



## From Inherited Cuisines To Local Brands: The Historical Gelibolu Zafer Cheese Halva Artisanal Producer

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### Abstract

This study examines the historical development, brand heritage, and cultural significance of Gelibolu Tarihi Zafer Peynir Helvacısı, the oldest documented producer of cheese halva in Gelibolu. Rather than treating cheese halva as a local food generalizable to the entire region, the research focuses on a single, deeply rooted brand intertwined with Gelibolu's gastronomic and cultural history, analyzing how a traditional product transforms into a heritage brand. The research is designed as a qualitative single case study based on Robert K. Yin's case study methodology. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with Süleyman Burak Batır, the fourth-generation representative and brand manager of the Zafer brand, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings demonstrate that the Zafer brand is a key actor in preserving the authenticity and continuity of cheese halva through artisanal production practices, heritage-based branding, and integration with destination image. The study reveals how a single traditional product establishes a link between cultural continuity, local entrepreneurship, and gastronomic tourism through a heritage brand. The main limitation of the study is that the data is limited to a single key information provider and brand sources.

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## INTRODUCTION

Culture is a dynamic structure that expresses an integrated pattern of knowledge, beliefs, values, behaviors, and life practices acquired by a society throughout its historical experiences and passed down from generation to generation (Idris et al., 2016; Isa et al., 2018; Permatasari et al. 2020; Rouhani, 2023; Lähdesmäki, 2016). This process of meaning production and transmission shapes how individuals perceive and interpret the world and establish their social relationships; making culture not merely a remnant of the past, but a constantly reproduced, living social phenomenon (Sharaningtyas & Sumiarni, 2023). Within this dynamic structure, cultural heritage offers a fundamental framework that carries a society's historical continuity, collective memory, and identity to the present day through tangible and intangible elements (Külcü, 2015; *Inheritance and Creative Communication of Intangible Cultural Heritage from the Perspective of New Media Communication*, 2021). According to UNESCO, intangible cultural heritage encompasses living practices, knowledge systems, and traditions passed down through generations by communities, continuously reproduced, and nurturing the communities' sense of identity (Kim et al., 2015; *Research on the Development Model of Intangible Cultural Heritage Tourism Industry*, 2023). Local cuisines and traditional food products are among the most visible and experiential forms of this heritage, acting as carriers of both cultural identity and the local economy (Cerreta & Girasole, 2020; Shao et al., 2023; Koukopoulos and Koukopoulos, 2018; Alves, 2015). Despite its importance, the literature on gastronomy and cultural heritage has relatively limited attention to how traditional food products are transformed into institutionalized heritage brands, and how family memory, local knowledge, and craftsmanship are restructured in this transformation process. The only work closest to the content of this study is Saybir's (2021) master's thesis entitled "The Bulgaroğulları Family of Gelibolu Peksimethanesi as a Family Business (1710-1861)," which focuses on the family's historical process. This and similar studies address family business histories, local dishes, or regional cuisines from a tourism and cultural perspective, relegating the heritage-carrying role of established businesses producing these products to a secondary position.

Based on this gap, this study examines Gelibolu Tarihi Zafer Peynir Helvacı, the oldest documented cheese halva producer in Gelibolu, as a heritage food brand. Instead of examining cheese halva as a local dish generalizable to all of Gelibolu, the research focuses on a single established brand that has developed intertwined with the region's gastronomic and cultural history, analyzing how this brand institutionalized, preserved, transmitted, and represented a traditional product. Within this framework, the aim of the study is to reveal how traditional production knowledge, family memory, and local identity are transformed into a contemporary brand narrative and gastronomy tourism value, using the Zafer brand as an example. In this regard, the research seeks answers to the following questions: How is the historical development of the Zafer brand related to the gastronomic and cultural identity of Gelibolu?, How is the production knowledge and craftsmanship practice related to cheese halva passed down through generations?, How does the Zafer brand position this traditional product as a heritage brand and tourism value? Through this structure, the study aims to present a contextual case demonstrating how intangible cultural heritage is sustained not only as a food practice but also through a brand and corporate memory.

### Local Cuisines as An Element of Cultural Heritage

Intangible cultural heritage is not concerned with physical objects but rather with the cultural practices, traditions, and knowledge of a society. Traditions and rituals, which are the ways of life and behaviors developed by a community over its history and passed down from generation to generation, the language used for communication

and the literary works produced from it, traditional music and dances, handicrafts and crafts, belief systems and values, stories and legends, as well as food and drink practices—i.e., local cuisine—are all part of intangible cultural heritage. These elements of intangible cultural heritage are vital for maintaining the bonds within a community. They not only reflect the cultural identity of the community but also ensure its continuity by transmitting knowledge, practices, and values across generations. Intangible cultural heritage fosters a sense of unity and belonging, while preserving the diversity and richness of cultural expressions in the face of modernization and globalization.

Food culture reflects the unique culinary practices, ingredients, and cooking methods of the society from which it originates, thus playing a crucial role in defining the cultural identity of a region by mirroring its history, traditions, and values (Somuncu, 2024; Meral, 2023). Food – its cultivation, preparation and shared consumption – is a form of cultural heritage. As a dynamic, living product, food creates social bonds by marking and preserving cultural differences (Di Giovine&Brulotte, 2014). Food and local eating practices are among the most fundamental elements of culture and serve as significant indicators of regional and ethnic identity. Local cuisines act as the culinary language of a region or community. This language conveys a great deal about the social, cultural, and economic structures of the geography and the communities living there, and societies use this language to communicate with others. As a culinary language, local cuisines ensure the recognition of a region through aspects such as cultural identity, economy, health and nutrition, and environmental preservation.

