BACK**, the head of the Back family. The partnership turns this store into a chain. The first store in Istanbul was opened in Galata. As the business expanded, the large store building in Eminönü was built and moved here.

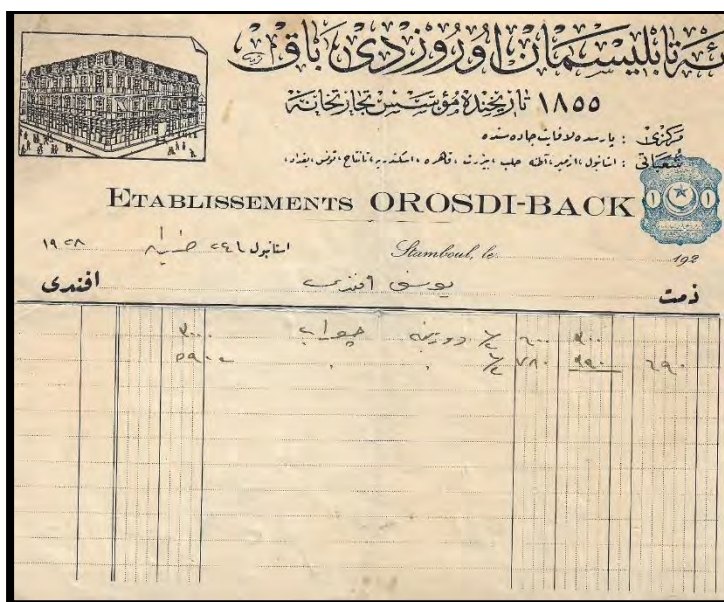
This building was used for many years as both a sales and production facility.



Interesting logo is the "elephant riding a tricycle". This logo, which started to be used in 1891, before the incorporation process, was the only registered logo used throughout the company's operating period.

The picture on the invoices below show the first branch building of the Orosdi–Back store in Eminönü–Bahçekapı, It was opened in there, because of the Sirkeci train station, which opened that year, would revitalize the area,

The details about the design of the new store are, the ground floor of the five–story store was arranged in the form of Paris Bistro. The first floor of the store has draperies, watches, umbrellas; the second floor has yarn, hardware, perfumes, and an accounting and cash desk; the third floor has linoleum, laundry, and musical instrument sections; the fourth floor has clothing sections; and the fifth floor has a dining hall and a fabric warehouse.



The Examples of invoices from the company.

A sample from Mehmet Akan Collection

The headquarters moved from Istanbul to Paris in 1888.

An envelope sample with the Orosdi-back Letterhead with France Headquarters address (126 Rue La Fayette, Paris).

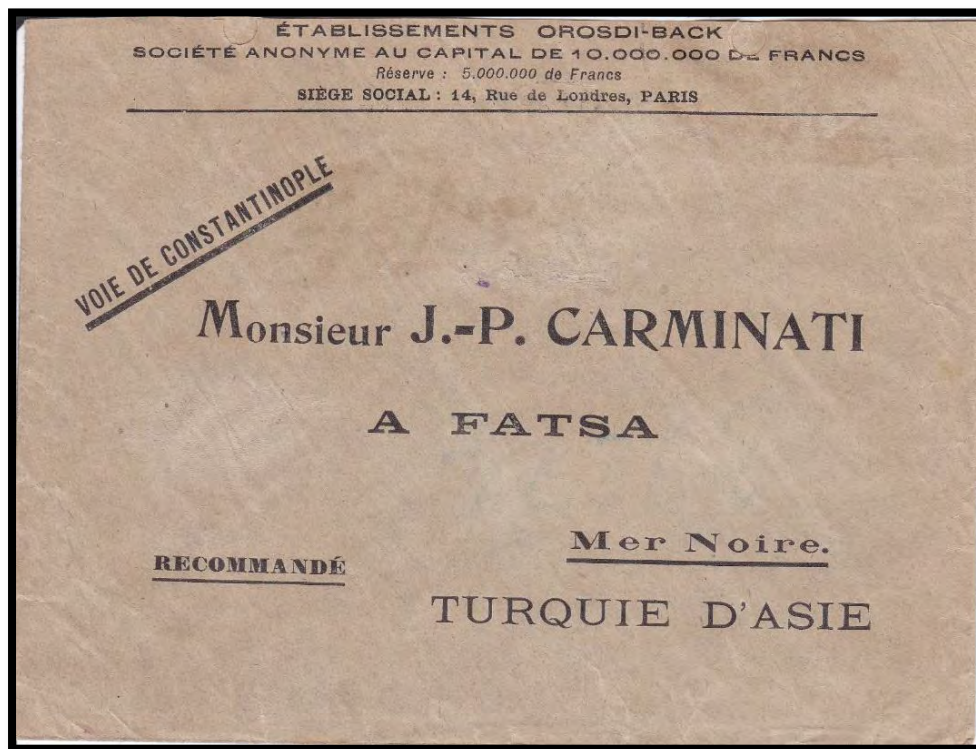


The initials of the Orosdi-back name, "OB", were applied (Perfin) to the stamp on the envelope.



