Green Leaves

Reads and Eats on Turkish Roads

Mena Hem
translated by Otto Mann

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Fictive Press
fictivemag.com/press

Logo design by Serra Şensoy

Foreword

These pages of collected nonfiction are the amalgamations of reading, tasting, and traversing through the environment, built of pages and spines, oils and salts, roads and locales, departing from Istanbul and extending outward into the greater region. The author's naive, searching prose is interspersed with articles of inquiry that transcend linear chronology, elucidating like a pontificator, someone haphazardly mediating the figments of their involuntary thinking with thorough absorption in daily experience. Piqued by intrigues, like that of an age-old innocent abroad, wondering and wandering on the theme of nourishment, physical and intellectual, inwardly and outwardly in pursuit of spatial embodiment, their roving eyes subsume words enough to compel them to hit the pavement, stretch their toes in the sand and dirty their soles on the bare ground of the Earth, grappling with shapeshifting mystical composition, from the cerebral to the palpable.

Transforming the one-way street of consumption to encompass the fruits of biological pleasure, while stimulating mental curiosity and the footsore roaming of a subjective character, such points on the map are not fixed but geographically expansive to enact a cyclical worldview, rounding the bend, tonguing the imagination for novelty, and once having turned the cover of a dusty classic, tracing the spaces between its lines, its narrative scope levels the playing field of the city, the town, the landscapes of abstract fascination. Harboring individual agency amid its blind corners, a gravitational lure from the leaves to the roots of a place; breaking like waves against the green, steeply sloping shores of the Bosphorus, that, like Poseidon's trident, fork out into the Golden Horn and the blind bay of ancient Chalcedon, which from its contiguous spine of shattered skeletal remains snakes into the Mediterranean and the world over. These curious narrations of quotidian interest are troves of inspiration, enough to grasp the silence of antiquated streets imbued with an imperial crest of daytime boredom, humming in the mind of one seer upright with volumes of verbal pursuance, stuffed with vegetable meat, sugar of fruits, fats of seeds, still, then walking past.

Otto Mann
March 10, 2024
Istanbul

Reads

Fusions

Istanbul is one city where writers have incessantly and voraciously swarmed from the ends of the earth to pursue and immortalize the latest fusions of contemporary literature. Throughout the innumerable local bookshops, from Balat to Kuzguncuk, Kadıköy to Beşiktaş and beyond, prim shelves and dusty piles are ready for unique mixtures of intercultural perspectives driven by multilingual narratives that blur every sense of worldly definition, from political borders afar to the ethnic neighborhoods of the inner-city.

American novelist Elliot Ackerman sauntered into Pera Palace Hotel Jumeirah on a late summer afternoon with a smile on his face. He ordered tea in the Orient Bar, sitting beside 18th century wood-carved Ottoman furniture and a library holding antique books on Istanbul, many by expatriate writers who have famously graced the legendary neighborhood of Pera throughout the ages, Ernest Hemingway, Knut Hamsun and Agatha Christie.

His reputation preceded him as the author of a highly praised debut novel, *Green on Blue*, which he published in 2015 after serving five tours of duty in the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan. Writing from the perspective of an Afghan orphan immersed in post-9/11 conflict had impressed the likes of Khaled Hosseini, not to mention the international press establishment.

"I like to say I'm like a dilettante journalist, I do some on the side and I write novels," Ackerman said, with a sly sense of humor. "Shortly after spending lots of time down in Gaziantep, I moved to Istanbul. My next novel which comes out in the U.S. in January, *Dark at the Crossing*, is all set in Antep."

Living in Turkey for the past three years, Ackerman has now spent about the same time between Istanbul and Gaziantep as a successful writer as he had in Afghanistan as an American Marine. Reporting on the Syrian Civil War for *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, and *The Atlantic* among many other media outlets, has led to the much-anticipated release of *Dark at the Crossing*, published by Knopf on Jan. 24, 2017 in the U.S., and the following year in Turkish by April Publishing.

"Whether it's what's going on in Afghanistan or the Arab Spring, you can really see a straight narrative line from the early 2000s up to everything that's happening politically today," says Ackerman, whose work demonstrates common threads in the literary fusions that inspire contemporary writers working in Istanbul.

> Having spent my twenties fighting in those wars, you can come over here, particularly if it's southern Turkey, whether it's what's going on in Syria or seeing how U.S. involvement shapes current Turkish policy, a lot of that narrative through-line informs my writing when trying to add some simplicity to what are very complex issues.

As exemplified by Ackerman, literature is a potent means for both writers and readers to empathize with the victims and perpetrators of global conflict. On the other side of the spectrum, Katherine Belliel expatriated for purely personal reasons, over love. As an expatriate writer who has lived in Turkey for over a decade, most significantly in Istanbul from 2003 to 2012, she has fostered and now leads a prestigious literary community of women who have been inspired by Turkey and the creative freedoms of international movement.

"I came to Turkey as a single woman in my early twenties. I know what it's like to be a single woman living here, a married woman, a mother, and now a divorced woman," Belliel says, light for her sense of humor.

The identity of an expatriate is, by the verbal form of the word, a conscious redirection away from birthright nationalism. In the process where the expatriate relentlessly seeks to redefine and transcend the stereotypes and bonds of national identity, more essential human identities are emphasized, such as gender, exemplified in the women-centric publishing philosophy of Belliel and her colleague, fellow American writer Rose Margaret Deniz with a new anthology of expatriate writing by women in Turkey titled *Expat Sofra*.

"Istanbul reminds me a lot of what you can say New York is like. Nobody is from here but everyone pretends they're from here. My Istanbul is very different than what a lot of Turks' Istanbul is," says Belliel, reinforcing the value of expatriate perspectives in literature and in society generally, when, for example, Turkish

people might exchange knowledge of expatriate ancestry more comfortably with foreigners, especially Americans who often express pride in Old World roots.

> I see a lot of Istanbul that most Turks who are born and bred here don't know.

Originally a transplant from the American Midwest, Belliel now lives with her son in the neighborly university town of İzmit, where she sometimes compares the flatlands of her birthplace to the Anatolian cultural landscape, fusing creative literatures in the process. Under her keenly perceptive editorial pen, *Expat Sofra* seeks to contribute to the newly emergent "foodoir" genre, as in the combination of food writing and memoir.

"In a way, in Turkey you can't really define Turkey, you can't define even yourself as an expat in Turkey. The book [*Expat Sofra*] is like that, it can fit into so many different niches. Since we started *Expat Sofra*, people have been contacting us to find the Turkish version of 'Expat Harem,'" says Belliel, confirming the hunger for expatriate literature among Turkish readers while sitting in Karabatak cafe, one of the iconic locales of the Istanbul cultural aesthetic, aptly situated in the lively pedestrian narrows of Karaköy.

> There are a couple of stories of people who lived in Turkey and then moved back to their respective countries, and they are writing about that, so like a re-pat table. That wasn't something that was part of *Expat Harem*.

Led by publishers Samer Qadri, an internationally exhibiting painter, and his wife Gulnar Hajo, writer of children's books, the Syrian expatriate literary community fosters unprecedented cultural interaction between the Arabic-speaking world and Turkish society at Pages, the first Arabic-language bookstore in Istanbul.

After leaving Syria three years ago, Qadri has hosted weekly events with authors and musicians for over a year as the founder of Pages. The bookshop is tucked away in the Golden Horn district of Fatih, near Chora Museum, behind two open-air cafes in an unassuming alleyway.

One among many fellow expatriate Syrian intellectuals is the leading literary figure of his community in Istanbul, Yassin al-Haj Saleh. His articles are

characteristically dense with philosophically conviction and newsworthy analyses. In a recent piece titled, "The Just Oppressors" published on June 9, 2016 by Al-Jumhuriya, and translated from Arabic into English by Palestinian-Jordanian researcher Abdul-Wahab Kayyali, Saleh exemplifies the self-determined humanism of expatriate literary freedom in Istanbul.

As proven by the expatriate literary communities of the largest Turkish metropolis, the cultural life of Istanbul transforms and diversifies through direct and mutual relations within, and alongside the neighboring societies in the region, and globally. Expatriate writers working in Istanbul unite over common narratives toward new forms of literary creativity and through dialogical processes that are increasingly critical as so many individuals, and even entire peoples, are oppressed to silence and remain unheard around the world.

September 19, 2016
Istanbul, Turkey

Strait

When the *Bosphorus Review of Books* released its first issue in January 2017 there were no reviews of books. Luke Frostick, its editor-in-chief, is proud of the short fiction piece he wrote and published to coincide with the launch of the online bimonthly, titled "Müneccim." It is an imaginative character study about a paranoid prince with a bad case of multiple neuroses.

“Müneccim” is set through a dark, orientalist filter, with its crowned Ottoman royalties reclusive behind harem chamber doors, fitted in silvery silk, nervously awaiting subservient eunuchs and fratricidal intrigue in decadently themed palace rooms.

Frostick has a sharp eye for historical fantasy, steeped in the former lands and intellectual histories of the late Turkish empire. His writing recalls the work of another young visionary, the artist Görkem Usta, who recently breached the halls of academia with his show of shipwreck models and fez-worn ruffians for the youth-centered exhibition series Mamut Art Project.

In the first installment of the *Bosphorus Review of Books*, its co-founder and poetry editor Thomas Parker published, "I'm Sick of Being Blue." It has a musical ring in simple repetitions of a refrain over six, three-line stanzas, evoking that down-and-out, hard-luck soul fished out of his Texan upbringing.

Parker identifies as a "Muslim-American poet" who translates literary works from Arabic and Turkish, broadening the eclectic editorial scope of the *Bosphorus Review of Books*. It is an expat outfit gaining significance on the Turkish literary horizon. Drawing from his Arabic education at the University of Oklahoma before moving to Alexandria, Egypt, he met Frostick at Spoken Word Istanbul, a weekly night of free expression in the city's downtown core founded by Merve Pehlivan, one of the Review's frequent contributors.

Pehlivan wrote the outlet’s first creative nonfiction piece, "Freedom from Language" about her trials as a Turkish writer who prefers writing in English (she originally wrote the piece in English, only to translate it back into Turkish).

"Part of starting the Bosphorus Review of Books came out of my personal frustration with getting published. Also because there was a massive gap in the market. There wasn't anyone except *Cornucopia* and William Armstrong [a journalist at *Hurriyet Daily News*] writing about Turkish literature," said Frostick, surrounded by multilingual books and English speech at the Cihangir cafe Journey, a haunt for expats, while awaiting his colleagues for a roundtable discussion and editorial meeting.

> Because we're a small team we generally can give pretty detailed feedback. This is a good time to write about Turkish literature. There's so much coming out now that just wasn't available before. If you go into a Turkish bookshop there are shelves and shelves of [Sait] Faik books and in English there is one. Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, the god of Turkish literature, wrote many important books and only two are out in English.

By the *Review*'s second issue, there were book reviews, interviews and more women writing for the modest publication that overwhelmed its fledgling editors as they watched it balloon from idea to establishment practically overnight. It was then in March when Parker published his first poetry translation for the *Review*, from the 9th century Arabic of Qais Ibn Al-Mullawah, better known as Majnoon, lover of Layla, the Shakespearian Juliet of the Arab world.

He claimed to have chosen lines that had never been translated into English, and under his careful handling of the otherworldly culture, his fine literary craft has a fresh, piercing readability.

It was not until the fourth, July issue, when Parker published two translations of Turkish poems, one with the poet Gözde Kurt, whose piece, "Envision" has a disarming, enlightening beauty, and appears in both languages in the *Review*.

"I'm a better Arabic translator, but most of my poetry translations at the *Review* have been from Turkish. In the last year, we expanded at a surprising rate. A lot of our first contributors came from Spoken Word Istanbul. Our unifying factors are, firstly, the willingness to accept published and unpublished writers, it's really about the quality of the work. Secondly, we have a focus on Turkey. It's an interaction between Turkish literature and global literature," said Parker, who is thrilled by the publication of his most recent translation of the creative nonfiction of Malek Daghestani in the current edition of the *Review*, on Syria's secret prison theatre.

> We are the only, or at least the biggest English-language literary magazine in Istanbul. If that's true, it's hard to have a very specific focus. I take submissions in Turkish and Arabic. I think it's interesting for Turks to read about how foreigners appreciate Turkish literature.

Since taking off in style, the *Review* has delighted readers with a series of prominent interview subjects, in the latest issue with the Turkish novelist Burhan Sönmez (whose novel, *Istanbul Istanbul* was translated by Umit Hussein), and original cover art designs.

Zeynep Beler, for example, speaking at the translation panel that Frostick will moderate on May 6 for the 10th Istanbul International Literature Festival, created the September 2017 cover. The startling, photographic clarity of its focus redefines stereotypes of the seagull-driven Bosporus seascape. By the third issue in May, the Californian litterateur Erica Eller became nonfiction editor. She approached Frostick and Parker after a Yabangee.com Expat Spotlight on Writing at Bomontiada's Atölye workshop space.

"We're all emerging writers. We [as a journal] are really lucky because we have a very specific niche, and it's an area that needs to be exposed more in the wider literary world," said Eller, who is currently collaborating with the Hazel Reading Series, which she initially founded while living in San Francisco, to develop the *Bosphorus Review of Books* through joint ventures.

> I've also been interested in the region, and in world literature. Thomas speaks Arabic, and interacts with the Syrian community. I know that Georgia has a wealth of literature, although we haven't had anyone review that yet. The most commonly learned second-language in Turkey is English. Readers are fascinated by English literature.

Eller first contributed to the *Bosphorus Review of Books* with her review of "Kafka's Curse" by the South African novelist Achmat Dangor, noting that her experience with the book changed dramatically after reading it initially in San Francisco compared to in Istanbul. In the past year, she says the *Review* has prompted her to write better, and more importantly, it has given her a platform through which to continue her literary practice, to branch out beyond academic study. She is only truly satisfied with each new piece that she last completed,

emphasizing her focus on constant progress as a literary craftswoman. In contrast, Frostick remains steadfast in defense of his debut piece of short fiction at the *Review*.

"I enjoy engaging with texts from an analytical perspective. We don't receive a lot of book review submissions, so I'm often handpicking specific authors to write them. You can access a lot of English texts in the academic world, whereas in the world of Turkish literature, a text begins in Turkish and later on you get it in English well after that author's work is established," says Eller, who holds two MA degrees, one in literature and the other in creative writing.

> Not all of the pieces are on Turkey, but that does give us a certain character. Most of our cover art has also been about the region. We want to attract people who feel intimidated to submit work. If they are not native English speakers we [still] want them to submit to us because that is the [local] voice of the region. Opening up English into literature broadens the way the language is learned. We foster a greater appreciation for the wider realm of English outside of strict professional use.

"I was a fellow [at the Istanbul International Literature Festival] last year. This is the first event that I've hosted. I'm excited and nervous. Alexander Dawe is a legend, equal to Maureen Freely and Amy Spangler. Last week, I met with the head of Bosphorus University's translation department to discuss the best questions. Dawe and Beler both translated Hakan Günday and Ece Temelkuran," said Frostick, who declared his love for the novel *Istanbul Istanbul* and for its author Burhan Sönmez for the latest, May issue of the *Review* after reading its translation by Umit Hussein, also one of his upcoming panelists.

> We have a name now. When we ask for an interview, people say yes. We are currently working on an anthology of last year, with some of the better pieces that we published. We're just waiting for the translation to be finished. We have an agreement with Matbuat Publishing for a mirrored bilingual version in Turkish and English.

May 3, 2018
Istanbul, Turkey

Bibliophiles

I discovered Linda's Book Room sometime after a seasoned writer from New York read a story I wrote on antique shops in Çukurcuma. He was a formidable character, who had written a book of note on the preservation of the most historic library in Manhattan, one of America's founding institutions of public learning.

I was surprised, to say the least, to receive a complimentary note from such a prestigious colleague. I had not exactly written on the beloved antiques district thinking it would wield much influence. It was through the mystery of words that we connected.

As a fellow expatriate, however, we soon became friends. His stories on libraries and their significance were influential, not only among bookworms and culturati. They rang with a clear message of awakening to the business elite that reading and its free dissemination are paramount and above capital profit. It was not long after our initial meetings when he directed me to a little-known place where the spirit of American libraries is kept, obscurely, in a neat corner of Istanbul's old downtown in and among the Levantine apartments of Asmalı Mescit.

I connected with Linda Robinson via email. She maintained a gentle and generous tone of welcome and enthusiasm in our brief correspondence. Almost immediately, she sent a map of the storied neighborhood, where its complex of inner-city streets is a tangle of outmoded Italianate architecture. In the middle was the name, "Ebru." And her, "book room," as it is known, is open only by appointment. When the day came, I made my way, only to find that she could not be there.

In her stead was another American woman, significantly her senior. A jovial and gregarious sort, the woman introduced herself with a talkative candor. She appeared to be in her 70s and then divulged of having first arrived in Istanbul around 1968. She went on and on about how different the city was then, and all of the changes it has gone through since. She spoke of having come from Colorado, and from certain inferences, there were hints that she had an extended Turkish family, perhaps marrying into one.

She captivated my attention after those hesitant moments navigating the curious, fusty halls of the century buildings when I knocked on the door that read, “Ebru,” and began to enjoy her smiling company. She sat on a couch and exuded pride and satisfaction in the fact that she was sitting in the midst of a dizzying array of books. There were stacks to the ceiling, bookshelves and boxes filled to the brim and overloaded. Yet, as the woman kept on telling her story, I was swept away as by the pages of a memoir.

Linda’s Book Room has a method to its madness. Most of the books in the bijou room are acquired from the deceased or those bibliophile collectors who have simply overburdened themselves and need space. Linda’s Book Room took them in like orphans, sheltering them so that they could go to a good home. Yet, not all of the books are mere leftovers. Some are quite valuable. And by some, I also mean, a lot. The shelves are divided into two main categories, lending and giveaways.

Because I had not been to Linda’s Book Room before and did not know when I might return, I decided to focus on the giveaways. Yet, the selections therein were canonical, perennial classics, and not only of the antiquarian stripe, obsolete and forgotten. I grabbed a copy of Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit to the Goon Squad*, a Pulitzer Prize-winning contemporary classic that broke the mold of Brooklyn’s literary circles with its fresh voice, that of a woman entwined in the wiles of an underground, alternative music scene.