According to Putri and Wijoyo (2023), local cuisines are fundamental elements of cultural heritage, showcasing unique creativity, cultural values, and the essence of indigenous communities. Local culinary culture encompasses a broad structure that includes the sourcing of ingredients, the processes of preparing, consuming, and storing food, as well as the behavioral patterns, routines, rituals, beliefs, and the social and cultural meanings attached to food (Çokışler&Türker, 2015; Akyürek et al., 2024; Duman&Avcıkurt, 2024). Local cuisines are not just about food; they also include a rich tapestry of historical, aesthetic, economic, health, social, and symbolic meanings (Mercado&Zerrudo, 2018). A region's local cuisine is characterized by the unique production, preparation, and presentation methods that have become traditional among people who live together in that region. It is the cuisine that the local population prefers more compared to other foods and is consumed daily or on special occasions. What makes a cuisine local is not just the geographical and climatic factors but also how it is shaped by the lifestyle, cultural identity, beliefs, and history of the local people. As cultural heritage, local cuisines are a mixture of tangible (e.g., ingredients and cooking utensils) and intangible (e.g., flavors, aromas, recipes, and dining traditions) elements that contribute to a region's cultural values and characteristics (Timoty&Ron, 2013). The preservation of local cuisines as intangible cultural heritage is of great importance to societies. Failure to document, remember, or value intangible cultural heritage elements, or the death of individuals who transmit this heritage, poses a threat to the continuity of the cultural identity of the communities living in that region. Local culinary practices, as part of cultural heritage, connect people to their community's heritage and identity while supporting local livelihoods (Autio et al., 2013). The failure to transmit this intangible heritage can negatively impact the future of the region. Preserving local cuisines is critical for maintaining global cultural diversity. UNESCO's inclusion of French cuisine in the "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" list in 2010 (Unesco 2024; Explore France 2024) highlights the importance of recognizing and preserving the gastronomic values of local cuisines.

Local cuisines are not just about food; they encompass a rich tapestry of historical, aesthetic, economic, health,

social, and symbolic meanings (Mercado & Zerrudo, 2018). Through the preservation of culinary heritage, communities can maintain their connections to the past and ensure the transmission of traditional recipes and cooking methods across generations. Local cuisines, distinguished by their unique formations, products, tastes, and flavors, also play a role in tourism by forming the core of a destination's intangible cultural heritage and influencing its attractiveness. Local cuisines highlight cultural differences between similar and nearby regions. Cultural differences are related to food in many ways: the conditions under which food is grown and harvested, preparation and cooking methods, purchasing habits, the number of meals eaten throughout the day, the variety of dishes served at meals, and the emphasis placed on specific meals, meal times, serving styles, and the time spent consuming meals.

### **Gelibolu: Origins and Historical Significance**

Gelibolu is a settlement located on the southern part of the peninsula bearing its name, on the European side of Turkey's Eastern Thrace, and on the European coast of the Dardanelles Strait, within the Çanakkale Province. Although there is no precise information about who founded the city and when, archaeological field research and various ancient texts authored by writers such as Homer, Hecataeus, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Pseudo-Skylax, Demosthenes, Diodorus of Sicily, Pseudo-Skymnus, Strabo, Pomponius Mela, Pliny, Plutarch, Arrian, Claudius Ptolemy, Pausanias, and Stephanus of Byzantium suggest that the city's history dates back to before the Neolithic period (Lieu, 2018; Özdoğan, 1986; Özbek, 2008; Özbek, 2017; Koçel Erdem, 2019; Isaac, 1986; Loukopoulou, 2004; Tzvetkova, 2008; Dinç&Yolcu, 2024).

There is no definitive information about the origin of the name "Gelibolu." However, there are various theories about its origins and meaning. According to Lieu (2018: 625), the name's origin is actually Italian, but it is based on the Greek word "Kallipolis" (Καλλίπολις), just like its namesake Gallipoli in southern Italy. The term "Kallipolis" means "beautiful city." Other explanations regarding the origin of the name Gelibolu also exist. Feridun Emecen (1996) in the 14th volume of the Islamic Encyclopedia, writes that there is no information on the origin of the name but suggests it could be derived from the word "Gallipolis," meaning "city of the Gauls." Emecen notes that the city has been referred to as Gelibolu since the 14th century, with the form "Gelibolu" used in the "Düstûrnâme," which contains the history of the Aydınoğulları. Emecen also cites Ottoman historian and Shaykh al-Islam Kemal Paşazade (real name Şemseddin Ahmed, as reported by Kılıç, 1994), who stated that the city's original name was "Kalipoli," where "poli" means city in Greek, and "Kali" was derived from the name of Bolayır tekfur's2 daughter.

The city of Gelibolu and the peninsula bearing its name have held significant strategic importance throughout world history due to their location as a transition zone between Asia and Europe. It is known that settlement in the area dates back to around 5000 BC. After the collapse of the Hittite Empire in 1200 BC, the strategic significance of the city was first recognized during the passage of the Phrygians and later the Lydians into Anatolia. Following the Persians' defeat of the Lydian kingdom and their dominance around the Dardanelles, the city came under the control of the Spartans, Macedonians, Pergameneans, Romans, Byzantines, and eventually the Turks (Arkeolojik Haber, 2019; Geliblue, n.d.; Kurtoğlu, 1936; Demirarslan, 2018).

Gelibolu, which served as an extremely important gateway and strategic naval base for all the states that ruled in the region, became a crucial step for the Ottoman Empire's transition into Rumelia. The capture of the Gelibolu Peninsula, as the first area acquired during the Ottoman Empire's expansion into Rumelia, has been extensively examined by many researchers and historians. Although there are uncertainties about when and from which points

the Ottomans crossed into Rumelia and the specific path of conquest on the Gelibolu Peninsula, Prof. Dr. Halil İnalçık's article titled "Osmanlı Sultanı Orhan, (1324-1362) Avrupa'da Yerleşme - Ottoman Sultan Orhan (1324-1362): Settlement in Europe" provides a detailed account of the transition process, supported by extensive source review and field research. According to İnalçık, between 1352 and 1354, Süleyman Paşa crossed from Kemer (Parion-Viranca-Hisar) with 3000 men to Kozludere, first capturing Bolayır, and subsequently the northern part of the peninsula including Çınpe, Odküklük, Eksamiliye, and Aya-Şilonya (İnalçık, 2009; Tetik, 2023). According to Kılıç, in 1352, the Byzantine Emperor John Cantacuzenus called upon Orhan Bey, the Ottoman ruler, for help against the Venetian-Genoese alliance. The success of Orhan Bey's forces in Thrace led to the granting of Çimpe Castle, marking a significant milestone in the transition of the Gelibolu Peninsula to Turkish rule (Kılıç, 2007). Gelibolu, the first sanjak of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans (Todorov, 1983: 23), was not only a gateway to Europe but also served as a base for the Ottoman naval forces as the empire expanded its maritime power.