On the Right, Censored envelope sent from Istanbul store to Augsburg, Germany in 1915.





On the Left,
envelope sent
from Paris I to
Ereğli -Turkey.

Stamps have
been removed.



On the Right,
1 piasters
Ottoman letter
envelope sent
from Edirne to
Istanbul store.

The Istanbul store's commercial activities continued during the early days of the Republic.

Cover with Republic period 1926 London print stamps.



After receiving the support of Ottoman Bank, they increased the number of branches to 25 during the First World War. They opened stores In Europe Vienna, Manchester, Birmingham, Lyon, Roubaix, Milan, Chemnitz, Barmen and Gablonz.

In the Ottoman Empire Istanbul, Izmir, Bucharest, Salonika, Samsun, Cairo, Alexandria, Port-Said, Aleppo, Beirut, Bizerte (Tunisia), Tanta, Baghdad, Basra, Plovdiv (Plovdiv) and Tunis until 1903.



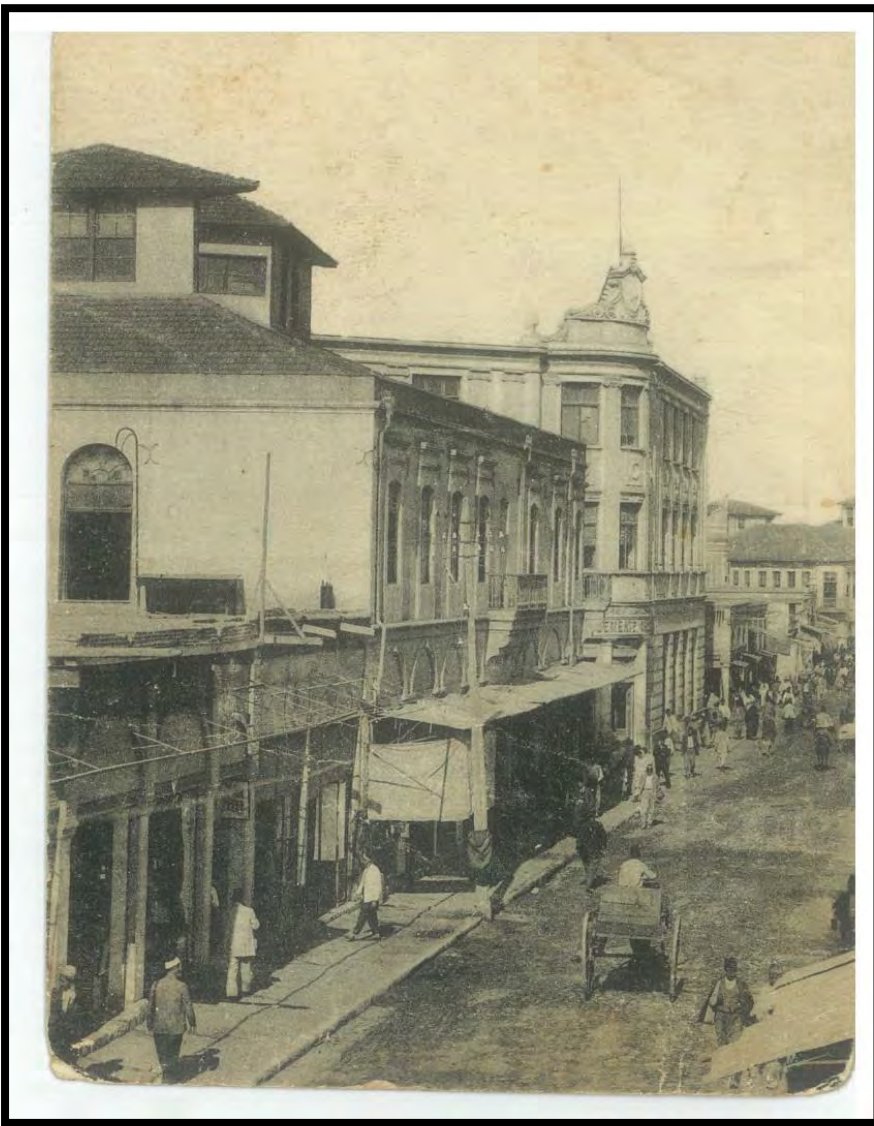
Censored envelope sent from Izmir store to Wien (Without Arabic letterhead).