In under an hour, I had perused a comprehensive span of almost every title in the room, the worn, secondhand bookshop smell fueling my inspiration to dig deeper. My arms were full with everything from Zadie Smith to Antonio Gramsci, and by the end of my Proustian search, my host, who had kindly replaced Linda on that day, although it was said that Linda wanted to be there, gave me a few bags. She encouraged me to take more, as many as I could carry. And I brought them back with me all the way across the Bosphorus.

One of the precious peculiarities of the *sahaf*, or secondhand bookshop in Turkey, is to recover unsung accomplishments in literary translation from Turkish literature into English. In the case of Linda’s Book Room, I happened on a humorous cover which I thought to be nothing more than light romance, Ottoman-era pulp fiction. As I began to read, I noticed hints of profundity that struck me as more thoughtful

than any mere commercial thriller. Although set amid the 17th-century intrigues of Topkapı Palace, it read like a specially keen modern allegory.

The author, Suzan Sözen, an antiques collector and dealer herself, had written novels prolifically throughout her life. The one I found at Linda's Book Room, *The Forbidden Love*, was published in 1972, as her first English translation. The delicate copy I took was inscribed with a reader's note in 1981. The translator, Joseph S. Jacobson, professor of Turkish at the University of Utah's Middle East Center, wrote his translator's note in 1971. "Suzan Sözen is the first modern Turkish novelist to bring this portion of Ottoman History so vividly to life."

November 29, 2020
Istanbul, Turkey

Closet

When Virginia Woolf came up with the title *A Room of One's Own*, for her book-length essay and changed the power balance of women in literature, as in society, the year was 1928, and she was then lecturing at two women's colleges connected to Cambridge University. It is unimaginable that that momentous metaphor of a room, which came to symbolize female independence, of body and mind, would not have mountains of books in it. But although most of these books might be written by men, it is the solitude of that room as occupied by a woman, that fires the fluid spirit of criticism to a round boil, perfect for steeping tea, and reclining for a day in thought.

At the modest space known as Uğur Sahaf, there is a woman and a cat, and both seem to be well-versed, if not in books then in the art of mentation, surrounded by stacks and shelves of voluminous volumes of text spanning the history of research and the imagination across the known world, and all in a space that might fit five, thin, eager bibliophiles. Uğur is its name, as many *sahaf*, or used bookstores, in Istanbul and Turkey are named and are as personable and idiosyncratic as any human individual. If Uğur Sahaf were a personality type, they might be very modest, perhaps penniless, but overeducated and polite.

Across from a cafe, and besides a veterinarian, Uğur Sahaf displays its books proudly, held up by wires that stretch, taut, against the exterior wall of an old building, whether used as a municipal office or private residence is unclear, its windows gated, as per Istanbul custom, protecting property from ground floor trespassing. But in opposition to the uninviting ambiance of inner-city crime prevention, the bookshop is as welcoming as ever. Although each of its items is one-of-a-kind, they are sold cheaply, according to the market value of copied copies of books that have long lost any order of distribution or print investment.

The reasons behind placing books outside appear to have many potential motivations. By the look of the homebody bookseller inside Uğur Sahaf, it seems that one could be more likely than the other. For example, to present, in an organized and salable fashion, some of the books in stock in English and Turkish, is, firstly, a formidable sales tactic. Such a strategy has the effect of also building a kind of trust with buyers, and locals, something that a *sahaf* does well, as its

breezy, open space conjures a communal sensibility beyond the capitalist chain to which almost all enact through cold, mechanical, daily transactions. The bookseller of the Turkish *sahaf*, however, is more aloof. She is in a room of her own.

Another conceivable reason for the outdoor displays at Uğur Sahaf is simply that the bookseller is busy reading, and, instead of pandering to the whimsical questions of passersby, many of who would ask, in Anglicized, heavily-accented Turkish, about books in English. They're often coming from the swanky apartments of Cihangir down to the floor, to pass their time perusing the worn spines of such irrelevant, news-unworthy titles as *The Three Romes* by travel writer Russel Frazer, whose history of Christian metropolitanism devolves into what a 1985 *Los Angeles Times* book review critiqued as a devolution into an overly personalized diary.

Yet, there are evergreen editions, nonetheless, that greet the bookish urban explorer on their way between Cihangir and Taksim, including savory works by Charles Baudelaire or Umberto Eco. A Penguin Classics issue by Soviet science-fiction novelist Yevgeny Zamyatin, namely, *We*, throws an eclectic spotlight on the characterful trails of Istanbul's many and diverse interests in literature, as they surface at a *sahaf* bookshop, remnants of the peculiarly regional taste of writing within multifaceted geography in which languages, histories and cultures misalign and converge with a percussive, postmodern dissonance.

And perhaps the most logical purpose for placing a solid amount of books outside of the shop at Uğur Sahaf is simply because its interior is too compact to hold all of its goods, and the people who might take them away, oftenest one by one, and generally for not much more than a bit of spare change. Among the various staples and obscurities that face the would-be book buyer passing Uğur Sahaf is a title by the late John Freely, whose works remain canonical to early 20th-century foreign erudition on Turkey, produced while raising a family in the hills of Boğaziçi University overlooking Istanbul's famed intercontinental strait.

Freely's study, *The Emergence of Modern Science, East and West* at Uğur Sahaf, emerged out of the once fashionable academic branch of historiography tracing the origins of the scientific process beyond the fringes of Western Eurocentrism, prior to Greek philosophy, encompassing Mesopotamia and Egypt, and continuously

since, despite the stereotypes of Dark Ages, to emphasize the strength of the bridge that was Islamic civilization, preserving and developing philosophical and scientific ideas through the Medieval era. It is, however, prescient in retrospect, when considering the ongoing lack of mutual reports on all sides.

The woman and the cat are still reading together, unmoving but not stony, comfortable. They do not mind that someone has entered their room because all of the books are penciled in with a price, a few liras here and there passed around by a stray hand that dips down through the doorway of the shop, which, cellar-like, hangs, like reachable fruit, amid the bustle of Cihangir's cosmopolitan airs.

Uğur Sahaf is essentially divided into two sections, which are separated by a roughly-hewn concrete stairway. There are carpets and posters on the cavernous walls, sheltering books from floor to ceiling around the entire circumference. The woman sits with the cat, reading, but they are not themselves open books, as theirs is presence clouded in a kind of mystique that comes with the antiquarian job. To their left are English books, and a smattering of Russian and French titles.

Among the Anglophone books was a slim novel by a Turkish author, Gaye Hiçyılmaz, whose fiction, *Watching the Watcher*, published in 1996, came after a successful children's book, *Against the Storm*, and an award-winning novel, *The Frozen Waterfall*. *Watching the Watcher* is utterly English in its sensibility, yet there is a streak of Turkish sentiment in its introspective psychological currents. Although Hiçyılmaz led an illustrious life as a proud mother and daughter, working with the British Council in Ankara for many years before traveling through Switzerland and England, setting perhaps her best-known book, *The Frozen Waterfall* in the small Swiss town of Horgen, her faded success might come as a surprise to readers who have not been privy to the overlaps where British and European fiction graze against the bristling skin of Turkish themes. And yet, if Uğur Sahaf is a testament to readerships in Istanbul, it would seem that at least someone had the curiosity to listen to her voice on the page, even if muffled behind the door to the room of her own life.

April 18, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Image

A man spills tea at his desk surrounded by books from floor to ceiling near cases overflowing with stacks of yellowed magazines, hardcovers and paperbacks from two centuries past. He sits atop a foundational node of Western culture, its history of expression as textual, the core of its rule and accounting, the authors of its authority. He wipes his desk clean and receives an older man who walks in from the rain, heaving to deliver a black bag spilling over with more books.

It is a usual weekday afternoon at Imge Sahaf, a vast secondhand bookseller in the bustling heart of Kadıköy's traditional commercial center, where fishmongers compete with herbalists over the attention of passersby along thin, pedestrian alleys in Istanbul. And across from Çiya, the famous restaurant that made a splash on the Netflix series, *Chef's Table*, the stark facade of Imge is replete with vintage magazines and worn novels, outdated nonfiction and obscure journals.

Passing into the opening hall, in which a single bibliophile might fit at a time, squeezing through the overstocked corridors, under the imposing heights of varicolored spines encompassing the erudition of all known civilization, its subjects and epochs are columned to the ceiling, in rows tighter than the concrete slabs of the street. Imge Sahaf, owing to its name (which, from the Turkish, means "image"), has a special cache of art prints and visual ephemera, everything from oil paintings to paper currencies.

And just between the two desks diagonally opposite from each other, as middle-aged men working behind them banter and complain, there is an island of Ottoman magazines, a rare trove of antiquarian delights. The frayed edges of their frail paper borders betray the age of the material, centenarians among the press establishment, representing dawns of cultural fruition at the cusp of popular literacy when academic and religious texts were second to literary humor, news satire and political cartoons.

Imge Sahaf holds an unparalleled collection of late Ottoman publications, many of which are labeled with quite comprehensive descriptions in English. Although in the center of the madness between eccentric buyers and talkative shopkeepers, the piles of plastic-wrapped pages gleam with enticing backstories. Under their

coverslips are bilingual histories, such as for *Kelebek*, a literary humor magazine published by one Reşat Nuri Güntekin between 1923 to 1924.

It was said that Güntekin published over a hundred humorous stories in *Kelebek*, which, in English, means butterfly, and is the name of a current tabloid in Turkey. Interestingly, the writing that appears to outline these historical publications has an editorial voice, someone opining atop it, a hundred years in retrospect, in much the way that the contributors of old might have within its pages.

As a publication active during the formative year in Turkey's history as a republic, when Ankara was declared the capital in 1923, *Kelebek* is emblematic of the society, especially in Istanbul, their tastes and concerns. Its stories breathe with the changes that people experienced in their personal lives when history was being written as a series of cold exchanges between wars and governments. For literary historians, *Kelebek* also rounds out Güntekin's oeuvre not found in his prolific novels and plays.

While the language reform had yet to take effect, such Ottoman publications as *Kelebek* were printed in the Ottoman alphabet, derived from the Arabic alphabet. Another example is a newspaper called, Sinop, with a spare description identifying it as a "very rare newspaper published during the independence war in Sinop." The newspaper, Sinop has a stark, informative aesthetic, issued in a simple design that likely reflects the urgency of its bridging necessary communications between the military and the people.

Still, there is an unmistakable streak of lightness that runs through the late Ottoman press, at a time when new facts were less a priority to readers than diversions from their direct experience with those hard facts exposed. Ottoman newspapers such as *Gıdık*, which means "Tickle" in Turkish, show, on its cover, a man in a fez reading and laughing, while a mischievous boy pokes at his back. Its publication began in 1910 and lasted two years. Lighthearted news analysis was punctuated with stories, poems and novels.

Among the samples of vintage Ottoman press are a few fresh starts, including the very first humor newspaper in the Ottoman Empire. It was called *Diogenes*, after the ancient Greek philosopher of the Cynic school, who urged candid behavior in

the face of social norms. The publisher was Teodor Kasap, who is revered on the descriptive paper slipped over its yellowed front page, denoting, in calligraphic Ottoman-Turkish Arabic script, the philhellenic name, unblemished since the 1870s.

Kasap, to the unidentified editorial archivist of Ottoman press at the Imge Sahaf was the "most important and famous journalist of the Ottoman period." In English, he is known as Theodoros Kasap, of the Rums or the indigenous Greeks of Istanbul and Anatolia. After serving as personal secretary to French novelist Alexandre Dumas, who wrote *The Three Musketeers* and other classics. Throughout his career he would publish in French, Turkish and Greek, depending on the sociopolitical climate.

It appears that most of the Ottoman magazines did not last long, often no more than two years, ostensibly a circumstance of law and economy. One of the most enduring of papers, even at the dawn of popular press, was a publication that stamped its readership on the allure of images, namely *Resimli Gazete*, which might translate to "picture paper," which lasted from 1923 to 1929. The front page on display at Imge shows a studious Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, reading, while a ballroom dance ensues in another room.

Although it is easy to get lost in the entranceway gallery of books and magazines at Imge, especially considering its nonpareil trove of immaculately preserved Ottoman journalism in their original printings, there is an adjacent hall on the top of the two floors that make up the bookshop. It seems bear the namesake of Imge, as a *sahaf* or antiquarian of images. Most of the stock are prints of paintings, with not a few large-format coffee table books on art history. And there are stairs that lead down, to more of the old, outdated, neglected, but yet, there, waiting for fresh eyes to hear their dusty voices still.

April 1, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Capital

Dry air is said to induce critical thinking, its nature being that of clarity. The dryness of the Anatolian heartland, where the capital city of Ankara rises out of the rolling hills, is as much a university town as the center of Turkey's national government. Unlike Istanbul, Ankara enjoys a metropolitanism that could be said to disperse outward from a more or less decentralized sense of cultural self. Although largely car-dependent, many of its inner streets are richly walkable, sloping steeply to overlook the vast, urban skyline built around mystifying Greco-Roman ruins.

In a quiet, residential neighborhood between localities called Güvenevler and Ayrancı in Çankaya district, close to a Russian community in the environs of their embassy, there is a peculiar, untitled secondhand bookshop. Along the frame of the building, the word *sahaf* denotes its realm as that of a literary antiquary. It shares a broad, pedestrian-friendly street with other businesses of the independent stripe, modish and pro-youth, including a boutique clothing store called Kumbara and a bakery cafe, Un, meaning "flour" in Turkish.

The *sahaf*, along the sleepy, tree-lined Alaçam Street is run by a quirky fellow with not a few feline friends. He is busy, opening the door to his shop wherein stacks of books of old are occasionally categorized according to a variety of genres that blend into each other, as multilingual and multicultural as the city beyond its pages. As is tradition to the *sahaf* milieu across Turkey, the interior moves with a spectacular array of hanging objects, figments of tack that by their age and obscurity, have become endearing.

Without a word, the bookseller arranges a late breakfast for the half dozen or so cats that call the house of his old books home. When not feasting, they are hiding behind corners, waiting to hold out a clawless paw of curiosity to strangers, guests, readers and collectors out for a bookish romp in retrospective discovery. Mostly in Turkish, the *sahaf* carries a delightful representation of English-language books, with smatterings of Russian, French and Greek. It is a microcosm of Ankara's intellectual sphere.

And as Ankara is utterly unique from Istanbul, although in a world of its own relativity, the steadfastness of its perspective, having harbored the republican spirit of social modernism, there is an encompassing sensibility to its regional acuity, that like a small city within a vast urban field, invites others enthusiastically while retaining its distinctiveness. If Ankara were a book it would be an encyclopedia of stories, with an editorial commentary on the historical diversity of their telling denser than the stories themselves, or a neoclassical political meditation.

It is observed among locals, that people who live in Ankara become introspective, and generally tend to read more. Landlocked, with a relatively bounded cultural sector, a book is an open window that swings wide open from the concrete interiors of the city. And its vistas are infinite, transformative, aligned with the interpretive powers of the mind, that, like experience, or time, constantly changes. A book is not, however, a fixed point, but might be compared to a moon that itself orbits around a planet, which revolves around a sun, with all of its celestial bodies.

It is for these reasons that the *sahaf* stock in Ankara is particularly expansive. Along the tranquil, domestic hum of Alaçam Street, such venturous authors as Amin Maalouf quench the thirst of homebodies with a compulsive desire to span the globe in all of its wealth of narratives spun by the yarns of history. On a single row, both *Balthasar's Odyssey* and *The First Century After Beatrice* by Maalouf entice wandering minds out for a walk through 17th century Europe to Ottoman lands, or to a dystopian, male-dominated future, respectively.

The untitled Ankara *sahaf*, as it might be called by passersby, has a special relationship with its garden. Books, like the plants that hang from its ceiling and grow from its entryway soil, require time to appreciate. The front wall facade is glass, allowing natural light to pour in, also enlightening for the cats that sit, spryly, atop its tall stacks. And there is a sunny disposition about the place, even if the bookseller himself is meek, and sits in a corner, almost unseen, walled on three sides by large-format books displayed in every possible manner.

The seemingly random assemblage of titles makes for happenstance coincidences of parallel meaning, in which dissonances of logical continuity call an avid reader to question, and consider just how such disparate literary efforts might make sense, whether by a course of linear or cyclical reason. For example, at the untitled *sahaf*

in Ankara, a peruser could stop and wonder just what Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh and Iris Murdoch have in common with a modern translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

As a matter of fact, Murdoch's 25th novel was titled *The Green Knight*, in which the satirical writer adapted the medieval poem into a tale of sibling rivalry. At the *sahaf* in Ankara, her sixth novel, *An Unofficial Rose* stares back at roving eyes, slim, worn, emblematic of the author's career-long creative critique of romantic love. Among other possible analyses, Graham Greene's name coincides with that of *The Green Knight*, but more, Greene, Murdoch and Waugh represent the heights of canonical British literature on par with Sir Gawain.

For a reader abroad, the presence of books in an incomprehensible language appears like the night sky to naive eyes, at a loss for the known constellations and stars, yet glimpsing narrow frames of remembrance and hearsay. Such is the case with Turkish books in a *sahaf* to a unilingual Anglophone, especially one living in Turkey, and who, exposed to the works of its authors in translation and its publishing landscape, can only wonder, how these books are read and understood in their original tongue.

There are at least two novels by Mario Levi at the untitled Ankara *sahaf*, one of which is often seen on the warped, overburdened shelves of secondhand bookstores across Turkey, namely *Istanbul Was A Fairy Tale*, an 800-page multigenerational family epic of a novel that is apparently common in Turkish, but incredibly rare in English. There are different ways of thinking about how books might end up in a *sahaf*. Were they orphaned by neglectful owners, or, perhaps more optimistically, passed down through the utterly public institution of the *sahaf*?

March 21, 2021
Ankara, Turkey

Passage

There is a secondhand bookseller across from the eastern entrance to Akmar Pasajı, or Passage, which might be understood, to an Anglophone, as a passage to an urban landscape that begins where Istanbul's Anatolian neighborhoods stretch along the Sea of Marmara, welcoming travelers from the European side of the Bosphorus with a bookish air. Its paginated redolence carries across the pedestrian mall to an older, bearded sort, who guards the closet-like space of the Müteferrika Sahaf with a hawkish eye.

As is printed on his fading, crimson sign, his shop is typified as a *sahaf*, which might best translate into English as antiquarian, including mostly but not only vintage books. It is a store of obscure literary treasures that spills out into the carless street of walkers and sitters in Kadıköy district. Yet, there is an interior, however, difficult it might be to enter. It narrows to a point, like a thin, isosceles triangle. While it is certainly permissible to look at the books, and even write down their titles, photographing them is another story.