Due to its role as the only safe crossing point between Anatolia and Rumelia, Gelibolu was of great importance. In addition to military activities, the city underwent a reconstruction process, with its castle and port being reinforced, it was designated as a naval base, and a shipyard was established. The establishment of the shipyard was one of the turning points in Ottoman maritime history (Kılıç, 1994; Bostan, 1999). With the development of the region, various other structures such as inns, markets, and mosques were built, enriching daily life and making Gelibolu one of the principal centers of the Ottoman Empire (Kılıç, 1994; İnalçık, 1964). Throughout the 15th century, Gelibolu served as an important trade hub between Bursa and Rumelia, acting both as a control point between Rumelia and Anatolia and as a major customs location for the Ottoman Empire. Due to these characteristics, it became increasingly populated and emerged as one of the principal cities of the Ottoman Empire (İnalçık, 1964). During the 16th century, as military activities continued, Gelibolu maintained its significance and became an even more vibrant city. In every neighborhood, there were places of worship for both Muslim and Christian inhabitants. During this century, Gelibolu was a sancak center in Rumelia, and despite Sultan Selim I's order in 1513 to move the shipyard from Gelibolu to the Golden Horn, Gelibolu retained a privileged position among other sancaks due to its importance as a naval base (Gülsoy, 2000). At the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century, following the wars with Venice which created instability in the Straits, the Ottoman navy was reinforced, the Kilitbahir and Kale-i Sultaniyye fortresses were repaired, and the construction of the Seddülbahir and Kumkale fortresses was decided. The 18th century was a period of failure for the Ottoman Empire, marked by military defeats and the contraction of its territories, including the Gelibolu Peninsula. The long wars with the Russians economically affected the people of Gelibolu, and the Bigalı Fortress was built to ensure sancak security. Due to the concerns created by the Russians, alliances were formed with the British and French, and the forces sent by the allies remained in Gelibolu for four years. In the 19th century, Gelibolu became a sancak of the city of Edirne. Due to the endless wars between the Russians and the Ottoman Empire, and the desire of the Rumelian people to escape to safer regions, this century also saw significant migrations from the Balkans to Anatolia through Gelibolu. At the beginning of the 20th century, the occupation of the Dardanelles Strait during the Ottoman struggle with the French and Italians led to numerous Turkish casualties and damage to commercial activities. The struggle for the Dardanelles continued with all its intensity during World War I. Particularly, the shores of the Gelibolu Peninsula were where the war was extremely fierce. The fortresses in the Dardanelles Strait were heavily bombarded many times due to the Allied forces' attempts to reach Istanbul via Gelibolu. The French landed at Kumkale, the British troops at Seddülbahir, and the Anzac troops at

Anzac Cove. The village of Seddülbahir was captured, but the Allied forces were defeated when Mustafa Kemal captured Conkbayırı and Tekke Hill (Quataert, 2000; Kurtoğlu, 1936; İncılık, 1964; Moorehead, 2005; Kılıç, 2007; Süer, 1987). With the end of World War I, the Ottoman Empire also came to an end. With the establishment of a new parliament and government led by Mustafa Kemal, the control of the Dardanelles Strait and the Gelibolu Peninsula became even more important. Many international agreements were made in this regard. The Treaty of Lausanne, signed in 1923, marked the international recognition of the newly established Republic of Turkey. However, due to the security threats posed by the treaty's terms, the full control of the Straits was returned to Turkey with the Montreux Convention signed in Switzerland in 1938.

Gelibolu, which is one of Turkey's prominent historical, cultural, political, and spiritual centers with symbolic significance (Erdoğan&Akarsu, 2019), became a provincial center in the early years of the Republic. This status continued until 1926, when it was transformed into a district center.

### **Local Cuisine of Gelibolu**

For Turks wishing to cross into Europe, Gelibolu, which serves as an unparalleled bridge, has become the naval base of the Ottoman Empire, with a shipyard established there, making it the gateway of the Ottomans to the Mediterranean (Gelibolu, n.d.). The city's connection with the sea has influenced its culinary culture. Gelibolu stands out not only for its historical significance and natural beauty but also for its distinctive cuisine. The city is particularly known for its seafood, with sardines being the most prominent. Sardines are prepared and consumed in various ways, including sardine kebab, sardines wrapped in vine leaves, sardine preserves, salted sardines, and dried sardines. Besides sardines, local seafood such as lakerda and scorpion fish soup are also enjoyed. In addition to seafood, well-known local delicacies include cheese halva, Gelibolu delight, Mevlevi dessert, milk tarhana, simit lokum, chicken manti, and akıtma.

For many centuries, Gelibolu served as a stopover for the Ottoman Empire in its transition to Europe, due to both military reasons and migration policies. With the peak of the Ottoman Empire's decline, which began with the Siege of Vienna and reached its climax in the 19th century, an intense reverse migration movement was initiated among Turkish and other Muslim communities in the Balkans as a result of the Ottoman-Russian war. As a result of this process, which lasted about three-quarters of a century, the settlement of Turkish, Pomak, and Romani people, as well as migrants from Bulgaria and Romania, deeply influenced and diversified the region's gastronomic Culture (Kocacık&Yalçın, 2008; İçduygu&Sert, 2015; Çetinçaş, 2025).