The Izmir store's activities continued during the early days of the Republic.

Two covers with different letterhead are presented and both of them have Republic period stamps of 1924 Star and Crescent issue and 1926 London print respectively.



Another branch of Orosdi-Back was also active in Adana. Europe, which had supplied its cotton raw material from America until 1865, turned to the Middle East after that. Adana, located in Çukurova, the source of cotton raw material, was in a position where sea and railway transportation could be provided simultaneously due to the newly opened Mersin-Adana railway line. These conditions encouraged Orosdi-Back to open a branch in Adana, and the company started commercial activities in Adana in 1903, but opened its branch in 1909. While the company directed the retail trade of the region, it also maintained control of the Adana cotton market for a long time. Some mills in the region gained the opportunity to introduce their products to domestic and international markets through the Adana branch. The store, which began to lose its effectiveness at the beginning of the Republic period, suffered a major fire in 1927. Instead of reviving the store, the company preferred to liquidate it. The place where the store, which has left deep memories and traces in the social memory of the region, operates is **Horozdibeği**, which is still the pronunciation of the concept of Orosdi-Back by the local people.



*Postcard of Adana
Orosdi-Back store.*

*The building with
the dome on it is at
the back of the
photo.*

The Adana store continued its operations without interruption during the French occupation.

Two examples of envelopes sent from Adana stores to the İstanbul during the French occupation are presented.

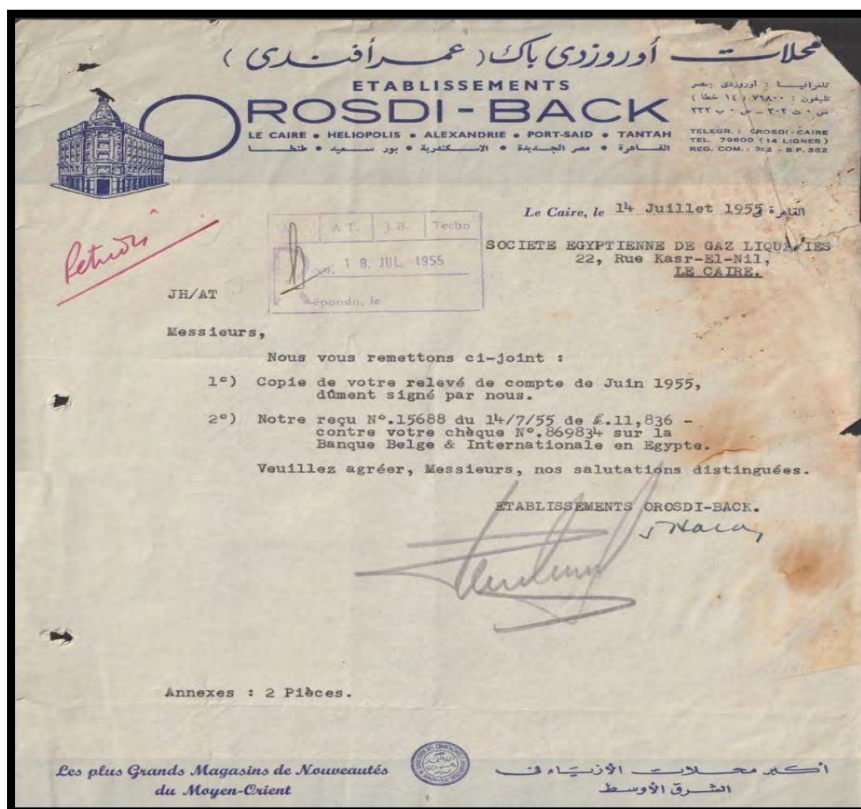
The envelope in above used French "Cilicie" overprint stamps, while the envelope below has stamps with "Cilicie" overprint applied to the Ottoman cigarette stamp.





On the Left, a registered envelope sent from Adana to Paris before 1927 fire, there are Ottoman & Republic period stamps on the envelope.

Cairo Branch. The six-story rococo building opened in 1909; in its better days when it was still a private-sector company.



The company has now grown. The Orosdi family and the Back family also form a partnership by marrying their children. The stores opened in Egypt were a turning point for the company. A document dated 1955 from the Egypt-Cairo store, with the letterhead Orosdi-back, written to the Egyptian gas company. There is a picture of the building belonging to the Cairo store on the document.