The erudite will know that Müteferrika refers to the first Ottoman printer, a convert to Islam from Hungary who came to be known as Ibrahim Müteferrika. In the 18th century, as a young Ottoman diplomat, he was a collector of books. When he began printing dictionaries, histories and scientific studies, he was ushering in a new chapter in the integration of modernism between the traditionally Muslim and Christian nations of Eurasia. The *sahaf*, named after the pioneer printer also carries the eponymous, *Müteferrika* magazine, an outlet specializing in books.

On its outdoor display table, where a group of men congregates over tea and telephones, the Müteferrika Sahaf stacked a formidable collection of used books in English. One of them had an especially captivating title, *The Book as World* by Marilyn French, which could be regarded as a fresh way to appreciate literature, not as a practice in the acquisition and understanding of objects, or others, whether fictional, or representational, but as conceptual windows, or frames through which oneself appears, subject to creative thought.

And these are not simply variously sized rectangles fit with clear transparent glass, but form shapes previously unimagined, and are colored by filters that encompass the rainbow's spectrum of refracted diversity. Some do follow a pattern and could be discerned as part of a tradition purposed to affect the reader so as to sympathize with the universal human condition through a specific lens of sociological or historical context. In Istanbul, it is natural to find such books as *Halide's Gift* by Frances Kazan at Müteferrika Sahaf, since it reflects the locality.

On either side of Akmar Pasajı, most researchers are students, as the book market purveys a hefty supply of textbooks, as a reliable source of material by which to embark on a self-education in the English language. Throughout its musty lengths, where booksellers greet with business cards and men in black leather jackets sip tea and listen to rock music, questions are often heard. A young woman asks persistently, "Do you have Ottoman poetry?" A group of backpack-suited teenagers ambles about in search of lost time.

Like a ride on the metro in Istanbul, the bookstores of the Akmar Pasajı are packed, side-by-side like sardines. If not a walk-in closet, their simple sales floors could be said to open like garages, yet often columned by walls lined with cracked spines. Its bookshops are generally a fusion of new and used, yet there are some that do specialize in the secondhand. Among the few establishments with a strong sampling of perennial literature, of books by authors that remain canonical and urgent to the critical establishment, is a used bookshop called Sevgi.

Its compact space is all the more circumscribed by its stock, held within the furniture that ascends on a vertical plane like a range of steep mountains. Its tall bookshelves are stacked to the ceiling. There is a section where there are two hoards of English books facing each other. One is replete with commercial paperbacks long obsolescent beneath its capitalist overflow of rehashed plots and typecast characters. The other is a trove of breathtaking finds. It is not by coincidence that the literary masterworks are separated from pulp fiction.

Such *sahaf* bookshops as Sevgi at the Akmar Pasajı are testaments to the tenacity of craft literature despite the increasing virtualization of reading and the publication of new voices critically representative of largely unheard segments of global society. Nevertheless, within the deluge of contemporary cultural industries,

the significance of past explorations of consciousness in writing not only holds water but assumes a distinctive, appreciable role as part of the ongoing conversation of intellectual history, like the staple genre of the classics.

The used bookshop, Sevgi, in that sense, is a free, public zone by which to realize the cusp where late modern thought crystallized into the postmodern. The moment, as it was analyzed and symbolized through different kinds of storytelling, discursive and metaphorical, could be said to have effected an attempt at psychological self-actualization on an international scale, toward a holistic embrace that includes all of collective memory. The idea of literature as a humanist project has ever been to portray and affirm absolute inclusivity.

By that single case of shelves in the Sevgi Sahaf, a person, even alone, and simply by the power inherent in literacy, might entertain the most enduring thoughts that have echoed across the grand valley of historic time. Among the impressive sweep of books, however, is one with a singular import for readers in Turkey aspiring to become bilingual. It is a novel by Kemal Demirel, entitled, *The People of Our Home*, translated from the Turkish by Sylvia Meyer. The marvel of the publication is that it has printed the novel in both languages.

But in the stacks of Sevgi, there are studies and tracts, romances and adventures that would tingle the spine of anyone, from the university desk to the high plains. Thick chronicles like that of David Abulafia, whose book, *The Great Sea*, is subtitled, *A Human History of the Mediterranean*, stands ready for a buyer under comparably dense tracts exploring the literary, art, religious and political legacies of Western civilization. Its evergreen authors, such as Marguerite Yourcenar demonstrated an eastward focus, as in her book, *Oriental Tales*, at Sevgi.

March 5, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Market

If Turkey's beloved second-hand bookstores, known locally as *sahaf*, are where books go to pass away into oblivion, then there is one passage dedicated to their shops, in a kind of indoor mall by Galatasaray High School in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district. The passage might be seen as a stretch of bookish purgatory, a parallel universe for literati, bibliophiles, readers, bookworms, poets, scribes, writers and even the purely nostalgic, wayward, footsore urban wanderer to backtrack, one page at a time.

It is a world within worlds, like a book about books, ideal ground for anyone out for a figment of the past as its accumulation of dust piles high inside the course of hallways named, Aslıhan Pasajı, or Passage, an emporium-style market of *sahaf* bookstores that, like their books, are piled and stacked beside and on top of each other, to abandon, as overwhelmingly voluminous as the runaway thoughts of an overthinking neurotic on a particularly anxiety-ridden day.

The *sahaf* booksellers at Aslıhan Pasajı are about as diverse and eccentric as the books that they carry, however messily, in heaps that appear more like the waves of a stormy ocean than any intellectual organization of rectangular objects. And the shops themselves overlap, apparently sharing shelves at points, even the displays immediately outside of their closet-like storefronts end indistinguishably where the next slew of spines begins.

Yet, throughout its mass of tangled leaves, although often kindly delineated according to topic and language, there is not much for the contemporary English reader to find that might remain relevant to the cultural moment. That is, after all, not the point of such *sahaf* markets, offering, instead, occasional curiosities going back a century past, or entertaining, outlandish perusals across outmoded trends in popular, commercial publishing.

In a compartmentalized box, the unbearable titles of pharmacy paperbacks gleam with their rosy, kitsch coloration, glaring with fonts that convey wordplay titles and forgotten names attributed to efforts that emerged with a shelf life as trivial and cliche as the themes that their stories and characters rehashed. But within the

bluntly abysmal, there are redeeming finds that would otherwise go unnoticed by the more erudite, uppish of browsers.

In between a lightly fictionalized travelogue and a generic autobiography is the posthumous 16th-century story collection of Marguerite, Queen of Navarre, known by its title, *Heptameron*, which, after the Greek, signifies the seven-day time span in which the 70 tales of the late Renaissance queen are grouped. Not far from the worn Penguin edition, and also in English, is a collection of poems by the famed Anglophone bard, Robert Browning.

For Turkish readers, the opening shops at Aslıhan Pasajı hold interesting examples of translation that span the breadth of 20th century writing from Turkey as it has conveyed itself to the world, and returned. The late author, Moris Farhi, originally from Ankara, spent his adult life after university in London, where he became a novelist who believed in Turkey's modernism as an authentic source of universal humanism.

The penultimate novel by Farhi, titled, *A Designated Man*, appears with its cover presented boldly at the Aslıhan Pasajı *sahaf*, in Turkish, as *Atanmış Erkek*. It is a bittersweet tale of Balkan rivalries, through the prism of gender equality. And the fact that Farhi, a Turkish writer, wrote novels solely in English, and that his books are sold in Turkey, in Turkish, speaks to the transcultural nature of literature as a relay race of shared histories in translation.

While perhaps not necessarily in relation to the titles themselves, the *sahaf* is a place where the work of independent publishers nestles deep into the nooks and niches of its obscure readerships, finding authentic appreciation for having been discovered at the end of a characterful venture. Such is the case with Sub Press, an underground imprint that deals in all things Beat, and counterculture.

One of the Sub Press publications, by American music writer Mark Opsasnick shows the rattled mien of Jim Morrison on the cover of *Coffee and Poetry*, in Turkish, a collection of writings on the lost history of late 20th-century coffeehouse culture. Its placement, near to a stack of magazines, *Hayat*, or *Life* in English, with the second, 1962 issue on top, demonstrates the distinctive contrasts of mainstream society during Morrison's early years.

It was said that Morrison himself read as diversely as the holdings of an Istanbul *sahaf*, from Plutarch to Arthur Rimbaud, Albert Camus to Jack Kerouac. In fact, at a particularly aesthetically-pleasing, vintage *sahaf* down the hall from the entrance at the Aslıhan Pasaj is Kozmos, in which the Turkish translations of Kerouac's 1958 classic, *Dharma Bums* is sidelong under one of the best biographies on him, by his ex-girlfriend Joyce Johnson.

In the Istanbul *sahaf*, as they abound at the Aslıhan Pasajı, there are not only the histories of Turkish literature's readers from the past hundred years or more, but of every culture that has ever come through the grand, historic multicultural, international crossroads of the Sublime Porte. It is no wonder, then, that American literary history is aired beside earlier English momentums of books, not merely as portals for the imagination, but as mementos.

At Kozmos, there is a well-kept bookcase, displayed at the entry, sandwiched among many others, of antique English, French and German books, many of which are translations from one of these languages into another. They are generally bound as illustrated hardcovers, as valuable as they are collectible, including works by Mikhail Lermontov, Stefan Zweig, and Mark Twain.

Among these dusty, worn volumes, one caught my eye, a collection of essays, literary and critical, by the English poet Matthew Arnold. The edition was a reprint, from 1911, and on the back of its cover, there was a charming note, in pen, by a loving daughter named Elizabeth, who in the winter of 1913, had gifted that book to her father for Christmas. It can only be surmised by some wild conjuration how it fell out of the family's possession. Now, it is 50 Turkish liras.

Unlike many of the other *sahaf* bookstores throughout Istanbul, which I have surveyed from Balat to Kadıköy, Beşiktaş to the Princes' Islands, Aslıhan Pasajı held a distinctive variety of books in rarer foreign languages than that mostly manufactured by Europe's publishing market, such as a Dutch copy of the spectacular Sartre biography by the American art critic and writer Annie-Cohen Solal.

And venturing further, throughout both stories of adjacent, neighboring used bookstores of the *sahaf* kind at Aslıhan Pasajı, even in the cold, relatively airless confines of shops within shops housed within the indoor, whitely lit marketplace, many of the *sahaf* booksellers appear to inhabit ulterior dimensions of the human intellect. One eccentric *sahaf* bookseller therein can be found at his desk under a sign reading, Destine, humming to Latin grooves, surrounded by books that seemed to have teleported from other times, countries, imaginations.

February 19, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Character

The uncommon name, Zebercet, appears in the opening sentence of the novel, *Motherland Hotel* by Yusuf Atılgan, a writer who appears to have stamped the place of existentialism in postmodern Turkish literature with unparalleled verve. Zebercet is a hotel clerk and a mystifying one at that, ruled by his impulses. He is doggedly pursuant of a peculiarly mundane, however, unresolved, enigma, an empty room in his hotel.

That same persistence, a psychological obsession perhaps, is at the heart of the will that drives the uniquely Turkish tradition of the *sahaf*, or used bookshop. In the face of temporal irrelevance and utter improbability, such storefronts as Zebercet in Kadıköy's Moda neighborhood in Istanbul remain open and, in fact, well-trammeled. On a perfectly normal Thursday afternoon, a group of youth sat around the friendly *sahaf* bookseller's door and spoke of literature, life, their city and world.

On either side of the Zebercet *sahaf* there are unlikely stores that speak of the neighborhood's distinctive order of cultural sophistication. Moda Plak, meaning, Moda Vinyl, swings open, ready to entertain with its vintage sound systems, amplifiers. There is a soft lure to the record, its visceral resonance blending with urban physicality, especially complementing the *sahaf* beside it, wherein there are obscure Odeon presses of Russian classical music. And on the other side of the irresistibly quaint crimson-painted storefront, there is a boutique clothier, offering its passersby a glimpse into opportune investments in new fashions of various fuzzy and frizzy varieties. Yet, on an uninspired humdrum weekday, under the light of a gleaming sun-drenched sky, as clouds pass intermittently, the *sahaf* confidently retains its poise in reference to a dustier plane of reality, where the past is held to the utmost esteem.

As with all others, the old friend of the *sahaf* is none other than the stray cat. They are like Sancho Panza to Don Quixote, the latter symbolic of the *sahaf* itself, going along on a rather eccentric adventure, self-revolving, anachronistic, yet, by the endearing nature of their waywardness, worth accompanying, if only for a fleeting stop in the midst of an afternoon walk. Atop books that Zebercet sells on its sidewalk, a black-and-white feline is often half-asleep.

Outside Zebercet *sahaf*, inside simple wooden boxes, are proud efforts in the struggle to accentuate Turkish literature's broad taste for writers abroad: American, French, German and Russian. A slight push against the back leg of the stray cat, that while disturbed, refrains from swatting, is a 1971 translation of Henry Miller's *Nexus*, a delicious mine of stylized 20th century prose at its finest.

More locally minded, such titles abound, as Buket Uzuner's tale of Gallipoli, or a study of Turkish classics by Yahya Kemal. In the window, where a peruser might peer through into the overstocked interior, such covers as the child-friendly translation of a daily folktale compilation, or an outdated copy of a book on contemporary photography art stands ready for spirits of inquiry to fly, unencumbered by the worldly pressures of modernistic news-cycle adherence.

Inside, the faces of writers Chuck Palahniuk, a self-made yarn-spinner of legendary proportions among America's history of popular letters, and Samuel Beckett, the indispensable dramatist of literary philosophy from the worldliness of Ireland's stout linguistic talents. It is a split-level affair, with mostly Turkish material on the ground floor, and by way of a thin stairwell, a loft that leads to an assemblage of antique books from abroad that only a *sahaf* would carry.

The books of Zebercet *sahaf* are well-categorized, for all of its seeming haphazardness is merely a characteristic trait of the used bookstore, with some more disorderly than others. By virtue of its placement in the neighborhood, Zebercet, maintains a certain lucidity, so as to foreground what at times produces the rare surprise of a book that appears, as from nowhere, to speak directly to the collective subconscious of mutual intellectual interests shared by all. An elderly woman on the other side of the world was remembering her days as a reader and through the fog of her fading eyesight, did not bemoan the loss but rejoiced in a life led with the joy of having read. One of her favorites, Taylor Caldwell, had written prolifically as a contemporary of Yusuf Atılgan. Her 12th novel, *Melissa*, is a feminist portrait of a dissatisfied woman overwrought by choices in a world of men, a copy of which Zebercet acquired.

The bookseller of Zebercet *sahaf* is a kindly gentleman, whose tall height requires him to bend down slightly under the low ceiling, where, from his desk at the far

opposite end against the entrance, he collects the change that issues from purchasers and answers the questions of students and literati who have come with interest or upon a fancy. He speaks English with an unselfconscious fluency and switches back to Turkish without skipping a beat.

The world of a *sahaf* is like a secret garden in which the act of smelling one flower opens the petals of another, which although different, makes for a harmonious bouquet of bookish discoveries. With enough erudition, seeing a collection of books, just the names, titles and covers, perhaps a quick skim of the opening pages, is like entering a cafe loud with the conversation of poets, philosophers and writers of the ages.

For example, the spine of a book by the Italian modernist, Italo Svevo, appears in Zebercet's foreign fiction section, as translated into Turkish. His second book, the novel, *Senilità*, published in 1898, known in English as, *As a Man Grows Older*, or *Emilio's Carnival*, had a direct influence on Turkish author Tezer Özlü, who, since her passing in 1986, returns to the bedsides and minds of her readers with a singular charm.

And as outside, so, within Zebercet, the Turkish literary culture of the 1970s is rife with intriguing intersections, particularly when it comes to the hard-knock prose of Brooklyn-born Parisian exile Henry Miller. The other volume of his diptych to *Nexus*, titled, *Plexus* is held within Zebercet's welcoming shelves beside a slim, rare title of his, *The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder*. Translated into Turkish as early as 1967, it was Miller's nonpareil Surrealist foray.

Looking back at the street, where varicolored protuberances protect pedestrians from the frequent passage of motor vehicles, from inside Zebercet *sahaf*, under its dim strings of light bulbs that reflect off the glossy, however, washed-out, posters celebrating long-outdated fame and fortune, the *sahaf* comes into its own as a space in which to gain not only knowledge but perspective, like reading its books, written decades ago, if not a century past.

February 5, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Hall

The theater is closed, and the actors have been out of work for months but there is an unscripted, impromptu play happening not far from the stage. A man, in a loud, dramatic, speaking voice booms across the hallway around the corner from where posters for bygone productions display the pantheon of famous playwrights Bertolt Brecht, Anton Chekhov and William Shakespeare, along with local Turkish dramaturgists.

The monologist is older, likely retired, yet youthfully energetic. He is worldly, characterful and unselfconscious while demanding the attention of multiple listeners, and exacting affirmative responses from them, exclamatory praise and mechanical laughter. He is among secondhand booksellers. They file in, prior to noon, greeting each other with dreary, rote phrases, coming in from a gray, Monday rain.

A tea-stimulated young man bursts in, shouting to abandon in his postal uniform, delivering good news. There are more books yet to hold, discuss and perhaps sell out of the overstocked, literary obscurities that line the shelves and cover the ground in stacks within the four *sahaf* shops, or secondhand bookstores, open inside Moda Sahne. It is a mini-mall of used books that welcome under white lighting that glares onto dusty heaps of cultural history.

The older man emerges from a *sahaf* called Titiz, which can be translated from Turkish as “Critical” or “Meticulous." It is a requirement that a *sahaf* exhibit these qualities since the many and sundry titles in their possession are a logistical nightmare of cataloging and literacy. Yet, the *sahaf* bookseller assumes an extraordinary role, one which they perform often with the dash and quirks of the most memorable of onstage figures.

Yet, during pandemic days, the *sahaf* bookseller must practice trade customs also forwarded by coffeehouses, namely to purvey their goods before their storefronts, out in the open, so as not to attract passersby inside, where the stifling air is liable to communicate the infamous virus that is proving beyond centennial import since 1918. Without a word, a woman at her desk in Titiz swings her finger back and forth behind a strip of plastic, forbidding entry.