The climate of the Gelibolu Peninsula is a combination of Mediterranean and continental climates. The constant winds in the region have contributed to the diversification of agricultural products. While the main agricultural product is wheat, other crops such as sunflower, rice, tomatoes, peppers, and other moist agriculture products, as well as sesame, olives, grapes, and walnuts, are also cultivated. In addition to small ruminant farming, large-scale cattle farming for milk production is also common in the region (Gözükızıllı&Fırat, 2020). The prevalence of goat farming in small ruminant agriculture has a significant impact on the local culinary culture.

Due to its peninsula feature, fishing is quite common in Gelibolu, and as mentioned above, various seafood, especially sardines, are cooked and consumed in different forms. Since fishing is one of the significant sources of livelihood in Gelibolu, fish is an indispensable part of Gelibolu's gastronomy. Grilled sardines and boklu1 sardine

kebabs are widely consumed, and fish soups, lüfer pilaf, and stuffed mussels are enjoyed. Although meat is consumed in the region, vegetable dishes are predominant. Meals made with eggplant, beans, peas, broad beans, spinach, leeks, and mushrooms are especially common. Vegetables are also preferred in pilaf. Pastry dishes hold a significant place in Gelibolu's cuisine. The most favored pastries include pirahu, mafiş, lokma, couscous, akıtma, chicken mantı, katmer, gözleme, and various börek types. In the making of börek, vegetables are primarily used as filling ingredients (Gözükızıl&Fırat, 2020; Çolakoğlu et.al., 2023). Onions, spinach, eggplant, and leeks are the most commonly used vegetables, sometimes accompanied by goat cheese or made with cheese alone. In the region, köftes are made with various vegetables in addition to minced meat, including zucchini, potatoes, broad beans, and onions. Dolmas and sarmas also hold an important place in Gelibolu cuisine. Stuffed grape leaves with olive oil, eggplant dolmas, and zucchini dolmas are very popular. Dolmas are usually cooked without meat and with olive oil. Chopped tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and onions are used to make shepherd's salad, which is served on tables. For dressing salads (and even in stuffed grape leaves), olive oil, unripe grape juice, and vinegar are preferred. Fresh fava beans, bean salad, and roasted eggplant are frequently consumed in salads and mezes. Pickles also feature on tables instead of salads. Particularly labor-intensive pickles such as eggplant, cucumber, pepper, tomato, acur, and cabbage are prepared for winter. Another winter preparation is tarhana. Tarhana is made with a mixture of tomatoes, peppers, and milk or yogurt. It is lighter in color compared to other regions. Sometimes it is made in the form of small hard pebbles, and sometimes it is passed through a sieve and turned into flour. During cooking, a small amount of tomato paste is added, and it can be served with cheese or minced meat on top (Girgin Aycibin, 2024; The Cuisine of Ancient Troy, Gallipoli and Dardanelle, n.d.; Saatçi savsa, 2023).

In desserts, recipes that use flour and dough, as well as those featuring milk and cheese, hold a significant place in Gelibolu gastronomy. Halvas made from flour, semolina, and eggs, such as peynir helvası (cheese halva), are among the most prominent in the culinary Culture (Ulu, 2025; Özer, et.al, 2024). These are followed by dense rice pudding (sütlaç), pumpkin dessert (kabak tatlısı), şekerpare, kalburdan çekme tatlısı, mafiş sweet, pelte, zerde, and hanım göbeği. The use of fruit in desserts is limited, with fruits primarily used in hoşaf (a type of fruit compote), featuring plums, sour cherries, apricots, and cornelian cherries.



**Figure 1.** Cheese halva. (Used with permission from Batır's personal archive).

## **Gelibolu's Specialty: A Study on Gelibolu Historical Zafer Cheese Halva Artisanal Producer**

Local cuisines hold significance that extends beyond mere nourishment. They are an important way to understand a region's cultural identity and values. Exploring local culinary products is a good starting point to grasp a destination's intangible cultural heritage, gain insight into traditions and ways of life, and establish a deeper connection with the area. Gelibolu, known for its historical victories and unique culinary culture, is renowned for its traditional cheese helva, a distinct local delicacy passed down through generations.

### **Research Design**

This study aims to examine the historical development, brand heritage, and cultural significance of Gelibolu Tarihi Zafer Peynir Helvacısı, the oldest documented cheese halva producer in Gelibolu. While other small-scale firms operate in the region, this research focuses on a single established business where the history of the region is intertwined with and parallels the history of the brand. Rather than attempting to generalize cheese halva as a regional food, it examines how this business's brand preserves, transmits, and represents this traditional product within the context of Gelibolu's gastronomic identity and intangible cultural heritage. Treating Tarihi Gelibolu Zafer Peynir Helvacısı as a heritage food brand, the study aims to understand how traditional production knowledge, family memory, and local identity are transformed into a contemporary brand narrative and a value for gastronomic tourism.

This research is designed as a qualitative single case study based on Robert K. Yin's (2018) case study methodology. The research universe of this study consists of traditional cheese halva producers operating in the Gallipoli region, representing the broader field of local, family-based gastronomic production in Türkiye. Within this universe, Gallipoli Historical Zafer Cheese Halva was selected as the case (example) through purposeful sampling due to its unique historical, institutional, and cultural characteristics. Zafer was chosen because it is the oldest continuously operating cheese halva producer in Gallipoli and the only brand with a fully traceable four-generation family tree documented through both archival sources and family records. While cheese halva is produced in many homes and small workshops, these producers often lack institutional continuity, written heritage, and brand formality. Therefore, Zafer constitutes a critical and informative case study that allows for an in-depth examination of the transformation of a local recipe into a heritage brand, in line with Patton's statement that "In qualitative research, the aim is not statistical representation, but selecting the cases that teach the most" (Patton, 2015). Because the Zafer brand embodies the intersection of family memory, local knowledge, intergenerational transmission, and commercial institutionalization, it represents an illuminating and theoretically significant case.