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The success achieved in Egypt did not go unnoticed by the French Emperor François-Joseph, who gave the title of "de surany" to the Back family, as he directed the Egyptian society towards France. After these developments, both families (Orosdi and Back) moved their residence from Istanbul to Paris.

Port Said Branch has been opened in Prince Farouk Street



Two postcards showing the store opened in Port Said.



The Aleppo-Syria Branch, which opened in the early 1900s, continued its activities after Aleppo was taken over by the Ottomans and during the years when the French occupation continued.

A sample of an envelope sent from Aleppo to the Istanbul center in 1920. The stamps used on the envelope are the surcharges applied by the Syrian–Arab Kingdom on Ottoman fiscal stamps.




The name Orosdi–Back was also used as **OROZDI–BAK** in the early years Republic after the Ottoman Empire.



An example of an envelope with the letterhead "OROZDI–BAK" sent by airmail from Istanbul to France in 1939.

Examples of invoices with OROZDİ-BAK and Orosdi-Back (a sample from Mehmet Akan Collection)




Etablisman OROZDİ-BAK

1855 tarihinde müesses ticarethane

MERKEZİ: Pariste Lafayet Caddesinde 126

ŞUBELERİ: İstanbul, İzmir, Adana, Halep, Bizert, Kahire, İskenderiye, Tunus, Bağdat, Beyrut

ÉTABLISSEMENTS OROSDI-BACK



İstanbul, 5/11/1931

Serdar Zade Yusuf Kemal Efendi

Zimmeti

| | | | | | | |
|---|-----|-------|----------------|--------|------|------|
| ✓ | 1/2 | Çay | Zilet mahenarı | 50 | 510 | |
| ✓ | 1/2 | | mk | 600 | | |
| | 1/2 | | Lozpor | 240 | | 1350 |
| | 1 | Kurtu | Pambukakı | 101 | 56 | |
| | 11 | | 10% | 224 | | 283 |
| | 6 | Loz | İpek kordor | 50/2 | 210 | 210 |
| | 5 | | Kurdela | 2527/9 | 625 | |
| | 12 | | 12 | 1250 | | 1685 |
| ✓ | 1 | Loz | Sapka | Kurtu | 1320 | |
| ✓ | 1/2 | | Storba | 1100 | | |
| ✓ | 1/2 | | A | 1500 | | |
| ✓ | 1/2 | | Karkot | 8036 | 225 | |
| ✓ | 1 | | | 8025 | 240 | 1985 |
| | | | | | | 8510 |

The economic and social effects of Orosdi-Back on the Ottoman society are, which is understood to have played an important role in the social transformation of the Ottoman society as well as its commercial aspect.

Shopping at Orosdi-Back was seen as an element of prestige in society. This situation, which can be considered as the prototype behavior of today's brand addiction, was also an expression of the definition of social status and economic class through a brand in its own era. Orosdi-Back prepared catalogs and presented them to the public in order to encourage product variety, product quality, aisle arrangement, fashion following and unnecessary luxury consumption, and introduced itself as "the largest and cheapest business house in Turkey" in the advertisements it gave to newspapers. Undoubtedly, it encouraged the groups with high purchasing power to buy unnecessary items.

It is undeniable that the store, which influenced the luxury consumption, has a serious follower group. It is also undeniable that a natural separation has occurred between the regulars of the store, which is understood to strategically attract the attention of female customers in the advertisements and win them over, and the public, whose agenda does not include unnecessary luxury consumption.

Becoming the focal point of visibility with eye-catching display windows, Orosdi-Back, which, similar to today, is a place that is frequented not to shop but just to wander around, has played a leading role in the emergence of a consumer class that is constantly eager to buy things, even if they do not need them.

Orosdi-Back served as a brand representing especially the Armenian, Greek, Jewish and Levantine groups in the Ottoman social structure, as well as the Western Muslim population that adopted the Western lifestyle. The biggest aim of the brand, which always offers new products to the groups that follow European fashion closely, is to attract more customers to the store by making them boast, "I bought it from Orosdi-Back"

This first shopping center and continued its commercial activities in Turkey until it transferred its assets to Sümerbank in 11 September 1942.

It was purchased and used by Sümerbank during the Republic period. It is still known as Sümerhan.

(Fatih-Büyük Postahane Cad.No:78)



References

Hakan Yılmaz Collection

Mehmet Akan Collection

Orosdi-Back Mağazaları – Ondokuz Üniversitesi İnsan Bilimleri dergisi-Necati