The outward presentation of Titiz is, like all *sahaf* facades, a smorgasbord of variegating multimedia, as immediately overwhelming as it is irresistibly enticing. The puckering visages of Norah Jones, Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley surround a hardcover, large-format coffee table book on popular clothes in Turkey, an exotic affair that seems all the more outlandish in contrast to apple-pie Americana alongside.

The cover image of the book that might translate to *Popular Dress in Turkey, 1873* features two men and a woman in striped, long robes. Their headwear is as elaborate as their sleeve cuts are wide, and they seem utterly indifferent to the lens in comparison to the images of the glamorous entertainers that encircle them. From there, the books of Titiz exemplify a similar balance, between eras Ottoman and Republican, Western and Turkish.

A novel by Bilge Karasu beside a treatise of Ludwig Wittgenstein is not dissimilar from a memoir by Ayfer Tunç beside the Snoopy cartoons of Charles M. Schulz. It is, according to the stock of Titiz, the result of eponymously meticulous selections. Such is the case with their neighbor Sercan Sahaf, which itself is also the home of Khalkedon Rare Books. Out of the slim outfit, a band of sharp young men do their work from laptops, opening new packages of antiquarian specialties.

There are shouts of bookish glee that echo down the Moda Sahne *sahaf* hall, from its end where the workers of Sercan Sahaf and Khalkedon Rare Books are realizing the accumulation of a prestigious, one-of-a-kind collection of literary legacy in Turkey. Following a passing question as to the significance of an Ottoman-Turkish journal on display, one quite vocal young man on staff responds with astonishing abruptness, kindly, yet to the point.

Besides being the home of Khalkedon Rare Books, the name a hearkening to the prehistoric settlement of Kadıköy, in English spelled Chalcedon, Sercan Sahaf is also a member of the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers, the Independent Online Booksellers Association and the International Map Collectors' Society. It is a little-known fact that Istanbul's *sahaf* shops preserve some of the world's most invaluable cartographic records.

Across from the decidedly vocal and social Sercan Sahaf and Titiz is an otherwise reclusive sort of *sahaf* bookseller. His place of business is called Eflatun Sahaf. On entering the bijou space within the shop, crowded by shelves of squeezed hardcover spines and piles of softcovers strewn haphazard, the walls seem to narrow. At the end is the man himself, silently poised over a desk under a ceiling that is nearly as low as the top of his head.

In his window are the spectrum of interests that lie somewhere buried deep in the collective Turkish and international subconsciouses of the literate and literati. From the melancholic princess of Turkish literature, Tezer Özlü, to the mad mountaineer of iconoclastic philosophical controversy, Friedrich Nietzsche, a surprisingly encompassing, if not random, sweep of bibliophilic insights ensues.

Among mostly Turkish titles, as would be expected, there are a smattering of finds to be had in English, yet their subjects appear as arbitrary as the very presence of an English book itself in context. *The Penguin Atlas of Medieval History* is embedded between a number of Turkish history books, as is Arthur Koestler's much-contested *The Thirteenth Tribe*, which argues that Ashkenazi Jews are descendants of the Turkic Khazar people.

These kinds of surprises are not uncommon at the Istanbul *sahaf*, and the slew of them inside Moda Sahne are no different in that respect. Their very visitation is cause for delight, as is the case particularly with the kitschy Rengin Sahaf, run by a casual woman who takes to her desk while watching daytime family reality dramas. Her *sahaf* bookshop doubles as a kind of altar to outmoded fame.

The door to Rengin Sahaf is filled with photographed portraits of Turkish celebrities since the advent of color film. They are tuxedoed and sun-tanned, dressed to the nines and lavishly adorned, as they look back from times long past. Inside her shop are the voices of those men and women who prioritized the conveyance of their thought in words over the fashion of their appearance. To the living, however, especially in these shifting times, any individual author, voice or face amid the growing stacks is lucky to hold a few seconds of fleeting attention.

January 25, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Faith

Two men in long, flowing *cübbe* robes, turbaned in clean white garments, were spending their Monday afternoon perusing a used bookshop. Along the row of booksellers and publishers that dot the bustling, main thoroughfare of Manyasizade Avenue in the traditional quarter of Çarşamba, there is an indoor alley replete with books, new and old. Most are arcane, glossy hardcovers with Arabic print, encompassing the central canons of Islamic studies.

These men appear to be devotees of a specific order of Sunni Islam's Sufi schools, and they literally wear their identity on their sleeves, proudly, in relatively uninterrupted continuity with the past. Çarşamba, which means "Wednesday," ostensibly named after a bygone weekly market, is the heart of the Sunni conservative *jamia* (an Arabic root word for community or gathering), known as Ismailağa, which aligns itself with the Naqshbandi spiritual order. The Ismailağa follow Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu, or as his local followers call him, Mahmut Efendi.

It is Istanbul lore that the community retained its traditions as part of a political strategy established by Kemal Mustafa Atatürk during his turbulent 15 years as the first president of the Republic of Turkey. It is said that he pardoned their outward, Ottoman-era religiosity as a buffer to stand as a pillar of strength beside the powerful Greek Orthodox community of Phanar, also spelled Fener, on the Golden Horn beside the increasingly gentrified environs of Balat.

The faith-oriented literary culture and bookshops of Çarşamba are an extension of its customs, in which small commercial outlets sell alcohol-free perfume and a premodern toothbrush called a *miswak*, which was said to have been used by the Prophet Muhammad. It is a world within a world, reminiscent of the Orthodox Jewish residents of Williamsburg, Brooklyn in New York.

The small businesses of Çarşamba exemplify the strict tenets of Muslim piety, and yet the district's eponymous *sahaf*, or secondhand bookshop, is a stash of ulterior interests. Within its acquisitions of commentaries and treatises on the Quran, and elaborations on the rules of family life as prescribed by its belief system, there are occasional intellectual insights into broader streams of modern Turkish society.

One book, in Turkish, which Çarşamba Sahaf carries, breaks the mold of its generally religious stock. It is a selection of short fiction, titled, *Selected Stories from Turkish Literature*, published by the Women's Coordination Center, and included 30 works of prose by authors who stretched the bounds of narrative style in Turkish. The best-known names are Oğuz Atay, Orhan Kemal, Sabahattin Ali, Sait Faik Abasıyanık and Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu.

As is fair from a publication by a women's society, the opening story in the book is by the female author Adalet Ağaoğlu, who passed away in July of 2020. Her short story, *Yol*, which translates to "road" or "way," appears as a signpost. Many other women writers are featured in the collection; Emine Işınsu, Fatma Karabıyık Barbarosoğlu, Ayfer Tunç, Füruzan and Afet Ilgaz, although most are men.

After the passing of Ağaoğlu at the age of 91, Turkey, and readers of Turkish literature mourned her passing, for she was loved, both on the page and in life. She was not merely skilled with the pen but spoke out, as a voice, into the free air. Ağaoğlu was an advocate for human rights. And she was a late-bloomer, as her book publishing history began when she was already in her mid-40s.

Although only two of her novels have appeared in English, her Anglophone readers lavished her with praise. In his obituary for the magazine *Cornucopia*, David Barchard compared Ağaoğlu to American writer William Faulkner, who apparently inspired her to become what he described as a "master of the flashback narrative." As Barchard explained, the appreciation of Ağaoğlu's eight novels has broken fertile ground since the 1970s, opening a middle way between Turkey's politics of polarization generally termed as a conflict between Kemalism and Islamism.

A contemporary of Ağaoğlu, while more prolific as a novelist, Emine Işınsu, took a more inward focus with her nearly 20 books steeped in philosophy and psychology. Meanwhile, the openly devout sociologist and writer, Karabıyık, trained her bookish mind on fashion, modernization and nonfiction studies of religious women. Of the same generation as Karabıyık, born in the 1960s, Ayfer Tunç found readerships in the Balkans and the Levant.

The fiction of Tunç has been translated into Arabic for readers in Syria and Lebanon in part due to the success of her short story collection, *The Aziz Bey*

Incident, which was also published in English by Istros Books. Its title is about a Turkish folk musician who roams in and out of love from Istanbul to Beirut. The English translation is by Stephanie Ateş, who further broadcast one of the stories, *The Snow Traveller*, via The Short Story Project.

Füruzan is the pen name of Füruzan Yerdelen, a writer of short fiction whose collection, *A Summer Full of Love*, is one of five selections, along with Buket Uzuner and Aziz Nesin in the Turkish-English Short Story Collections series at the London-based Milet Publishing. Füruzan worked as an actor, married a cartoonist and won awards for her stories, a couple of which appear in English translations as published online by Istanbul's elite Boğaziçi University.

In the same way that Turkish literary appreciation might tend toward male-dominance, Afet Ilgaz is remembered, if at all, in the shadow of her husband, the famous writer Rıfat Ilgaz. Yet, his wife, Afet, wrote some 30 books and in 1973, won the Turkish Writers' Union award for the best novel and novelist that year. The Women's Coordination Center did not publish a story by Rıfat in their collection.

I was just starting to work my way through the dizzying arrays of books inside the Çarşamba Sahaf, the vast majority of them as incomprehensible and unapproachable as the copy of a gilded Islamic manuscript in Russian when the bookseller stepped into the walk-in closet-sized room and asked if I was an Arab. He was wearing the garb of a local sect member and told me he would be leaving the store to pray. The message was clear.

I hesitated. I was in the middle of a yellowed paperback. It was a pocket-sized copy of *Chariots of the Gods* by the Swiss pseudo-historian Erich von Däniken, translated into Turkish by Aslı Gizem Korkmaz. Däniken's books claim that the prehistoric record reveals clues about extraterrestrial contact at the dawn of humanity. He saw "paleocontact" as a potential origin myth for spirituality. I did not believe a word, but left with a story.

January 11, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Bookish

On a cold, midweek morning in an inner-city neighborhood, the presence of culture is largely invisible. All the more so, the remnants of printed material born of foreign continents and distant hemispheres make a rather faded impression. It is the dead of winter, and as the Western world comes to grips with a forcibly untraditional holiday season, Istanbul is waking to the alarm of a singular portent, that the future which awaits the global village is nothing short of an absolute mystery. As the abnormal ensues, one of the only creature comforts left is the past, or more elaborately, nostalgia.

Within the core of Beşiktaş, a quarter famous for its football club and an otherwise confrontational stripe of local pride, especially on game nights, there are numerous havens for literati young and old. They emerge in the form of shops, cafes and mixes of the two, otherworldly portals through which to peer into the stories, thoughts and records that span the adventure of printing the written word. Each volume and tome, whether a pocket paperback or thick hardcover, cast long shadows that tell time, like sundials of leaves and spines. By its socioeconomic mix, Beşiktaş preserves a unique slice of Turkey's modern cultural heritage.

Retaining more character than a store of new books, a *sahaf*, or secondhand bookshop, speaks to the retro nature of books themselves. In his study on aging, *The Force of Character: And the Lasting Life*, American psychologist James Hillman wrote with inventive insight on the effect of time's passing. His observations, beyond that of a clinician, mine the depths of subjective psychological conditioning with a practitioner's clarity. Like that of an aging person, books transform with the seasons, and the fact that they persevere despite the overwhelming influx of digitization is indicative of the strength of their character.

Hillman drew direct inspiration from literature to form his theory of aging as a psychological phenomenon. It was specifically the *Four Quartets* by T. S. Eliot, published in the midst of another worldwide paradigm shift, in 1941. Eliot poeticized with critical scrutiny on the distinction between experience and meaning. To age is to reconcile the two, Eliot wrote, with the later crystallizing in reflection. And Hillman echoed the process, noting that it is not defined by a sense

of loss, as in the Proustian imagination. Curiously, it is books, and perhaps more exactly, aged or secondhand books, that contextualize experience as meaning.

To paraphrase another wise saying on the idea of books in relation to age, it was the American poet and translator Gary Snyder who said that in Western culture, books are elders. An oft-quoted African proverb reaffirms the statement, telling of how the death of an old person was mourned as if a library had burned to the ground. But when the present moment demands the full attention of a society bent on returning to an earlier state of balance, the previous past is sidelined, and history's pivots switch. It is potentially the case that life before COVID-19 may take on a bygone appeal in the same way that film posters from the 1970s are dustily alluring.

In an instant, the results of searching online maps garner at least six *sahaf* shops in Beşiktaş, though, in reality, circumstances are apt to be more fickle and subject to changes unforeseen by even the most advanced algorithmic intelligence. In a human landscape, especially one in the midst of a universal health care crisis, the opening and closing of nonessential marketplaces, like that selling rarefied cultural products such as vintage books, is a world of extraordinary caprice. But, however abstract from mainstream economic activity, I was confident that Beşiktaş would still be selling its old, used books.

What would have been the likeliest option for a seeker on the path of appreciating secondhand books on a casual workday outing, Beşiktaş Sahaf and Vinyl House, was covered in curtains, chairs and boxes. Although unlit and locked, I was not deterred and simply asked the next door shopkeeper when it might open. He said in a couple of hours, so I sauntered off and headed to the next *sahaf* on the list, through the winding, steep alleys in the cobblestoned bowels of Beşiktaş. Nestled into a storefront along a sloping street, Aksoy Sahaf was closed without a book in sight.

Next, within a multistory mall, where there were at least two new bookshops in its immediate environs, any semblance that a *sahaf* may have existed had been completely struck from the physical plane, although one of their names, "Afili Sahaf" was still displayed on the floor plan guide. Up to a broad avenue, the formidable acquisitions of "Djoyen Sahaf," which normally exhibits exceptional,

large-format titles on history and geography along its glass wall for sidewalk-strolling passersby were shuttered. Its treasury of collectible books inside was reduced to a modest sampling of studies on art, archaeology, fashion and botany.

Inside another mall, called Sinanpaşa and modeled like a modernist caravanserai, cheap Christmas lights dangled over a staircase that led from tacky clothiers, phone repairmen and outmoded tailors to carts of books, many of which seemed to be defunct textbooks. And the empty square in which the books were stored were organized for customers in an utterly counterintuitive manner. It was a pure enigma of salesmanship. The corridors between shelves were so narrow that even a fit person could barely pass through, never mind take out a book. And titles were barely visible, stacked in masses sidelong so that only the white of the pages could be seen.

After that conundrum, reminiscent of a Borgesian literary puzzle, I returned to the namesake of the neighborhood's bookish history, Beşiktaş Sahaf and Vinyl House. I arrived just before noon, and a young man with a yellow winter coat was opening shop, focused with earbuds firmly inset as he listened to music to start a new workday. His youth and the cultural artifacts surrounding him were at odds. A Turkish poster from the original Star Wars Trilogy gleamed in the overcast light, gray and gold. I found Greek and French vinyl beside Turkish classics. Finally, I saw books, literature. It was a promised land of time suspended in ageless thought.

December 24, 2020
Istanbul, Turkey

Pier

From the docks of Beşiktaş, it is a brisk walk to Ortaköy, traversing a straight, busy road of stone walls lined with portraits of the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, intermittently passing the exquisite architectural facades of Bosphorus palaces and the rolling hills of pastoral inner-city gardens. At the storied waterfront neighborhood, once a village, and now shaded by the recently renamed July 15 Democracy and Martyrs Bridge, the six-pointed star and high-security gate to the Tree of Life synagogue is a bold reminder of the historic social complexity that expresses Istanbul in storytelling, both written and spoken.

And it is on the pier of Ortaköy furnished with a row of used booksellers, also known by the Turkish appellation of *sahaf*, where literary tales commingle with the immediate presence of architectural wonder, and the words that issue uninhibited, freely and with a wry sense of humor from the mouths of those who while away their hours observing, remembering and recounting visions of old. It is with likeminded pleasure, by the mark of endurance, that the books collected and sold at Ortaköy reflect the lingering echoes of times passed.

Some booksellers are absent, their shops closed by a heavy, corrugated metal barrier so as to protect the invaluable stocks of paginated wisdom within. Yet, at the end of the line where the slim closet rooms of books are stacked and shelved underneath signs indicating their purveyor, a man named Volga is wary of the close quarters as he welcomes bibliophiles into his densely packed commercial space. He stops eating his plain *börek* pastry and kindly offers to host inquiries, and impromptu research into his splayed catalog.

As an American art writer in Istanbul, what caught my eye, firstly, was a picture book by the renowned 19th-century seascape painter Winslow Homer. The self-taught artist and I share the same birthplace, namely Massachusetts, although he is from the capital, and I was born in the rural western forests. But I was raised on the oceanfront and spent my formative years looking out onto the liquid horizons that Homer would eternalize and emblazon into the art history of American realism. The cloudy froth of Atlantic waves on the cover made me nostalgic.

And zooming over to local interest, I gravitated to the magnum opus of Turkish novelist Mario Levi, titled, *Istanbul Was A Fairy Tale*. The 800-page tome is a stout chronicle of life in a Jewish family, across a sweep of generations from the 1920s to the 1980s. I have always wanted to find its rare English translation, so when I see the Turkish original, the lure of finding it in my native language one day is strengthened. Volga watched, wordlessly, as I was fixated on the spines of his neatly arrayed hoard of literature.

A young preadolescent fellow named Ali was maintaining two shops beside Volga with a shrewd sensibility. Ali was ostensibly the son, or close relation to Volga, as whenever I asked about the price of a book, he would run and ask just what to do. It made the prospect of buying all the more tantalizing, so as to entertain the boy and give him the self-esteem that might come with making a sale. It was the day before the first night of Hanukkah, and I was in Ortaköy, where, in 2015, modern Turkey's inaugural public Hanukkah ceremony was celebrated.

I happened on a book wrapped in clean, clear plastic, a method to preserve vintage classics in the *sahaf* world of unexpected, priceless finds. The Turkish translation of an obscure, slim volume by French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre dangled from a string, showing its title, *The Jewish Question*. The famed author wrote the book-length essay in 1944 after the Liberation of Paris from German occupation in World War II. The piece analyzes anti-Semitism, enlightening with respect to Ortaköy's significance in regional Jewish history.

Although the price of the Sartre book was penciled in, at 35 Turkish liras, however illegibly under the cover, Ali ran to Volga's shop next door and confirmed the price. Then, the poems of James Joyce appeared before me. In my studies and readings, I did not appreciate these precious gems of English literature and so was apt to spend the last bills in my wallet on the pocket-sized book. Ali bargained the price down 10 Turkish liras. I was still 5 short. He responded, "It's not my problem."