From the methodological perspective of the single case design selection, the Zafer brand functions not merely as a food producer, but as a cultural and historical phenomenon where gastronomy, identity, and regional memory are intertwined. According to Yin, when a case exemplifies a unique, established, and context-dependent process, it should be examined holistically, not through statistical comparison. Therefore, Zafer's four-generation continuity, its entrenched place in the gastronomic identity of Gallipoli, and its role in transforming an abstract culinary practice into a recognized brand heritage make it a robust unit of analysis. To ensure validity and reliability within a qualitative research paradigm, this study adopts the reliability framework outlined in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) "Naturalistic Inquiry" study. This framework includes reliability, transferability, consistency, and verifiability. According to these criteria, the reliability of the study is supported by multiple data sources, including archival documents, historical records, visual materials, and oral history accounts from family members. This multi-source approach strengthens

the internal validity of the findings by enabling cross-verification of historical claims and production narratives. Transferability is supported by providing detailed descriptions of the socio-cultural, historical, and institutional context in which Gallipoli Historical Victory Cheese Halva operates. By detailing the intergenerational continuity of the brand, its production practices, and its place in Gallipoli's gastronomic identity, this study allows readers to evaluate the applicability of the findings to other local heritage food brands and family-based culinary businesses. To ensure consistency, all stages of the research, consisting of data collection, source selection, and analysis, were systematically conducted and recorded. This allowed for an assessment of the study's methodological consistency and, if necessary, its replication in similar contexts. Verifiability was strengthened by documenting the collected data, using direct references to archival materials, historical documents, and oral testimony. This minimized researcher bias and ensured that conclusions were based on data rather than subjective assumptions. Together, these strategies provide a robust framework for ensuring the reliability, accuracy, and analytical integrity of this single case study on the transformation of Gallipoli Historical Victory Halva from a local culinary practice to an institutionalized heritage brand.

### **Data Collection**

The primary data for this study were collected through a semi-structured in-depth interview with Süleyman Burak Batır, the fourth-generation representative and brand manager of Gelibolu Tarihi Zafer Peynir Helvacısı. Eight structured interview questions were developed to examine three main themes:

1. The historical development of the Zafer brand,
2. The production and transfer of cheese halva,
3. The role of the brand in Gelibolu's cultural and gastronomic identity.

The interview was conducted via Zoom on December 23, 2023, and recorded in both written and video formats. All responses were transcribed verbatim. Ethical approval for data collection was given by the Beykoz University Ethics Committee (Decision No. 3, Date: 28.11.2023, Meeting No. 22).

### **Data Analysis**

The interview transcript was analyzed using thematic analysis. Responses were coded and grouped into three analytical categories corresponding to research themes. To preserve the authenticity of the narrative voice and ensure transparency of interpretation, direct quotations from the interviewee are presented in italics in the findings section.

### **Limitations**

This study is limited to a single institutional producer and reflects the perspective of a single key information source. This limits generalizability but reveals a deep and historically grounded understanding of how cheese halva was established as a heritage product within a specific brand context. The lack of archival documents other than those provided by the Zafer brand is another limitation. This limitation particularly highlights the importance of oral history in documenting intangible gastronomic heritage for future studies.

### **Findings**

In an in-depth interview with Süleyman Burak Batır, the fourth-generation representative of Gelibolu Historical

Victory Cheese Halva, eight structured questions were asked, grouped under three categories, and the findings were analyzed based on the responses. The questions asked in the in-depth interview, categorized by type, and the findings are as follows:

### **Category 1: The History of Cheese Halva, The Establishment And Development of Zafer Peynir Helvası**

In the Gelibolu region, shepherds developed various methods to preserve and utilize the milk obtained from their animals. One of these methods involved turning the milk into cheese and preparing this cheese in various forms, both as cheese itself and as ingredients for other foods. The key point in the origin of peynir helvası, an important gastronomic value in the region's cuisine for over 100 years, is its ability to preserve milk in a healthy manner for an extended period. Gelibolu Tarihi Zafer Peynir Helvası, established by a family that has been involved in livestock farming and processing animal products for centuries, holds significant importance in the region.

Süleyman Burak Batır describes (S.B. Batır, personal communication, December 23, 2023) the origin of peynir helvası and the development of the Zafer brand as follows: “Gelibolu peynir helvası is essentially a shepherd's helva. One of the methods shepherds used to preserve milk was to produce cheese and utilize this cheese in various ways. The most important feature of this cheese is that it is unsalted and fresh. The cheese is made immediately after milking, using the milk's own warmth to turn it into cheese, without pasteurization. Later on, natural products like molasses, honey, and flour were used. In the early days, when sugar was not widely available in our country, peynir helvası was sweetened with honey or molasses. Looking at our family's roots, my paternal grandmother's lineage traces back to the Aydınoğulları principality. During the Ottoman conquest of Rumelia, support was requested from various principalities. After the Turks crossed into Rumelia in 1354, families from many principalities were brought to the region for settlement. The ancestors of Çolak Ethem, who were part of the Aydınoğulları principality, were brought to Çardak in 1375 and settled there. After Çardak, they moved to Bolayır. After moving to Bolayır, the family began livestock farming again by buying new animals with the money from the sale of their previous animals. Çolak Ethem, having adopted a nomadic lifestyle like his ancestors, pursued livestock farming as his profession and livelihood. As the number of animals increased, the need for pasture arose. They requested pasture and settlement land from the state. Consequently, the Ottoman Empire settled them in Kozludere, one of the villages closest to Gelibolu. Our family has been living in Kozludere for over 300 years. Later, in the 1840s, Jewish merchants living in Gelibolu would travel around villages to purchase eggs, milk, and other goods for sale in the market. At this time, one of our great-grandfathers invited these Jewish merchants to a sheep shearing festival in the village, both to help with the shearing and to enjoy their time. During the festival, meals and peynir helvası were cooked in large cauldrons, and the Jewish merchants were served peynir helvası. When one of the Jewish merchants asked, ‘Teach me how to make this peynir helvası, so I can sell it in the market and make money,’ our ancestors began to consider why they shouldn't do it themselves. Our family actually has two branches. One branch is from my paternal grandfather's side, who settled in Kavak village after coming from Crete. My grandfather's father died during the Gallipoli Campaign due to an artillery shell. Following this, my grandfather's side moved to Kozludere as the war intensified. My grandfather was born in 1924. When my grandfather's mother died at a young age, his father remarried. The new wife had three of her own children, so she did not want to care for my grandfather, who was then raised by his aunt. My grandfather's aunt's husband Mehmet Emin Kayyar was the son of Seyit Ali Kahya, the wealthiest person in our village. At that time, there was only an elementary school in Gelibolu, which went up to the