The neighboring *sahaf*, next to the second outlet Ali was busily managing from a height of about 150 centimeters, was run by a familiar face. The shopkeeper, Tahsin T. Kılıçarslan, was quick to recall that we may have met before. He produced his business card, which bore the image of a house formed by a stack of open books, with its roof a slightly opened tome, out of which a chimney emits

letters. Tahsin was all smiles, opening his arms to my bookish fascination as he confidently showed me the Instagram page of his *sahaf*, named, Çatı, meaning "roof" in Turkish.

It was then that I came upon, *Panther in the Basement*, a short novel by Israeli writer Amos Oz, who was lionized for his prolific contribution to Hebrew letters. It was an irresistible, compulsive buy on my part, though one that I felt necessary to make within the holiday spirit, inspired by the spiritual ambiance of Ortaköy, a fusion of cultures and faiths, that, like a book, is an invitation to bygone worlds that age beautifully, if not with a bittersweetness. Tahsin was as generous as he was kind, offering a discount without hesitation, as a pleasant gesture.

In the midst of winter, as a global pandemic reaches a fever pitch in the masked face of vaccine anticipation, political controversy and personal metamorphosis, the Ortaköy *sahaf* gallery lends a peculiarly comforting experience. It provides a link to the Istanbul of the past before the new normal set unprecedented paradigm shifts into motion while allowing for cultural activity to perpetuate and communicate the legacies of thought, writing, art and music that have preceded contemporary life.

At the end of the row of *sahaf* shops in Ortaköy, a man appeared to be quite very eccentric by his mannerisms, greeting with a rather introspective attitude. And as a group of women told jokes in the open-air market, he was underlining sentences in an antique hardcover. He sat and studied in broad daylight, as the clouds parted and the sunshine carried waves of optimism over the Bosphorus, uncommon in the often overcast winter between two seas and two continents, where, despite the problems of the world, a man could find peace over an open book.

December 11, 2020
Istanbul, Turkey

Nostalgia

It is a cleaning day for Hamza the bookseller, and he is not in a good mood. Books, especially second-hand books, spell clutter for contemporaries, who are tasked with mining the vast cultural industries of centuries past. Hamza, the shopkeeper at Kuzguncuk Sahaf, is a bespectacled, serious young man, dressed neatly in a plain, grey sweater, suitable for autumn, over a collared shirt. His guests mostly pass by, outside the entrance to his shop, which is rife with heaps of fallen stacks, uncategorized and disorganized.

A *sahaf*, in Turkish, translates, loosely, to the beloved used bookshops that have become one of the cultural mainstays of cities throughout Turkey, where vintage volumes, vinyls and visions of the past in all of their sundry manifestations come back to haunt, satisfyingly, far-flung urban explorers and unsuspecting locals alike. The Kuzguncuk Sahaf is uniquely poised to offer a reflection of its neighborhood history, where Armenian, Greek, Jewish and Muslim Turkish inhabitants once lived as friends and family.

Hamza, however, is busy vacuuming in between the nooks and crannies left dusty in the single room, which is overwhelmed with printed and multimedia materials, in boxes, shelved and otherwise displayed on the walls or hidden under layers of olden figments of long histories. If someone asks a question in passing from the street about a book he might carry, his answer is usually in the negative. And yet, the erudite inhabitants of Kuzguncuk are as progressive as they are steeped in an altogether unique island of sometimes obscure, socio-historical perspectives.

The Kuzguncuk Sahaf is not entirely eccentric. It is stocked with new books, uncreased spines and unmarked pages, and located along the main thoroughfare in the quarter that stands out like a diamond in the rough of Üsküdar, where municipal mandates restrict bars and the like from what has become, instead, the atmosphere of a small town at nights. Kuzguncuk, in that sense, is a singular world unto itself in Istanbul, a veritable village on the Bosphorus as it was once known to its multicultural networks across the Black Sea.

I lived in Kuzguncuk for a year. It was there where I gained ground to refresh my career, approaching arts journalism in Turkey, a country I never dreamed of calling

home. Its nostalgia, precious to national consciousness as a place where historic, religious and ethnic minorities once lived together for generations, evokes my former days whiling away weekend afternoons in its cafes, peering out over the blue waves of the Bosphorus from its modest coastal park, breathing in the fresh air of its community garden.

I would drift past the Kuzguncuk Sahaf like a breeze, offering Hamza a kind greeting. But I had never fully perused the books that he sells, even if haphazardly. That said, the books that he has labeled and shelved are clearly delineated according to genre, topic and language. Mostly, when I lived in Kuzguncuk, the idea of appreciating writing in Turkish was a fantasy, yet, as the seasons have changed and I have remained, moving back and forth across the Bosphorus over the years, I have come to admire Turkey's diverse publishing industry.

From outside the shop, which is on a corner along Icadiye Avenue, a road lined with open-air and street-side cafes aplenty in creative collaboration with gallerists, restauranteurs, ceramicists and landscapers, Hamza curated a distinctive display, including multiple editions of *The Little Prince*, in Turkish and Russian. A hardbound copy of the world classic, *1984* by George Orwell, is a reminder that dystopia, especially in the era of a global pandemic, is closer to reality than perhaps previously thought. But anyone who knows Kuzguncuk has realized that, besides conserving remnants of social diversity, it is a place where individuals are freer to be themselves, quietly able to integrate more universal identities into daily life, like being a poet or painter. At his storefront, Hamza presents a bilingual volume, *Microhistory of the Turkish Poets (1920-2016)* beside the influential text, *Portraits* by John Berger, and coffee table books on the 16th-century artists Pieter Bruegel and Giuseppe Arcimboldo.

Kuzguncuk Sahaf, like many surrounding small businesses, relays the neighborhood as it is experienced in the popular imagination of Istanbul, with its antique homes, renovated to their proud aesthetic largely by the late architect Cengiz Bektaş, their slim brick-lain builds and bay windows hanging over the peopled streets with vibrant textures and homely moods. There is arguably no painter who visualized this ideal more prolifically than Lesya Demchenko, whose canvases are exhibited between books and on the walls of the Kuzguncuk Sahaf.

Demchenko's artwork has become part of the Kuzguncuk experience, reflecting the soul of its century homes, their eternal character uniquely apt as a frozen, unforgettable moment in time by the tip of a paintbrush. The works of fellow neighborhood artist, a portrait illustrator who goes by Aptulika, adorn the bibliophilic walls of the Kuzguncuk Sahaf. For my first art review while living in the neighborhood, I wrote about a gallery show by Aptulika in the basement of the bookstore Nail Kitabevi, built by the Balyan brothers, famous modernist architects.

Another fixture is the poet Can Yücel, who lived on an alley now bearing his name not far uphill from the Kuzguncuk Sahaf. It is rumored that, in a bathrobe in slippers, he would stroll past the shopkeepers and gardeners along Icadiye Avenue, which prior to modern urbanization flowed with a stream, before sitting at the shorefront fish restaurant to poeticize. His poem, *Man's Principle Law* goes, "This is man's law of reason: to convert water to light / to render the dream true / to make the enemy a friend!" as translated by Ruth Christie.

Kuzguncuk Sahaf carries a number of the original Turkish-language poetry books that Yücel published to unrivaled acclaim throughout his life. He became something of a personality, his bushy white crest of hair crowning his burly, bearded face, as a man's man, and a poet's poet who waxed nostalgic about Kuzguncuk in his direct, sensual verse. With its idiosyncratic cast of characters, Kuzguncuk is rife with material for the theater, which makes Metin And's book, *A Short History of Turkish Theater*, also at Kuzguncuk Sahaf, essential.

I am consistently, pleasantly surprised by the breadth and depth of literary material, both to read, and as inspiration for writing, at the *sahaf*, and that which Kuzguncuk maintains is certainly characteristic. Whether it is an unweathered tract on Balkan cinema by Dina Iordanova or a 1930 edition of a French play by Marcel Pagnol, signed by its previous owner in 1968, discoveries run the gamut of the world's cultural geography. Even its dustier books, like, *Armenian Letters, Turkish Texts* by Kevork Pamukciyan still speak volumes.

November 5, 2020
Istanbul, Turkey

Perusal

The walls of the used bookstore, Balat Sahaf, are very talkative. They speak in poetry, prose and in the music, theater and film of bygone days when Istanbul's culture had a homegrown vitality that is all but lost, preserved by such capsules of memory as are confined to the dusty pages and grainy recordings found, often by chance, in the city's secondhand literary knickknack shops, known, adoringly, by the local Turkish appellation of the *sahaf*.

As a resident of Istanbul, I have tended to favor Balat as quaint, lovable, akin to other sweet locales tucked away inside the bustling megalopolis, such as the serene Kuzguncuk, or the lively Arnavutköy. Yet, Balat is unparalleled for its evocation of history. Istanbul's oldest surviving synagogue, Ahrida, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in neighboring Fener, are irresistible lures to appreciate the world's heritage of Byzantine civilization.

From the busy port of Eminönü, floating fish restaurants compete for customers among bread stalls, coffee stands and newspaper kiosks. Along the inlet mythicized, in English, by its antique, Grecian title of Golden Horn, the ruins of one of humanity's most impressive examples of archaic urbanization lead to clusters of waterfront cafes and restaurants, empty lot gardens, antique auctioneer shops, winding cobblestoned streets and rentable varicolored apartments.

Balat emerges beside its citified sibling, Fener, a contiguous, revitalized district with a name that recalls the inlet's storied medieval lighthouse. Traces of Greek society, such as the occasional *meyhane* tavern, remain, as with a long-standing Roma community, and more obscure evidence of boulevards that, until the early 20th century, were the toast of Jewish life in old, Ottoman Istanbul.

The plain, unremarkable Balat Sahaf is housed behind an entirely transparent, glass storefront on one of the two main pedestrian roads that make up Balat's core. Before its alleys lead uphill past the iconic architectural gem of Phanar Greek Orthodox College, Balat Sahaf is a few steps from the Bulgarian "Iron" Church, legendary because in the 1890s, Viennese architects shipped the frame of its metal structure over the Danube, Black Sea and past the Sublime Porte.

Opposite the sleepy exterior of Balat Sahaf is a vestige of the neighborhood's past, where the Jewish doctor Davit Eskinazi continues to see patients out of his walkup tenement examination office, as one of the last of the proudly diverse community of Sephardic, Romaniote and Karaite religionists. And by its transparent entryway, it is common to see a nondescript middle-aged man in a plaid, collared shirt dozing off as stray dogs pass.

Beside him, under the soporific hum of a midday snore, there is the rustling overgrowth of a healthy olive tree, its bushy, silvery-green leaves poking out from under the foundation of a half-demolished, traditional stone home still protected by a formidable iron gate. In animated, green typescript, "Balat Sahaf" appears, twice, above the phone number of the frugal business that is wanting for a sleeker sense of design, however, couched in its charming irrelevance.

Once inside, the reticent but friendly shopkeeper Izzet Yılmaz is busy fixing an outmoded cassette player, as springs and reels pop and unravel to his increasing befuddlement. He is surrounded by a staggering amount of premillennial media, those scratchy vinyls and discs, finicky tapes and the like spanning the multicultural range of vintage cultures that exists only in the heaven-sent return of what ghostly imaginations linger among the living.

After fielding some phone calls, Yılmaz sits at a rickety desktop computer, besieged on all sides by overstocked shelves and leaning stacks of books and ephemera. He then catalogs a few newly acquired titles, including an invaluable copy of the Turkish translation of Richard Wright's seminal African-American memoir, *Black Boy*, initially published in 1945. Yılmaz then quietly offers his guests tea out of a makeshift kitchen set in the bibliophilic chaos.

The organization of books and printed material at Balat Sahaf comes in waves of order, yet adheres to nothing resembling any particular earthly shape. It is an amorphous jungle of spines and leaves, bound and scattered, as multilingual as those who were said to have lived in the shadow of the biblical Tower of Babel. Like the eternal fable of human striving to heaven, or unity, out of its innate diversity, Balat Sahaf evokes a parallel epic in modern publishing.

Despite the wide array of obsolete names, titles and works, which might otherwise be reduced to the pulp of a paper mill, there are, at Balat Sahaf, intriguing discoveries to be made for the contemporary-minded reader. On the other side of the city, in the shorefront quarter of Tophane in the heart of Beyoğlu, a cafe called Riverrun, in reference to the words of James Joyce, quadruples as a seller of new books, an art gallery and publisher Norgunk, specializing in boutique artist books.

Balat Sahaf happens to carry a twin edition of a Norgunk book of sketches by the painter and sculptor Abidin Dino. They are exquisitely crafted slim volumes. One is dedicated to the sketching of hands, the other of faces. If a curious art-lover of a bookworm cracks open, *Hand*, they may be transported to Dino's public sculpture by Istanbul's forested Maçka Park, in which the artist conceived an Escher-like vision of fingers, nails and palms. Also in relation to Istanbul's downtown scene, Balat Sahaf has a rare backlog that encompasses the oeuvre of the Turkish-Jewish poet and painter Habib Gerez, who, even into his twilight years, eighty-something and ageless, continues to host guests at his Galata studio with all of the gusto and charisma one might expect from a 20th-century, European bohemian. Balat Sahaf sells his collected nonfiction, loosely translated, *Those Who Speak to the Wind*.

Of note is the fact that Balat Sahaf also stocks the art magazine, *RES*, an imprint of Dirimart, one of Istanbul's proudest sources of interaction with the global art world. But what is most exciting about Balat Sahaf, in my opinion, is its treasury of magazines, particularly dating from the immediate decades following World War II, when Turkey's midcentury, Cold War-era affairs with cultural globalization made for some perpetually fascinating fusions of the creative industry. And with an intellectual disposition for oblique means and references by which to approach novel appreciations of Turkish culture, such troves of cerebral insight as that which the Balat Sahaf offers, and truly every *sahaf*, are indispensable. One book buried in the shop, *Mural Ceramics in Turkey* by Marie de Carcaradec, contextualizes the Turkish modernist Füreya Koral, or *The Arrangement*, a minor novel by Elia Kazan, published in 1967, might shed light on the author's Ottoman origins.

October 19, 2020
Istanbul, Turkey

Recycling

While winding down the storied Yüksek Kaldırım Avenue (which roughly translates to "steep road," and lives up to its title), as it twists and descends alongside Galata Tower, I peruse the tantalizing variety of musical instrument boutiques and often wander where some outlets also craft Black Sea fiddles and *saz* folk guitars. Around a smooth corner dotted with cafes by Şahkulu Street, I like to visit an affable, though reserved bookseller named Cuma at his *sahaf*, or secondhand bookshop, which he curiously calls “Fahrenheit 451 Recycling Store.”

The cool basement spot is a witty nod to the theme of the classic 1953 novel, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury in which canonical works of literature are preserved from book-burning authorities by a community who recite them aloud by heart in a nature hideout. Fahrenheit 451 Recycling Store houses a trove of textual gems, spanning a hearty slice of the globe’s breadth of publishing and thought down the ages. Cuma is as affable as he is withdrawn, yet delights in impromptu conversations about art, writing and life.

As much as his patrons come to survey his ever-surprising stock of faded spines, bound leaves and worn hardcovers, I am equally happy to greet Cuma, as he seems to appreciate every opportunity to connect with mutual friends and bookworm regulars out to voice their latest whimsies of daily reflection or, in the case of foreigners, their smatterings of Turkish. Cuma speaks English softly, slowly and carefully but enjoys all the more to exchange pleasantries in Turkish even if in response to heavily accented, slight, broken attempts.

That said, his penchant for small talk, tete-a-tete, is eclipsed by the grandiose scope of the impassioned dialectics and imaginative storytelling that grace his shelves. After all, Cuma and the few sorts able to squeeze into his humble place of business, perhaps no more at a time than can be counted on one hand, are just small, world-weary individuals, navigating the inner-city humdrum for some magic of insight that might leap from the lines of a dusty paragraph and speak the truth.

Tastefully decorated with potted plants, and before an entry painted in vibrant stripes of sky blue, brick red and turmeric yellow, the cellar door is inviting, as its dank air soothes overheated amblers in need of the grounding shade of a stone-

walled interior. On either side, books aplenty bloom up, as from the cobblestoned alleyway. One quirky box is labeled “Try a Blind Date with a Book” and holds empty notepads beside the reason for its alluring display, paperbacks wrapped in newspaper, each inscribed with colorful descriptions of the mysterious narratives that wait for the more uninhibited and exploratory of silent listeners. One book, enclosed in opaque brown construction paper, is intriguingly itemized as by an English author, a collection of short stories set or written in the 19th century that “will make your blood freeze.” Yet another, enveloped in white paper, is a “magnificent and lavish story” of Russian royalty in the far north, featuring characters “with a revolutionary soul and a simple, village man yearning for more.” The blurbs are priceless, teasing deep-rooted interest with a subtle, calculated effect out of footsore urbanites and sightseers with short attention spans.

Immediately, even by a sideways glance, the outdoor shelves are furnished to catch the eyes of nationals and expatriates alike, with stories and studies by famous modern authors like Jean Paul Sartre, whose work, *The Communists and Peace* may continue to galvanize young minds into politicized, existentialist Francophiles, or by the globally renowned American playwright Arthur Miller, whose Brooklynite love letter, *A View from the Bridge*, still fires the soul of working-class intellectual thespians.

Cuma hosts a peculiarly idiosyncratic, yet familiar collection of collectibles that make up the inner world of the *sahaf*, exhibiting the staple vintage typewriter, for example, next to obscure and cult references to lesser-known literary histories. A cubby beside the door is open, with its fragmented brick background, for all to see an enlightened hoard of printed material in dialogue with the greater cultural sphere in which Istanbul’s core has been situated for the better part of the millennium. Firstly, Jason Goodwin’s singular scholarship on Ottoman history, *Lords of the Horizons*, lays beside Orhan Pamuk’s novel, *Snow*, for an obvious local focus. But from there, Fahrenheit 451 Recycling Store then transports seers and bibliophiles into a venture through the intellectual landscape of Turkish literacy. A rare English translation of a science fiction detective novel by the Polish writer Stanislaw Lem, *The Chain of Chance*, together with the philosophical journal publication, *Nihilism Today*, makes for an especially invigorating cognitive fusion beside a hardcover copy of a Slavoj Zizek treatise in Cyrillic script under the illustrated fantasy magazine, *Heavy Metal*.

I am as excited about different editions of books as I am about the books themselves, as it reveals an essential aspect of publishing, that being the editorial history of reading. Fahrenheit 451 Recycling Store has a special section dedicated to English books that are either or both first editions or signed. Among the titles in the secure care of Cuma is an ample sampling of gilded, perennial issues of the English polymath Aldous Huxley, who transformed the art of fiction into experiments in social philosophy.

Brave New World and many of Huxley's other timeless works are acquirable at Fahrenheit 451 Recycling Store, beautifully illustrated by Heron Books, or in a stellar imprint by Chatto & Windus, rightly immortalizing the humanist luminary. With respect to the criticism of Huxley, veritable books within books, so the *sahaf* is a fine resource from which to embark into broader avenues of amateur scholarship. For that, I came across, *Books on Turkey*, issued by Pandora, which details a wildly comprehensive list of titles.

What is even more striking, however, is that Cuma trades in treasuries of art history, with quite specific regional significance. A large-format coffee table book, *Jewish Art*, edited by British historian Cecil Roth offers a scintillating parallel to the idea of Islamic art when it comes to a shared, Semitic religious heritage of calligraphic and sculptural creativity in contrast to the mainstream aesthetic traditions of Western globalization that have stemmed from European painting.

Finally, I was pleasantly gripped by the discovery of a series of tracts by the artist and academic Ipek Duben, who, together with Istanbul Bilgi University Press, published a groundbreaking commentary on the history of Turkish art and its criticism, spanning its early beginnings from 1880 to 1950, and as co-editor on an overview of Turkish contemporary art in the 1980s. At nearly 80 years old, Duben mounted a solo show of her art at Pi Artworks in Karaköy. That her writing is at Fahrenheit 451 Recycling Store equally proves the enduring relevance of her work and that of the *sahaf*.

September 28, 2020
Istanbul, Turkey

Antiquarian

It was on a gray, drizzly Sunday dedicated to late summer exploring when I spotted a shopping cart brimming with books in front of an unlit doorway on Heybeliada, the second-largest of Istanbul's Prince Islands. The storefront mantle above read, “Antiquarian Books” and beside it by a polished window decorated with latticed wood was its other rustic sign, “Heybeli Sahaf.”

Staple fixtures among Istanbul’s narrow, winding streets, the *sahaf* is a type of secondhand bookstore that can be found all over Turkey. The small shops offer the bookish, vintage and otherwise archaic media of bygone decades for those out to discover a new story, hear another voice, or read and listen again to their peculiar tastes.

Crowned by a colorful glass facade, the quaint bookshop anchors the breezy, spacious intersection it shares with a vibrant florist, a furniture repairman and a trendy espresso cafe. Nazım Hikmet Erkan, the otherwise melancholic and aloof bookseller and shopkeeper, was reading, grumbling and walking about the corner as I approached. Before I could reach the shop, a man stopped for a moment outside and raised his voice loud enough for Erkan to hear. He requested a book. Erkan scratched his head as the man outside grew more impatient by the second. A *sahaf* may be a place of compulsory buys and whimsical wants, but at its heart, it is – at least according to the dreamy poise of Erkan – a space to stop, breathe and ponder. But the impatient customer had missed the memo.

As with all bookshops, temptation beckoned near the door, where books aplenty had been arranged so weary, excitable eyes could easily sweep across their titles. Among the stacks outside the *sahaf* was a book on the Turkish poet Nazım Hikmet, the laureate of modern Turkish verse, a study of the bard’s influence on the stage and screen. Farther down the pile was a photographic lineup highlighting the work of French humanist photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson and the "Eye of Istanbul," Armenian Turkish photojournalist Ara Güler. For hopeful aficionados looking to delve further behind the lens, Walter Benjamin’s *A Short History of Photography* was also in the mix. Beside them was an indispensable volume on the Prince Islands, *Heybeliada* by local historian, professor Akillas Millas.

Nearby, a rickety brown table claiming space on the sidewalk caught my eye. It had purposefully been left empty, sporting a makeshift, stained sign that read "10 liras" and promised the opportunity to spread out the literary treasures that surely awaited within. The tabletop offering a quiet place to peruse literary gems and the teetering stack of books successfully lured me through the door. Once inside, external light, diffused by ample cloud cover, filtered in softly, welcoming me as dust particles floated off the broken spines and yellowed pages of the many shelves tested by the weight of the bound and inked leaves. There are two floors, but Erkan cautions patrons against venturing above. It is dangerous and the books are much older (that was what he said, anyway). A more adventurous patron may have interpreted this warning as an irresistible challenge, but I opted to avoid the potential risk for my maiden visit.

Ideally, entering the otherworldly, somewhat anachronistic suspension of time that is the *sahaf*, particularly when distanced on an island in the Marmara Sea, means discovering many things anew. And Antiquarian Books does not disappoint. Behind its brittle covers and sepia-toned guise is a localized complex of chance breakthroughs.

Whether horizontal, vertical, stacked on the floor or crammed against planks and walls, the sprawl of books and printed material inside Heybeli Sahaf can be daunting for roving minds trying to scan for favorite wordsmiths and beloved voices of silent storytelling.

Luckily, Erken has instilled some order to the chaos, not only for the Turkish literature but also for his broad, pointed section for foreign language literature – though even this system, as per *sahaf* tradition, requires ponderous meandering through the titles. The English section's top shelf, for example, has a timeless quality, as popular nonfiction by Yuval Noah Harari appears next to an antique edition of the 1898 short story collection *A Day's Work* by English author Rudyard Kipling. Off to the side, the sunflower-hued cover of Illuminations and a series of essays by German Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin are upright and front-facing, with the author's profile unmissable. With an introduction by fellow German Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt, Benjamin's work is a renowned trove of insights on art, literature and philosophy, something like a *sahaf* within the *sahaf*.

There is some semblance of sections on the first floor of the *sahaf*. So, if browsing for hours isn't your cup of tea, the first floor of Antiquarian Books could be divided into four sections: the lefthand side is dedicated to Turkish literature in general; the anterior to foreign language literature, including English, French, German and Greek; the right side to large-format photography, fashion, travel and design coffee table books; and the posterior to music records.

Bookshops offer the opportunity to penetrate the voices, ideas, experience, drama and imagination shared throughout the world. The *sahaf* offers an even deeper, quieter experience, often forcing you to hunt for the knowledge among an eclectic – often disorganized – medley of poetry and prose. As such, it could be said *sahaf* managers like Erkan sell time-worn narratives to the rest of humanity.

The shop is brimming with myths, facts, stories, folktales, history and much more, many of which are based on Turkey, Istanbul and the Prince Islands. The words harbored within are just waiting to snag curious minds who stray for a moment only to end up captivated by the stratified pages. Adding to the charm, the bustling island and Turkey's deep-rooted history offer the perfect backdrop for the current of this literary phenomenon to meander and flow.

September 21, 2020
Istanbul, Turkey

Seaside

By the citified airs of Çalış Beach, where a veritable transplant of British society has cropped up along the Aegean Sea, a bike path meanders down the broad promenade looking out into the wide, hilly bay of Fethiye. It ends just before the road diverges, turning speedy cyclists into footsore walkers as the way ascends to vantage points where the island-dotted, infinite coastal horizon leads to open sea.

As the blue bike path turns to the dark gray concrete of the pedestrian sidewalk, a wide storefront displays high turnstiles chock-full of paperbacks. They are generally commercial, genre bestsellers of yore, their obsolescent lifespans reduced to curiosities, readerships transformed from consumers to researchers. But the romantic tendencies that birthed their stereotypical plots and typecast characters still retain traces of inspiration, however faded.

I came across this particular *sahaf* bookstore, after a quick search from where I was staying at the other end of the bike path. While more familiar with the plethoras of options by which to explore *sahaf* shelves in Istanbul, I found one, "Fethiye Sahaf Kitabevi," apparently a token *sahaf* in the smallish beach town that offers a quaint, although at times overly touristic urban environment for people dreaming in the turquoise ambiance of the Aegean region.

At nights, the bookseller is a young busybody named Nazlı, who carefully roams the stands and cases, stacks and displays. "Are you looking for something specific?" she asked with a kind eye.

"No, just looking," I said as the sun went down over the impressive liquid aquamarine landscape beyond. They play a low, local radio station, as most potential patrons scan the immediate sections of books and knickknacks outside the facade along the walkway.

I have a confession to make. I did not bike along the bike path to the *sahaf*. I was driving an automatic motorbike scooter. These are rentable for a steal around town, and even at a speed of no more than 60 kilometers per hour (37 mph), they offer ample passage in all directions to such locales as Ölüdeniz or farther afield, to

Kabak over the expansive Kelebek Valley. Even at the helm of these modest machines, the ambiance of Fethiye is as transporting as it is pacific.

To stop for the time it would take to find a book of interest at Fethiye Sahaf Kitabevi only adds to the peaceable mood. Yet, this particular *sahaf* is not like those found in Istanbul, for example, where perceptive minds rove with incomparable abandon, out to raise their intellectual capacities in the hard-to-get cultural acquisition of the historic alleyways and avenues in the storied city of 16 million people.

Fethiye Sahaf Kitabevi is particularly poor in terms of having organized the English books separately from their Turkish stock, or the random French or German title, or other language titles for that matter. I was as surprised as I was disappointed by the selection of rare, stray volumes for sale on the heavily settled Aegean coastline. Yet, a lightning strike of comic history appeared when the autobiography of Lenny Bruce reared its creased spine.

And not far from it, there was a more or less highbrow study of the art of Marc Chagall by the Italian essayist Lionello Venturi, translated into English and printed with a brilliant series of images representative of the early modern migrant artist's eternal oeuvre. Beneath the hardcover, an original black watercolor was folded inside. The discovery raised more questions than answers but contributed to the magical atmosphere common to every *sahaf*.

One of the sweet, endearing qualities of Fethiye Sahaf Kitabevi is a couple of pieces of furniture inscribed with literary gems. Inside the shop, by the bookseller's desk, over which Nazlı can be found worrying about her upcoming university exams while navigating phone calls and Anglophone passersby, there is a simple table and two chairs. Over the surface, a quote by the classic novelist Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar is sprawled in white, handwritten marker script.

Out back, in the yard of Fethiye Sahaf Kitabevi, shelves of outdoor bookcases packed to the brim lead to a stone bench on which poems are engraved. It stirs the tenor of the place with a creative hum, silent and searching like minds that wish and wonder for stories, thoughts or simply a saying to enlighten their path in the

noosphere, a brief stopover, a reprieve from the often overly physical nature of life experience.

While it would appear that Fethiye Sahaf Kitabevi is not entirely concerned with presenting a neat, concerted collection of books in English, their titles in Turkish are admirable, up-to-date and replete with works of unfaltering relevance for young generations of readers. Among them is the Turkish translation of *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, one of America's most prominent journalists on Black issues and identity politics.

After taking in more pressing worldly concerns, it is always good to let off some steam, and other forms of literature can help. Fethiye Sahaf Kitabevi has a tantalizing trove of illustrated magazines from Turkey's ventures in print subculture, detailing cartoons and a grittier sense of humor than in mainstream publishing, mostly from the 2000s. Rags like *Lombak*, *Gırgır*, or *L'Manyak* are still edgy, while literary issues of *Sabitfikir* remain evergreen.

Such local businesses as Fethiye Sahaf Kitabevi speak volumes, in this case literally, about the area where it emerged, in relation to the neighborhood, the landscape, its history and communities. Certain finds detail this symbiotic saga between the *sahaf* as endemic to the social ecology from which it springs and attracts books, readers and stories. No used bookstore is complete without an uncommon array of cookbooks.

With respect to Fethiye, a southern Aegean destination across from the island of Rhodes, its unique culinary palate integrates Turkish and Greek cuisine with unrivaled traditional appreciation. This is what cookbook writer Rena Salaman explored in her catalog of recipes, *The Cooking of Greece and Turkey*, in which Turkish dishes like stuffed zucchini (*kabak dolması*) are listed alongside the Greek "kolokythakia" zucchini salad.

A deeper look into local interest material on the shelves of Fethiye Sahaf Kitabevi reflects a historical breadth of knowledge and experience that far transcends the comparatively narrow, recent touristic view of the scintillating vistas around the quiet, waterfront bookstore. One study, in Turkish, of the war heroes of Fethiye by

local historian Mustafa Uslan chronicles the regional contribution to the country's fight for independence during World War I.

Most older folks remember decades ago when the span of the breathtaking coast from Fethiye to Ölüdeniz and beyond was a staggeringly empty, serene territory, altogether distinct from its current milieu, in which vacationers and villagers rub shoulders under a sky lined with parachutes, beaches thump with techno music, and the waters are flitted by sails. Still, Fethiye Sahaf Kitabevi blends a touch of history, deliberate wonder and silence.

October 5, 2020
Fethiye, Turkey

Fabric

It is rare, or unprecedented, for anglophone readers to find a comprehensive study of cultural artifacts conceived and exchanged across some of the most politically sensitive zones in world history. In particular, the swath of land encompassing the Middle East, Central Asia, the Balkans, the Levant and Mesopotamia, where local ruins, peoples and traditions have told stories of annihilation, conquering and perseverance since time immemorial. The reasons are many and include everything from postmodern colonialism to natural age.

Within her broad foundation of object-based research, Amanda Phillips is an intersectional art historian of those pasts where earlier forms of multiculturalism engendered anomalies and hybrids of plural human expression, further decentralizing the fringes of Western categorizations of department and discipline. Yet, steadfast in the face of her decidedly venturous approach, Phillips has published a number of frank, well-evidenced proposals throughout her dense book that might upend the historiography of cultural work produced on that cusp when medievals became moderns.

The upsurge of the Ottoman dynasty serves as the focus of Phillips' remit, encompassing the years from 1200 to 1800, with significant concluding notes relevant to the current milieu. The geographies under question and the spheres of influence by their leading societies existed beyond the pale of European Christendom and were strained through assumptions of classical philosophy largely via Arab Muslim exegetes whose dominance preceded that of the Turks having land and title throughout Anatolia.

The prevailing sociocultural context in which Ottoman society developed would be largely unrecognizable to a person today. Specifically, its leaders had an entirely alternate set of beliefs and tastes with respect to images and text than that which forced its way up to the current model of global primacy as prescribed by the traditionally Christian nexus now generally termed the West, whose seafaring occupations gained irreversible traction over leading international markets by the 18th century.

Together with changes in technology and the subduing of mass workforces from the Indian subcontinent to the American hemisphere, the colonial empires of Western Europe were achieving supremacy one piece of clothing at a time. But while wearable garments may have transformed to befit trends of the West – in some cases retaining eastward elements, particularly in the Balkans – certain customs fell through the cracks of such epochal change. Textiles for ritual, decoration and everyday use are a distinctive, and potentially all-important key by which to unlock the Ottoman world for the contemporary historical imagination.

In retrospect, the primary role that figurative, mimetic imagery plays in modern culture was not a foregone conclusion in the Middle Ages. Early art history is popularly dominated by religious scenography and famous portraits before artists experimented with models who could remain nameless, as the creative class came to control capital enough to commission painters to make art for art's sake. However, at the same time, the vast Asian continent had been shaped by another kind of artwork, one laden with precious metals and stitched with images less given to realism. This was due to the nature of its fundamental material – textile.

It is interesting to view the Ottoman industry of textile production through the lens of art history. For one, the objects were heavy with real value – arguably less abstract than currency – given that techniques of gold and silver thread were central to textiles. In the latter years of its trade as a mainstream commodity, when poorer members of society were both producing and consuming traditional Ottoman textiles, the materials came to assume the appearance of what had become a culture of decadence. The economic history of Ottoman textiles cannot be deemphasized in relation to Western definitions of art and wealth.

If the value is the result of that which is tradable, how tradable a commodity is is paramount to defining its value. For much of the textual investigation that informed her book *Sea Change: Ottoman Textiles between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean*, Phillips pored over contractual agreements listing the qualities and attributes of textiles as exchanged between buyers and sellers, who typically belonged to the heights of social status, with a formidable trove of palace records showing just what each sultan acquired. She found that the workers themselves kept worse records, if they did at all, likely a result of illiteracy in a multinational empire where, to many, public education was a foreign import.

To close the wide, and often vague gaps in knowledge between academic reference and the object-oriented scholarship of her methodology, Phillips examined minutes from the shariah courts that presided over the legalities of textiles. Among these are the sumptuary laws that draw interest for the exoticism of its enforcement in comparison to the myths of personal freedom enjoyed by the West. These regulations – which arranged the wearing and prohibition of clothes according to people's religion, gender, class, ethnicity and work – are a vital source for researchers interested in understanding the ways in which textiles established social codes prior to the introduction of concepts pertaining to modern identity and its salience in politics and government.

Throughout her book, Phillips highlights and chronicles a key point in her argument that textiles represent their own historiographic source material. A crucial support to her findings is the fact that the only commodity traded more than textiles in world history is grain. That their significance is underestimated by westward-thinking art historians is a wide gap in scholarship, which *Sea Change* begins to fill with clear delineations of prose offering readers meticulous insight into the pragmatics of the textile craft and the inspirations of its creative flourishing across classes and cultures.

Even a more astute reader will be glad for the comprehensive glossary, which includes designations common to the field, such as "sericulture," to more obscure classifications such as a variety of lightweight silk known by the Turkish appellation "bürümcük." Each chronological section in *Sea Change* is prefaced by epigraphs prior to Phillips' clarifying texts accounting for themes pertaining to technology, terminology, style, production, regulation, consumption, imitation and novelty. The first chapter begins with a Turkish proverb that also serves as an apt metaphor for the writing process: "With patience, the cocoon on the mulberry leaf is made into a silk dress."

June 28, 2021
Boston, USA

Pastry

In the south aisle of Hagia Sophia, there is a marble slab with a trident. It suggests that prior to the usage of the building as a mosque, museum and church, there was likely a temple to Poseidon, the god of seas, on that auspicious ground overlooking the Sea of Marmara, Bosporus Strait and Golden Horn inlet. Istanbul, as ever, is a marine city, a complex waterfront urban habitation stretching back to the founding of Byzantium in the seventh century B.C.

In Greek mythology, Daphne is a female nymph, a naiad, who appears bound to bodies of water, fresh, however, not saline. Yet, it is not entirely out of the question that a character named after her would return from the oceanside villas of Miami to the sloping hills of Istanbul for the expressed purpose of listening to her mother's people tell their stories. She aspires to study the oral history of her Byzantine community.