third grade. After that, there was no further schooling available, so those who wanted to continue their education had to go to Istanbul. Since there was no opportunity to attend school, my grandfather's uncle told him, "Come, I'll find you a job in Gelibolu so you can work there." His uncle placed him as an apprentice with a bakery master. My grandfather worked under this bakery master from the age of nine until he went to the military, learning everything about the trade. He then served in the military, which lasted two years at that time. Before going to the army, he married his aunt's daughter, and while he was in the army, my uncle was born. After returning from the military, my grandfather's father-in-law, Mehmet Emin Kayyar, told him, "Son, you're back from the army, you have a family now. It's not fitting for you to work for others. Let's sell the livestock and open a bakery for you. I'll teach you how to make peynir helvası, and you can take charge of the business." In 1950, they rented a place where the old fountain used to be. They sold the livestock and, with great difficulty, bought the bakery equipment. They sourced the ingredients daily from the local Jewish merchants, bought the materials in the morning, sold the products, and paid their debts to the merchants at the end of the day. At that time, making a profit was not a reality; however, the shop was managed by the family's own efforts. In 1956, there was a bakery at the site where Osmar Market is today. The bakery owner offered to work with my grandfather, saying, "I'll provide the materials, and you'll provide the labor. Let's run this place together." When the bakery owner's other business ventures went bad, he wanted to sell the bakery to my grandfather, but my grandfather declined the offer. The bakery's location was then purchased by Türk Ticaret Bankası, and they had to move to a place across the road. In 1963, when the current shop location was developed by the municipality, they moved to the present site. After my grandfather and grandmother passed away in 1982, a year later the municipality opened a tender for the sale of the shops. Although other parties also entered the tender, we eventually acquired the deed to the shop in 1983, and since then, the shop has been operating at the same location under the same brand name" (S.B. Batır, personal communication, December 23, 2023).



**Figure 2.** Süleyman Batır Serves Cheese Halva in His Shop-1952. (Used with permission from Batır's personal archive).

## Category 2: Gelibolu Cuisine and The Place Of Cheese Halva In Gelibolu Gastronomy

Gelibolu, its historical significance and strategic geographical location, has served as a migration route for

generations. On this migration route, some communities settled permanently while others left their marks and continued their journey. Today, it is still possible to see all these traces in Gelibolu, especially in the gastronomic culture where the cultural influences of past communities are distinctly present. Gelibolu's role as a transit point has had a lasting impact on its culinary practices. The region's food choices today, including the prominence of baked goods, and the methods of cooking and eating reflect the skills of nomadic communities to stay full for extended periods and to preserve food for a long time.

Under this category, four questions were asked to Süleyman Burak Batır regarding the value and recognition of Gelibolu cuisine among other regional cuisines in Turkey, the contribution of cheese helva to the recognition of Gelibolu, how cheese helva differs from other cheese-containing sweet products in Thrace and the Marmara region, and the essential elements in the production of cheese helva. Batır describes Gelibolu's cuisine and the place of cheese helva in it with the following words: "Gelibolu is actually a very cosmopolitan city both sociologically and gastronomically. It has hosted many different communities. Because the city was a province and an important transit point, people have continuously come here. This was a nomadic lifestyle, and Gelibolu was very active for this reason. Even when settled life began, Gelibolu continued to be a settlement and a transit area for many people. According to various studies, it is said that there are 89 ancient cities in the region, but this has not been pursued due to budget issues up to now. The status of Gelibolu as a transit point has also influenced its gastronomy. It is very difficult to specify particular dishes in Gelibolu cuisine. Due to the nomadic lifestyle, the food has been influenced by the dishes made by people from different regions, their methods of preparation, and the products they used. However, it can be clearly stated that due to the nomadic lifestyle, easy-to-make and filling dishes have been adopted and passed down through generations. For example, "Tavuklu Gelibolu Mantısı" is a dish where wheat is turned into dough, combined with the dough to make dumplings, and topped with chicken. This is considered a luxury dish. Since Gelibolu cuisine is nomadic, pastry dishes are predominant. For instance, the Pomaks living in the region have a dish called Zelnik, which is very much like a vegan pizza. They cook rice and spinach like pizza. Another dish cooked in Gelibolu is "ciğer sarma" (liver rolls), which is relatively more labor-intensive. Since there is no agricultural industry in Gelibolu, things like turning agricultural products into final products do not happen. I don't think Gelibolu cuisine is sufficiently recognized. We established the Gastronomy Association to promote Gelibolu gastronomy. Traditional dishes specific to this region are being forgotten as they are no longer made in homes or restaurants. We want to prevent this from happening. The cosmopolitan nature of Gelibolu cuisine is directly related to the geography of our country. Since the Turks were nomadic societies in the past, the cuisines of every region in Turkey have been influenced by the cuisines of other regions and have added something unique to themselves. There are many dishes in Turkey made with the same ingredients but different cooking methods, or the same dish made with different ingredients. Cheese helva is one of these products. Regarding the contributions of cheese helva to the promotion of the Gelibolu region, I can say the following. Gastronomy is the most important factor in the tourist development and growth of a region. It is crucial to have local products that attract people to the area. In tourism, loyalty is extremely important, let's say 75%. A region may have many historical sites and significant values, but if people cannot stay and enjoy local foods and drinks, it holds no value. Therefore, to develop tourism, there must be unique and high-quality food. Without gastronomy, there is no tourism. Thus, Gelibolu cheese helva is a significant asset for gastronomy tourism. Gelibolu cheese helva is both a product that people come to the region to eat and a souvenir taken home. For instance, even when going to ask for a girl's hand in marriage, especially if the girl's family