Yet, in Istanbul, Daphne faces the overwhelming and multilayered nostalgia that locals have for old Istanbul, particularly those who belong to the minority cultures of Greeks, Armenians and Jews. For her beauty, her youth and her American upbringing, however, she is warmly embraced. But the Turkish identity of her father, and of herself, is largely hidden, until, for dramatic tension, the novelist Nektaria Anastasiadou uses it as an apt literary device.

But besides being a well-researched piece of fiction, employing historical knowledge and cultural nuance deftly, spiritedly and soundly, Anastasiadou's novel is not entirely on key when it comes to the momentum of contemporary literature in which she, as an award-winning multicultural writer, is poised to contribute. Daphne, for example, whose mythical beauty is as cartoonishly unreal as a sylph, is perhaps the least developed of her book's characters.

Anastasiadou writes of Daphne's hair like a Minoan princess, and that she enjoys a figure of perfection that is garishly exaggerated, like the glossy cover of a paperback romance. A more successful portrait of human characterization is that of an older man named Fanis, who along with Daphne's aunt Gavriela, assumes the trappings and eccentricities of life as a proud Greek Christian in the neighborhood of Kurtuluş, known to Greeks as Tatavla.

Fanis is as bold as he is honest. And in his forward sincerity is his vulnerability, uninhibited, approaching his twilight years with sparks flying. Anastasiadou has captured an achingly human portrayal of cultural revitalization as intimately commingled with the anxieties of aging and its preoccupation with the romantic potential of youth to revitalize, and perpetuate sources of communal belonging.

The full name of Fanis is Fanourios Paleologos, which he exclaims as aligned with the famous heritage of Byzantine emperors. He uses such boasts for what might be understood as his personal imperial interests, his flirtatious conquering. Although he is about 70 years of age and Daphne is 32, he believes he has as fine a chance as any. As Daphne's mother, Sultana, warned her, Istanbul is the city, with a capital "C", where even a smile is cause enough for a man to jump.

Daphne's heart, however, is not easily wooed, at least not by a man so vastly her senior. But she is not entirely unavailable. She is in a bind, emotionally, and geographically, a modern damsel in relationship distress. Back in Miami, her tango-loving partner Paul is having adventures of his own, while she is drifting away from the tacky lifelessness of air-conditioned Florida for the personified histories of unfading unpredictability in Istanbul.

Her course of study is oral history, a Ph.D. no less, and she has set her sights on the three top universities in the largest Turkish metropolis. Two of them end up rejecting her, but she does not lose hope. When her mother learns of her ulterior motives for visiting Gavriela, that she might want to move to Turkey, it causes a family scandal. Her full name is Daphne Zeynep Badem, a telltale sign of second-generation immigration.

Daphne's parents, Sultana and Ilyas, raised their daughter in America, yet with a strong command of Greek. The thought of her returning to Istanbul is a backward step, especially to her Greek mother, a rupture in their collective future. Yet, for all of the information on Daphne, besides exhibiting such traits as the classic Mediterranean jealousy that Anastasiadou chronicles so endearingly, she is largely devoid of inner life, practically mindless.

It could be a condition of Daphne's Americanization that she has essentially become bland and superficial, a blank canvas on which the mess of Istanbul would color. Yet, as the driving force of a new novel, rather than focus on outward expressions of Greek Orthodox and Byzantine Istanbul's cultural attributes, *A Recipe for Daphne* misses the beating heart of literary creativity as it has been critically amassed and developed into the 21st century.

She eventually comes into contact with Kosmas, who, although a momma's boy Istanbul Greek of a pastry chef, finds his way to her fancy. He is a reader of Ottoman Turkish, and discovers, in a premodern cookbook, how to make a special dessert representing all of the Ottoman Balkan peoples. Anastasiadou exhibits a refined talent for writing about food, which should be a proper skill set when it comes to Turkish-Greek literature.

As with most novels and nonfiction set in Istanbul, cliches abound. Even if the book advances the cultural revitalization of Greek "Rum" society, *A Recipe for Daphne* is replete with Turkish sayings. The protagonist, like the author it seems, is torn between her affection for Turkish and Greek cultures, and their harmonization. Ultimately, she affirms their singularities as parts of the same whole, symbolized by a pastry.

For a read on the perennial distinctions between Greek and Turkish perspectives in terms of culture, and with a special eye on American immigration, *A Recipe for Daphne* is a worthwhile gander, a decorative complement to serious study.

In the late Ottoman tradition of the early Francophile novel as light romance, as a trivial diversion, a ploy serving no more important a purpose than to pass domestic time, the novel is every bit as sweet as the pastry that sticks its narrative together, offering a taste, a glimpse, by which to imagine, and remember that Istanbul is more diverse than it may seem, and that its history is, to many, alive and present as ever.

February 22, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Mechanical

Turkish readers are often emphatic and prompt when praising the philosopher and novelist İhsan Oktay Anar. His characterful, narrative prose stylistically merges technical knowledge with artistic vision. He is celebrated for his special literary talents in Turkish, conveying its Eurasian subtleties with the finesse of a Seljuk archer, the heft of an Anatolian wrestler. And yet, according to the infamous “three percent rule,” referring to the proportion of translated books in English, only one novel by Anar is available to Anglophones, that being his sophomore work, *The Book of Devices*. Titled like a classic Ottoman book, the work is full of eccentric characters moving through a bygone world that, while fictive enough to border on fantasy, retains the authentic charm of Istanbul's historic core.

He finished writing the skinny, 137-page novel on March 10, 1993, in verdant Karşıyaka, not far from where he taught philosophy until 2001 at Ege University in İzmir. The final inscription does not include the time of day. He placed it under a boldly capitalized "THE END," as closure for those left wanting more when the intertwining, darkly comic narratives conclude. Its point is unambiguous. While spinning with infinite curiosity through the contemporary medium of historical fiction, its trajectory echoes old-time traditions of Ottoman storytelling from the steaming, smoky cafes of its haunted past.

As a transcribed voice, the storyteller unravels his tongue when he speaks of the inconclusive lifespan, mysterious death and unknown burial of the lead protagonist. Under the pen of İhsan Oktay Anar, he is a man named Tall İhsan Effendi, the Minister of Devices, who wrote a microcosmic homunculus of the novel, also titled, *The Book of Devices*. Effendi is the author's fictive double, an enigma survived by his work to compose, sketch and recount the manufacture of his many fantastical inventions, along with the worlds that inspired them and the personalities who saw them to realization. It is a clever literary device, a play of a play on words and names, potent for experimental writers who wish to relate the effect of mirrored plots and intersubjective voices reflecting each other with endlessly recurrent and kaleidoscopic, metaphysical depth.

İletişim, a Turkish-language publisher in Istanbul, first sent *The Book of Devices* to the printing press in 1996. It became the second published novel by the then 30-

something Anar, a prolific writer born in 1960. Gregory Key, a professor of Turkish language studies at Binghamton University, translated *The Book of Devices* in 2016 with support from the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism TEDA Project (Translation and Publication Grant Program). Koç University Press printed it in June.

A spill of Ebru seeps from the cover title, designed by E. S. Kibele Yarman like a collage from an antique stationery shop, with outmoded paper currencies commingling with cartographic drawings and architectural renderings. The three-chaptered book opens with a dedication to Anar's beloved parents before prepping the reader with a pair of epigraphs from the sacred texts of the Quran and the Bible that conjoin the sanctifying presence of King David to the ancient craft of metallurgy, exalting its pliability and strength.

After a peculiarly sharp typeface called Daubenton by Olivier Dolbeau, the action is set by a grisly group of caffeine-addled orators in a far-flung Anatolian coffeehouse, speaking of a long-dead gentleman native to Tophane, now a downtown confluence in Istanbul home to the national religious and secular divide, great socioeconomic diversity and the youngest generation of entrepreneurs in Turkey. His name was Yafes Chelebi, and about him issues some of the most animated and amusing prose fiction in all of translated Turkish literature. Despite being filtered through the relatively more rigidified English language, the writing of Anar leaps from his pages, dense with delicious gossip and salacious scandal.

The narration is candid, assuming the loud cadence of oral storytelling, a folkloric practice traditional to Turkish culture. Its informalities and airs of suspicion, conspiracy, intrigue lure minds by first dispelling rumors, to gain ears before parading into the heart of numerous, uninhibited yarns from the unchecked urban wilds of Ottoman Istanbul. And they are rich with references to life in the 19th century on the shores of the Bosporus, deeply researched though still playful, unweighed by obsession with fact, only suffused with the elements of style to tell more exacting, powerful tales. They all take place under the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz, a westward thinker who sought imperial progress on trips to European capitals like Paris, London and Vienna, while ruling his embattled, impoverished and shrinking lands from 1861 to 1876 when the Young Ottomans wrote the first constitution in Turkey.

The timeworn, weathered and beaten characters are manual laborers on the cusp of automated factory work, and Anar conjures them with a mental eye for early photography, capturing the poise of those fated to mostly unselfconscious and unexamined lives, without a thought to the vanities of public ostentation.

Anar distills the searing medieval spirit of the late Ottoman era, its amoral tone raised from opposite ends of the pre-modern, social spectrum, the heights and depths of its extremes from religion to industry. From the deadly edges of sword smithery to the rousing Anatolian battle prayers of old, it speaks of a time when Istanbul harbored a stripe of freedom only known and forgotten and enjoyed and suffered by those who emerged from shadow and smoke to sit among the tavern orators of the Fener and Galata districts, and the many countless districts of Greco-Italian tradition hailing from the long Byzantine night, its golden dusk faded, yet scoured by the proud descendants of the ancient immortality of New Rome.

There is a philosophical richness to the writing of Anar, even immersed in complex narrative logic, yet faithful to his irascible, colorful characters. Key's translation navigates the spiraling, Escher-like staircases of Anar's literary optical illusions with a refined ear for drama and absurdity. Ottoman society interpreted mechanical invention in more intuitive, eastern dimensions, one given to alchemy and magic. In contrast to the male-dominating Eurocentric drive to conquer nature, which has ever been the underlying scheme and modus operandi for Western industry and its tall orders, the Ottomans saw automation and its symphonies of metal fabrication as an opportunity to best meet the whims of the Sultan, whose quixotic desires were as capricious as the clashing currents of the Bosporus where it forks around the white boulder under the Maiden's Tower and into the Golden Horn and Sea of Marmara.

The style in which Anar's chronicle ensues in many ways reflects the overly elaborate detail of the devices themselves. For example, the very first of many drawings outlined in the book is of a sword, still hot from the burning iron, hanging in the shop of Yafes Chelebi for all to see after a long bout of hammering that conformed to a variety of Turkish musical rhythms like a tightly choreographed scene in a Broadway musical. Its blade doubles as a pair of scissors, streamlined into a newfangled, kinetic contraption. And in turn, Key's translation

shows how Anar conversed with mixed vocabularies, pairing French and English expressions in a world ruled by the fusion sounds of the Ottoman Turkish language at the climax of its development, yet also on the cusp of extinction.

September 13, 2018
Istanbul, Turkey

Flame

In his last days, Tosun Bayrak sat with his people in the evening hours, as night fell after the ritual *zikr* ceremony finished, the dinner tables cleared, teas served and all ears readied to listen to his soft, elderly voice speak in between regular puffs of Samsun cigarettes as he led the traditional group discussion known in Turkish as the *sohbet* or conversation, in which perennial wisdom is relayed by word of mouth from master to student on the Sufi path, unbroken since time immemorial. From the Arabic word for remembrance, the *zikr* is a pronounced, collective dedication to the rhythms and harmonies that issue from the vowels of sacred names in Islam. Its multiple forms of prayer recollect a higher union with the omnipresent religious experience of transcendent, communal absorption through movement and music.

To his closest devotees, he was known lovingly as Tosun Baba, spiritual father to the dervishes who he guided beyond selfish egotism. More formally, in the wider circles of his organized faith, he was Shaykh Tosun al-Jerrahi. It is a title extending from Hazreti Pîr Muhammad Nureddin al-Jerrahi, who lived in the 17th century and founded a Sufi order that remains active by his tomb in Istanbul's old city district of Karagümrük. In the summer of 2017, as seasonal rains swept in from the Atlantic archipelago of New York City to wash the forested border of New Jersey, he emerged from the verdant ecology beneath the sleepy minaret of his emerald-lit American mosque in a place called Chestnut Ridge. It was where he continued his greatest life's work to the very end. Months before his death, none could be sure that he would appear on such nights, as he was said to be in ailing health. When he did, the reverent ambiance could be felt in the air with every breath.

He whispered to a bold, young woman who had traveled from Turkey to kneel beside him. She was with an American man, her partner. Before beginning the *sohbet*, Tosun Baba first asked if he would convert to Islam then and there to be with her. In front of an open-hearted crowd of onlookers, he did, and took his place among the believers. The sitting room was lined with countless books encompassing a kaleidoscopic range of interests that mirrored Bayrak's intellectual history, spanning studies from Buddhism to architecture, Gurdjieff to Rumi. Its richly-lined shelves wound throughout the lushly furnished interior of the lodge, displaying his translations of early medieval Muslim mystics Ibn Arabi and Abd

Al-Qadir Al-Jilani, next to his 2014 autobiography, *Memoirs of a Moth*, the only book of original prose that he authored. Written in a spare, third-person narrative style, his life chronicle serves as an ample reflection on the role of the Turkish nation since the dawn of the republican era to preserve and advance its shared cultural heritage with the world.

It was December of 1968 and Tosun Bayrak had not been back to Istanbul, his native land, in 17 years. He was then in the company of his second wife, Jean, who would remain by his side till his passing. Later, during the *sohbet* in New York in the winter of his life, she smiled back at him as he complimented her beauty with a twinkle in his eye, even at 92, sharing a moment encircled by the warmth of congregants, where she sat humbly inconspicuous among his many followers. They exhaled visibly in the frigid train station of Haydarpaşa awaiting passage to Konya, to witness the *sema* listening ceremony performed by authentic, whirling Mevlevi dervishes, who, in the spirit of Rumi, symbolically enact the mystical wedding of all humanity with spiritual perfection, one soul at a time.

The ceremony was underwhelming, as even then, audiences had come from afar attracted by its mere romantic exoticism, only to distract those genuinely interested in realizing a way in to the Sufi path. By then, Bayrak and his wife were not committed to a spiritual discipline. In fact, he was raised without religion, but since high school, and especially as a student and artist in the US, he read Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, and for years attended meetings at the Gurdjieff Center in New York, pursuing the 20th century Armenian-born thinker who forbid talk of religious dogmas in favor of experiential consciousness. His first encounter with Islam as a living practice occurred when he stayed with his eldest aunt Fatima on weekends as a boarding student at Robert College. In her shadow, he watched her pray five times a day, and fast during Ramadan, a stark contrast to his mother and father who only rarely led him inside a mosque.

Bayrak found art before religion. On the tenth anniversary of the Turkish republic, in 1933, he was seven years old in the company of his grandfather, a dyed-in-the-wool Ottoman clerk and lover of *rakı*, aniseed liqueur, named Ihsan Efendi who encouraged the little, fledgling artist in his family to grow by taking him to Topkapi Palace and the Greco Roman Antiquity Museum where he could best learn to draw the human figure. In his last year at Robert College, he became enamored

with the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore, and the Bhagavad Gita, intrigued by its eastern mysticism like any curious man with a secular, western upbringing.

He soon aspired to become a poet, or an artist.

Before boarding a decommissioned American troopship in 1945 bound for the University of California to study architecture, his father gifted him Rumi's classic poem, the *Masnevi*, and he began a long friendship with the painter Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu at his workshop in Istanbul. He later met Eyüboğlu and Abidin Dino, another great Turkish artist in Paris, where he studied under André Lhote and Fernand Léger. His cultivation in post-Impressionist French painting soon turned into his affinity for the Abstract Expressionism that developed in America as European art disembarked in the New World during the 1940s. In the meantime, Bayrak enjoyed an eccentric bout of the artist's life outside of London with a quartet of outlandish Turkish mates while studying art history, despite skipping many classes, at the prestigious Courtauld Institute.

Among his compatriots were the poets Bulent Ecevit, who became Prime Minister of Turkey four times, and Can Yücel, a legend of modern Turkish verse. Interestingly, at the time, Bayrak had already published a book of poems, titled, And, to favorable reviews, and would release yet another, *To Speak Without Speaking*, while living in Ankara, where he found the wherewithal to produce the first Turkish translation of the United States Constitution. Back in England, he knew Ecevit and Yücel were better poets, but they were unknown. He stamped around proud of himself until Yücel's father, Hasan Ali Bey came to visit and critiqued his loose way of life, which they coined, as Bourgeois Mysticism. In the same breath, Hasan Ali Bey introduced Bayrak to Sufism, as a philosophy of human perfection already complete and proven.

On that fateful train ride to Konya in the winter of 1968, a lady named Munevver Ayasli heard Bayrak and his wife speaking and thought they were both foreigners. Bayrak had arrived only recently to his native country after being away nearly two decades, and when he first saw one of his little cousins, his modern Turkish baffled him, as he had been educated in the Ottoman language. Munevver introduced herself and her travel companions, who were the mother and wife of a direct descendant of Saint Mevlana, a Celebi. It was an auspicious meeting as it would

eventually lead to his discipleship under Muzaffer Ozak Efendi, who brought the Jerrahi order to America. But even after conversing for almost the whole ride through the Anatolian heartland about Sufism, and the sheiks and dervishes of Turkey who had persevered despite Ataturk's secularization reforms, Bayrak lost her address after she had given it to him with an invitation to see her back in Istanbul. Bayrak returned to the US after his yearlong sabbatical from his hard-earned professorship at Fairleigh Dickinson University where he established its Fine Arts Division literally from the ground up. The year back in Turkey had involved a number of life changes, including the death of his father, Hasan Tursun Efendi, to whom *Memoirs of a Moth* is dedicated with an inscription that explains how, while he did not teach formal religion, he conveyed the most fundamental principle in Islam called, *adab*, or manners, the essence of kindness, tolerance, patience, gratitude, unity, loyalty, truthfulness, and sincerity above all. Despite receiving the enviable Guggenheim Award in 1965, and inventing Shock Art in downtown New York, among many other claims to historic prominence, Bayrak lived many and various lives. He transformed when most would have conformed. His memoir has three sections, Know, Find and Be. It is the honest testament of a wise, gracious soul who raised the spirit of humanity from profound depths, through expansive breadths, to new heights, by acts of fellowship, to embrace true oneness.