is from outside Gelibolu, cheese helva is always given as a gift on a tray. Cheese helva has become synonymous with Gelibolu. When Gelibolu is mentioned, cheese helva comes to mind, and when cheese helva is mentioned, Gelibolu does. There are various sweets made with cheese in Thrace and the Marmara Region, but none have the same ingredients as Gelibolu cheese helva. Some recipes include starch, while others use semolina and eggs to save on the cost of cheese. None of these are true cheese helva. The important aspect is not only the ingredients used but also the proportions in which they are used. If too much flour is added, it becomes hard; if too little, it becomes runny and doesn't hold its shape. If too much sugar is used, it becomes rock-hard when cooled, and so on. The consistency and amount of cheese are crucial, and all of this is related to craftsmanship. The significant difference that sets Gelibolu cheese helva and the Zafer brand apart from other similar products is the quality of the cheese and the fact that no other ingredients besides flour and sugar are used. Therefore, there is no equivalent. The most essential element in the production of cheese helva is unsalted and fresh cheese. This is because the cheese has a consistency that can change within minutes, and everything that needs to be done must be done within that short period, as its characteristics change within 15-20 minutes. Additionally, flour is very important. Fresh flour is not used; the flour needs to be rested a bit. We request rested flour from our suppliers; if not available, we work with stock. However, our stock is not large, and it is carefully balanced. We rest it ourselves in a dry, moisture-free environment. Powdered sugar must also be fine-grained. Fortunately, as an old brand, we are lucky that our suppliers know exactly what we need and how we need it" (S.B. Batır, personal communication, December 23, 2023).

### **Category 3: The Contributions of Historical Zafer Peynir Helvacısı To The Gelibolu Region**

Historical Zafer Peynir Helvacısı has its origins tracing back to the year 1384, when Turks first moved to Rumelia, and became one of the prominent figures in the Gelibolu region from the 1860s onwards through livestock farming and related activities. The story begins with Süleyman Batır, a descendant of Seyit Ali Kahya, who in 1938 moved from Kozludere village to Gelibolu to work in a pastry shop. By 1950, he was selling the peynir helvası he learned from his grandfather Seyit Ali Kahya at his own shop, Şen Pastanesi. When Süleyman Batır's second son was born in 1954, he named him Zafer in honor of his brother Hilmi Bey's wish, who was serving in the Korean War. Consequently, Şen Pastanesi was renamed Zafer Pastanesi, marking the beginning of the branding process for Tarihi Zafer Peynir Helvacısı. The key element that transformed Zafer Pastanesi into a recognized brand was undoubtedly the creation and specialization in a unique product.

Under this category, three questions were asked to Süleyman Burak Batır about the contributions of the Zafer brand to Gelibolu's agricultural and production practices, their role as a significant representative of the region in gastronomic tourism, and the motivating factors for the brand in developing new products through different presentations of traditional cheese helva production. Süleyman Burak Batır explains the importance and impact of Tarihi Zafer Peynir Helvacısı as follows: "We have continued the tradition of cheese helva through generations as the Zafer brand. Therefore, it is not only Gelibolu that makes Gelibolu cheese helva unforgettable, but also the Zafer brand. We uphold our value by preserving it for the future. This is similar to viticulture practices. For example, centuries ago, barrels of grape pickles were sent by ship to the palace of our Sultan Fatih Mehmet, yet there is no grape cultivation area in Gelibolu today. It is documented in the Ottoman State Archives that grape pickles were sent from Gelibolu to Fatih Sultan Mehmet. Cheese helva is also a rare product, and as the Zafer brand, we uphold this value. As I mentioned earlier, cheese helva is very important gastronomically, both for the transfer of regional culture

and for tourism activities. Cheese helva is valuable as a gift, and this gift always comes from the Zafer brand. When a foreigner comes to the city and is asked what to eat, you will often hear: ‘Everything is available here, you can eat whatever you want, but our helva is famous. Zafer Helvacısı is behind Ziraat Bankası; make sure to eat from there.’ The significance of cheese helva and the Zafer brand in recognizing Gelibolu is immense. Hearing people say, ‘We ended up in Gelibolu, came again to eat your cheese helva’ is very important and prideful for us. We couldn’t achieve this level of recognition even with a trillion-dollar advertising budget. After the Çanakkale Bridge was built, we were offered to operate one of the facilities on the bridge route, but it didn’t suit us. Now people come to Gelibolu’s market just to eat and buy cheese helva and then return. In this sense, I believe our brand significantly contributes to the region’s promotion. We have never deviated from the traditional production of cheese helva and we will not. We only offer the same product baked a second time. We do not add any other additives or flavors. The reason for this, as I mentioned before, is so that someone who eats Zafer cheese helva can return years later and find the same traditional taste. This is important to us. Food is a crucial part of people’s memories. While maintaining our cheese helva in its current form, we are introducing changes in packaging. For instance, as a significant investment, we will implement an atmospheric pressure sealing system to extend the product’s shelf life, particularly for customers who wish to gift cheese helva, without adding any preservatives or additives. As mentioned, we do not deviate from the traditional taste of cheese helva. However, we also produce a variety of other products such as jams, pasta, walnuts, and breakfast items. Under our Kozludere sub-brands, we produce olive oil, coffee, and honey. Through these sub-brands, we contribute to the agricultural production and practices of the Gelibolu region. For example, we handle all the fruit production for the jams ourselves. The fruit and nuts, suited to the region’s climate, are grown in our own orchards. In this way, we support the region’s development. We are also working to train skilled craftsmen who will assist us in production. While promoting Gelibolu gastronomy is currently my personal effort, as the son of Yoğurtçu Zafer and the fourth-generation representative of the Zafer brand, my goal is to promote and develop both the Zafer brand and Gelibolu. Highlighting gastronomic tourism in Gelibolu and developing the region is crucial. Currently, cheese helva and sardines are the two most important local products in Gelibolu. It is essential to ensure these products and values are preserved and do not fade into history’s dusty shelves. This is my main effort. I have been trying to obtain a geographical indication for Gelibolu for 15 years<sup>4</sup>. The importance of obtaining a geographical indication is to ensure Gelibolu’s visual value is not forgotten and is documented”.

## **Conclusion**

Local cuisines are an essential part of a society’s cultural heritage, as they carry traces of a community’s past. Culinary products are not only vital for fulfilling a fundamental human need but also reflect history, traditions, social identity, and a sense of belonging. The gastronomy of a region can mirror the experiences, agricultural and livestock practices, trade routes, and even conflicts experienced by its people over time. Traditional recipes are preserved and passed down through generations, allowing a society’s knowledge and values to be transmitted through its culinary culture. Food reflects a society’s unique character and cultural identity, distinguishing it from other communities and highlighting its uniqueness. Additionally, food plays a crucial role in strengthening social bonds between people; it helps maintain and reinforce these connections. Another important aspect of local cuisines in the context of intangible cultural heritage is their contribution to tourism. Local cuisines can attract visitors by providing a sustainable competitive advantage and generating revenue through gastronomic tourism. This economic aspect is crucial, as it positions culinary heritage as a driving force for local development and prosperity.

The cheese halva, one of the most well-known local delicacies of the Gelibolu region, is considered a part of the area's cultural heritage with roots extending back to the Ottoman period. It is known that cheese halva has been made since the conquest in 1354. In the Ottoman State Archives, there are about 60 types of halva mentioned in many sources. "Fresh Cheese Halva" is also recorded as one of these types. In addition, there is a recipe for cheese halva made with sugar and honey in the first Turkish Cookbook, *Kitâbü't-Tabbâhîn*, dating back to the 1800s (Hikayemiz, n.d.). Cheese halva holds a very important place in special occasions, daily life, and cultural events of the region. It is a sweet associated with the historical significance of the Gelibolu Peninsula. Particularly, making and distributing cheese halva to celebrate victories and commemorate the martyrs after the 1915 Gallipoli Campaign is one of the traditions that continues to this day.

Cheese halva is an integral part of Gelibolu's cultural and gastronomic heritage, holding profound historical and cultural significance. The Historical Zafer Cheese Halva Artisanal Producer is a key business and brand that upholds this tradition and strives to introduce this local delicacy to a broader audience. Although the family's history in livestock farming dates back centuries, the Historical Zafer Cheese Halva Artisanal Producer, operating under the Zafer brand since the early 1950s, preserves the original recipe of Gelibolu cheese halva with its standards of taste and quality, thus maintaining the region's gastronomic heritage.

As Gelibolu serves as a significant tourist center, preserving the memory of the Gallipoli Campaign and attracting both domestic and international tourists to visit memorials and traces of the war, the Historical Zafer Cheese Halva Artisanal Producer contributes to the region's economic development and helps in global recognition of Gelibolu's cultural values. Zafer Cheese Halva Artisanal Producer is not just a sweet brand producing cheese halva but also a cultural carrier. The tradition of cheese halva, which has continued for centuries, is preserved and passed down through this business. This is crucial for the preservation of local culinary culture and its transmission to future generations, thereby enhancing the cultural and touristic value of the Zafer brand and the region.

## Notes

1. Boklu means shitty in Turkish and refers to the sardine with not cleaned internal organs.
2. The term "tekfur" is used for governors in the Byzantine Empire, as well as for Christian rulers in Anatolia and Rumelia.
3. Gelibolu Cheese Halva was officially registered with a Geographical Indication on April 15, 2024, starting from October 17, 2023.

## Declaration

Ethical approval for data collection was given by the Beykoz University Ethics Committee (Decision No. 3, Date: 28.11.2023, Meeting No. 22).

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## Appendix 1. Ethics Committee Permission



T.C.  
BEYKOZ ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Kurulu Sekreterliği



Sayı : E-45152895-299-2400016116

19.09.2024

Konu : Etik Kurul Sonuç Bildirme Yazısı -  
Prof. Dr. Pınar Seden Meral

## İlgili Makama

Aşağıda künyesi verilen bilimsel araştırma çalışması / bilimsel yayın için Beykoz Üniversitesi Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Kurulu'na yapılan 08.11.2023 tarihli başvurunun değerlendirilmesi sonucunda Kurul'un 28.11.2023 tarih ve 22 sayılı toplantısında alınan 3 nolu kararı ile OLUMLU görüş oluşturulmuş bulunmaktadır.

İşbu yazı Etik Kurul başvurusunu yapan öğretim elemanının talebi üzerine düzenlenmiştir.

Saygılarımla

Prof. Dr. Selahattin KURU  
Rektör Yardımcısı

## Etik Kurul Başvurusu Yapılan Çalışmanın Künyesi

Çalışmanın başlığı	Miras Kalan Mutfaklar: Gelibolu Tarihi Zafer Peynir Helvacısı
Çalışmanın türü	Bilimsel Makale Çalışması
Çalışmanın yapıldığı kurum / kuruluş	Beykoz Üniversitesi
Başvuruyu yapan öğretim elemanının unvanı adı soyadı	Prof. Dr. Pınar Seden Meral

Doğrulama Kodu: C1C19D0

Bu belge, güvenli elektronik imza ile imzalanmıştır.

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