The cause of unity became a prime mover for Bayrak as the sheikh of the first Jerrahi mosque in America, which he opened in Chestnut Ridge in 1990. Its growing community immediately helped genocide victims during the breakup of Yugoslavia, especially Bosnian students who Bayrak assisted during his trips to Zagreb. In 1994, he met Fetullah Gülen, who offered him support when Robert College and many private schools would not, and wrote of him endearingly. *Memoirs of a Moth* was published in 2014, before the failed coup attempt allegedly perpetrated by Gülen's FETÖ group on July 15, 2016. When Bayrak appeared in Istanbul for his winter 2016 exhibition, *Fasa Fiso* at Millî Reasürans Art Gallery, he condemned Gülen in an artistic statement depicting the dollar as an evil that FETÖ had exploited. At age 90, he was still an avant-garde globetrotter and radical humanist committed to freedom, peace and creativity.

August 31, 2018
Istanbul, Turkey

Scribe

The city of Oxford is steeped in the rural airs of its surrounding county, locally its shire. Along the Thames and Castle Mill Stream, stone bridges link routes that seethe with the folklore and history of a people who have braved the eye of the storm that is Western civilization, staring back unfazed. In the shadows of its core buildings, where the facades and spires chronicle architectural developments in England since the early Romanesque Saxon era, intellectual life has grown beyond compare, firming the roots of national culture while fruiting the imagination that transcends worldly concern. One of the many outstanding geniuses who graced its public founts of knowledge was none other than J.R.R. Tolkien, in his day a humble philology professor specializing in Old and Middle English, a man known to pen verse in the tradition of language play after Lewis Carroll, also an Oxford professor.

Tolkien lived on Northmoor Road, as the name would signify, at the north end of the city by the Oxford University Parks and the River Cherwell. It raises a smile to think of him strolling down the countrified avenues of Park Town to read Gothic, Welsh and Finnish manuscripts at the Bodleian Library, the main research library at Oxford University, where he resisted the Great War long enough to earn a degree in English Language and Literature in 1915 before attaining the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professorship of Anglo-Saxon in 1925. From June 1 to Oct. 18, the Bodleian Library exhibited an unprecedented accumulation of his work, the grandest posthumous return to his hometown since the 1950s, the place that inspired his otherworldly visions, and which to anyone who knows Oxford will attest, are also utterly drawn from the surroundings in which he lived and wrote the fantasy classics that changed the meaning of originality in art and literature.

When the newly married and moneyed Sir Thomas Bodley sought to transform a medieval store of books in 1598, he could never have known that he would found what is now the largest university library system in the UK, housed within Oxford University, the oldest university in the English-speaking world. Bodley had a wealthy widow of a wife, and with her at his side refurbished the library, replaced its roof and modernized its bookshelves. He then convinced his closest associates to lend books for the borrowing, opening in 1602 as the Public Library of the University of Oxford. In that initial year, the library already acquired a Quran, and

was gifted a Turkish manuscript that is generally unpublicized, accessible exclusively to meritorious scholars. And with the 17th century upsurge of the Orientalist's thirst for knowledge from the East that spurred Europe from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, the Bodleian would preserve one of the five greatest Islamic manuscript collections in Europe, sharing its prestige with others in the cities of Leiden, Paris, the Escorial and Rome.

Leading up to the opening of the Bodleian Library, the economic agreement signed by Sultan Murad III and Queen Elizabeth I in 1581 granted the English priority trading rights over the rest of Europe within the dominion of the Sublime Porte. In a historic diplomatic gesture in 1599, Sir Henry Lello, the English ambassador to the Ottoman Empire arrived at the murderous court of Mehmed III with the extravagant gift of a clock-organ accompanied by its maker Thomas Dallam, who was commissioned by the Queen to cement the alliance that would outmatch her competitors from Spain to Prussia. In response, the Sultan and his mother personally sent Elizabeth gifts in return, a time-honored tradition including Turkish manuscripts. Soon after, Sir Thomas Roe served as English ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1621 to 1628 and came back with manuscripts that furnish the Bodleian's bookshelves.

It had been by then well established since the library's genesis that Turkish scholarship would be a cornerstone, garnering inaugural support by William Laud and later most notably by John Greaves, the Savilian Professor of Astronomy at Oxford who went to Constantinople with Edward Pococke, the first holder of the Laudian Chair of Arabic at Oxford also to gather rare literary treasures. By the end of the 1660s, one of the first Englishmen to know Turkish, William Seaman, had worked with Oxford University Press to translate the New Testament into Turkish and to publish the first grammar of Turkish in England.

It is said that it was for the sake of custom and aesthetic that Muslim Turks delayed printing books for over 300 years after the Gutenberg published the Bible with his movable type in the 15th century, when Jews, Armenians and Greeks published extensively under the eye of the sultan, and even despite the first Arabic-language book appearing in Italy in 1514. It was only due to İbrahim Müteferrika, a Hungarian Unitarian convert whose Christian name is lost to history when printing began by and for Ottoman Muslims, yet the books were to be secular. Müteferrika

owned and published the first Muslim printing press in the Ottoman Empire after solving the challenges of setting Arabic script to moveable type, which had bedeviled European publishers who until then produced what Muslims saw as simply incorrect and blasphemous texts. In the process, Müteferrika spurred what some scholars have called an Ottoman Enlightenment during the early industrial Tulip Era.

After receiving permission from Grand Vizier Nevşehirli Damat İbrahim Pasha, the Grand Mufti, the clergy and Sultan Ahmed III, the first year that Müteferrika actively published culminated in a two-volume Arabic-Turkish dictionary, *Vankulu Lügati*, followed by Katip Çelebi's world atlas, *Cihannuma* (in English, *Universal Geography*). That same year, on Aug. 26, 1729, he printed a third book, *A Traveller's Chronicle Concerning the Emergence of the Afghans and the Cause of the Collapse of the Safavid Dynasty* (in Ottoman transliteration, *Tarih-i Seyyah Der Beyan-i Zuhur-i Agvaniyan ve Sebeb-i Inhidam-i Bina-i Devlet-i Şahan*), an eyewitness account of the Afghan invasion of Persia in 1722 by the Polish Jesuit Father Judasz Thaddeus Krusinksi.

In a general note on the text as it is catalogued at the Bodleian, the translation of the book into Ottoman Turkish was produced by Müteferrika or the author, and the original Latin was later published in L'viv in 1733. It is clear that Müteferrika had strong personal oversight, and that as a publisher, he groomed his polymath stature as a scientist, theologian and man of letters. To literate Ottomans, the book of Krusinski would have been densely textual, not illuminated in the least, as were the gilded leaves and painted miniatures of the scribed manuscripts. It opens with the Koranic invocation: In the name of God. Its unadorned pages are fit for the eyes of an imperialist mind scanning for practical knowledge. And reading between the lines, the expansionism of the empire appears to be crucial to the incipient Muslim Ottoman press.

In the following year, Müteferrika prefaced *The History of Ancient Egypt* (transliterated as *Tarih-i Mısr ül-Cedid*) written and also translated by Ahmed Bin-Hemdem Süheyli. It, again, begins with the opening lines of the Quran, and in its present state, the 61 rigid and warped pages of pure text are hardly openable. The cover to the Bodleian copy, dated 1730, is a glossy chestnut brown, and folded against its final page is an impressive map of Egypt masterfully sketched, detailing

and glossing the Pharaonic landscapes where the Ottomans ruled from 1517 to 1914, before the English.

Interestingly, it was another British diplomat, James Mario Matra, who sought to revive the press of Müteferrika after it was finally struck down in 1742 by palace scribes weary of job loss and the feared janissaries who backed them. The introductory century of book printing for the Ottoman Muslims was clouded in as much intrigue and fascination as that given to any sense of authority in a land where political contests were tried over blood feuds of kin. Enderunlu Fazıl, the first banned author in the Ottoman Empire, makes a welcome appearance at the Bodleian with a mid-19th century publication of his *Book of Love* (*Defter-i Aşk* in transliteration).

Şemseddin Sami Frasheri immigrated to Istanbul in 1872; educated in Ioannina, the capital of his native region, where he learned Turkish, he later wrote *The Love Between Talat and Fitnat* (transliterated as *Taaşşuk-ı Talat ve Fitnat*), long considered to be the first Turkish novel. (In fact, Vartan Pasha published a novel in Turkish written in Armenian script earlier, in 1851.)

The Bodleian copy of Frasheri's debut novel is officially stamped in 1963, worn with brittle and tattered pages exuding the unmistakable must of a beloved used book. From the 17th century mystic poems of Neşati to the 1926 feminist memoirs of Halide Edib and encompassing contemporaries, the Bodleian preserves the breadth of Turkish literature.

March 28, 2018
Oxford, UK

Revisited

On the Sunday morning of New Year's Eve, as an extraordinary cold snap worsened the infamous New England winter, with snow and ice piling high along the streets of South Boston, a young American man from southeastern Massachusetts walked into the Albanian Orthodox Cathedral of St. George. Inside, a tall, elder held out his hand, welcoming with the question, "*Shqip?*" to identify the newcomer (as the word *Shqiperi* means “Albanian” in Albanian).

Through the foyer, photos and clippings from the old country were interspersed along the walls of the late 19th century High Victorian Gothic interior. Led through the cathedral doors by a gently smiling, soft-spoken man with broken English, a chorus of three sang over the solemn notes of the organ to enunciate the cryptic and melancholic tones deeply influenced by the Gregorian chants of the Byzantine civilization that once sprawled from the Iberian Peninsula to Upper Egypt and the Black Sea.

Father Arthur Liolin emerged from the multi-paneled, wooden facade, enacting traditional rites of devotion before standing at a podium to address the sparsely-peopled pews. Raising his voice ever so lightly, he led prayers in English and Albanian, an act of historic significance with respect to the early 20th century awakening of Albanian religious, national, and intellectual identities into modernity following the dissolution of Ottoman Balkan territories. Adorned in immaculate, gold-pleated robes dyed in fulvous, solar hues, Father Liolin spoke of the lack of extant scriptural knowledge regarding the actual verifiable date of the Nativity, and that it was even forbidden to celebrate Christ's birth as Dec. 25 in 17th century Massachusetts when the colony was ruled by English Puritans, popularly called the Pilgrims.

He then stepped down to call up the one expected guest from the congregation, presenting him as a journalist who had been drawn to the Cathedral while working in Turkey, and who returned to America seeking knowledge of the iconic leader of the nascent Albanian nationalist movement who he knew from his readings as Fan Noli, the founder of the Albanian Orthodox Church. In that brief passage of words through the sacred space buttressed with elegant wooden beams upholding the lofty architectural round, the young writer moved the hearts of his fellow

Americans also born of the immigrant dream that too often still sends the most vulnerable people in the world sleepwalking in the dark only to grasp for imagined ideals and groundless aspirations. The director of the Fan S. Noli Library, Archive and Cultural Center listened to the distinguished visitor with intrigue. Beaming with a proud intellect, and conveying her genuine warmth, she introduced herself as Neka Doko.

Modestly housed on the second floor of the building next to the Cathedral, the rarefied archival library that Ms. Doko sustains opens its doors into a windowed office overlooking the seasonal dramas and local colors of Greater Boston's slowly gentrifying, peripheral district. Around the corner, a sister Albanian Orthodox Church named after St. John the Baptist burned down in 2013, destroying priceless murals and breaking the heart of the community. Its lot remains under construction while some maps and directories continue to list the former address. For outsiders looking in, even the slightest exposure to the immense wealth of intellectual heritage stored at the Fan S. Noli Library requires a series of personal encounters driven by a studious, and persistent curiosity.

Ms. Doko, who also bears the title of Intercultural Mediator, is a passionate and ambitious multilingual archivist. By appointment, she leads the way invitingly, and with a kindred, inquisitive charm, especially for those sharing her chief affinity, to appreciate the contemporary significance of the man who led the Albanian nationalist movement with the nonviolent power of his peerless, creative intelligence. Her enthusiasm for the legacy left by Fan S. Noli is palpable, as she converses buoyantly to express the great importance of one individual who orchestrated both the reformation of Eastern Orthodox Christianity and the nationalization of secular Albanian culture into the modern, post-imperial era with his towering and prescient intellectual humanism.

As a resident of the Boston area for the past decade, and with family history descending from the Pashalik of Berat, she preserves a stunning collection of first edition books by Noli printed in the earliest decades of the 20th century. Among his initial literary works are Byzantine hymnals that he translated from scriptural Greek into Albanian, representing the unprecedented entry of his mother tongue into the communal liturgy of the Orthodox faith. His translations went beyond religious texts, as he brought Omar Khayyám, Don Quixote, Shakespeare and

others into the fold of an ingenious linguistic revival. And more, Noli was a prolific writer of original verse and prose, advancing the very language of his nation into the epochal shifts of modernity as individual style increasingly defined the new cartographies of cultural solidarity.

Even in English translation, such as is best known in the work of Robert Elsie from his exhaustive American collection, *Albumi* published in his later years in 1948, his poems voice exile and the homeland with a fine historic awareness, stylized as robust calls to action as he names from the movement and invokes the classical heroism of antiquity, often against settings rich with the ecologies that source his nationalist sentiments. Noli was dedicated to the academy at least as much as he was to the church. As a graduate of Harvard, the New England Conservatory of Music and Boston University, he wrote with special authoritative effectiveness on Skanderbeg, the national hero of Albania. In his book, *Beethoven and the French Revolution* published in 1947 by the International Universities Press of New York City, he wrote an inscription to his father, Stylian George Noli, to honor him as his first music teacher and for serving as the cantor of the Albanian Village Church in his native Ibriktepe.

That Noli furthered the scholarship and production of literature and music together in his intellectual efforts is crucial to understanding his success in leading the formative and scattered Albanian nation as a united people into the modern era. According to a 2010 study published by Father Foti Tsitsi, who entered the Antiochian Orthodox clergy of Australasia in 2013, Noli crystallized his compositional ear for Byzantine music in Egypt, a talent that he had developed since childhood steeped in the Orthodox Greek traditions of his father. As equally attested by Ms. Doko from her extended conversational monologues of biographical insight, Noli looked to America while immersed in the highly educated, urbane Albanian diaspora in Alexandria. It was not until he was 31 years old in 1913, the year after Albania declared independence from the Ottoman Empire, when Noli finally saw the national territory that his people would claim as a homeland for the modern age.

He spoke at the Albanian Congress of Trieste alongside his partner and sometimes-rival Faik Konitza who was from the Ottoman province of Ioannina, a place of learning that raised many early nationalist Albanian intellectuals, such as Naim

Frashëri who had developed the Albanian National Awakening into a literary movement by the late 19th century. Konitza formed the Vatra Federation with Noli into the most powerful Albanian organization in America, eventually editing *Dielli*, the oldest Albanian-American newspaper that Noli founded. And ultimately, it was Noli who arranged what was arguably the single-most important act for Albanian nationalism, that being acceptance into the League of Nations in 1920. In Boston, where Noli laid the foundation, Ms. Doko is enlightening the mass influence of his voluminous letters into a renewed community labor of love.

January 7, 2018
Boston, USA

Wave

As in the Genesis of scripture, which is partly set in the northeastern Levant, the origin stories of Lebanese literature begin before its national identity formed as part of mainstream historical consciousness, when the modern republic was yet realized from Ottoman Syria on its mythical Phoenician shores. Established as a groundbreaking experiment in the ethnoreligious power-sharing method of consociationalism, the smallest nation in mainland Asia maintains a disproportional cultural impact on the world relative to its size. The reason is partly due to the fact that its culinary and literary heritages are thoroughly intertwined in early 20th century American immigrant history.

The most distinguished intellectual and transnational pioneers, lauded throughout the globe today as foundational Arab-American writers, Ameen Rihani, and famously Khalil Gibran, have given voice and substance to the essential spirit of the age, and, by writing with singular creative talent, have pierced the veils of all earthly social bounds toward the universal reconciliation of the world soul. More, the early Lebanese feminists Afifa Karam and Anbara Salam Khalidi employed international literary and publishing efforts to advocate for the global liberation of women, furthering especially important perspectives as Arab minorities with increasing contemporary relevance.

Shot through with all of the visible strife of historic and current Middle Eastern urbanism, the decadent and impoverished peripheral infrastructures around downtown Beirut tell tragic tales of civil war, political infighting, religious conflict, diaspora exile, and refugee obscurity. Within its core, gentrified lights seep through often opaque societal norms given to a state vulnerably besieged and infiltrated with instability and opposition. Bisected where the Government Palace is fortified with ubiquitous guards armed to the teeth, the shorefront downtown of Beirut is pockmarked with the postcolonial nostalgias of the Arab World from the era of the French Mandate, as it now gradually regains its footing one high, celebratory night at a time, and every day as the new sun shines over the tawny gold-hued buildings sculpted with superlative finesse from the legendary Levantine quarries of the ancient region.

The central streets of Achrafieh and Hamra, for one, are studded with rare gems of the literary imagination, as its writerly hangouts are utterly divided between Latin and Arabic scripts. The globalized readership haunts such sites as the healthily-stocked Aaliyah's Bookstore Cafe, where mainly contemporary Lebanese novelists like Amin Maalouf and Iman Humaydan stand on display beside collections of Khalil Gibran, and the recent 2013 publication of the Anbara Salam Khalidi memoir by Pluto Press, an independent house dedicated to refining Middle Eastern dialogues. Littler shops like The Carton, an English-language publisher led by artistic director Jade George, the Papercup cafe, a stylish purveyor of art books and literary magazines, and the compact shelves at The Little Bookstore, are furnished with more rarefied insights about the wide cultural bedrock where the early giants of local literature stand firm.

From the heart of the dense Armenian district, where Ethiopians and Southeast Asians now stroll, commonly grinning with airs of contentment in the smog-driven mornings, proud, self-described Maronite Christians lead the way for travelers to board unmarked buses for a cheap fare out of the city and into the sharply vertiginous hills. Where the capital expands up into the Mount Lebanon region of Matn, an enormous bust of Ameen Rihani marks the ecological and administrative border. Inside the limits of Beirut, his former residence is widely unknown on the policed inner-city Clemeceau Street, and his books are all but absent from the most visible of literary hotspots in the urban nucleus. It is the Lebanese countryside that birthed and cultivates the legendary works of Rihani, who is justifiably immortalized in a humble museum where he lived and died in the bucolic, steeply-rising village of Fraikeh (pronounced Fray-Kee).

By a shared taxi, affable, stubbly-chinned drivers drop off the unaware along the sun-drenched cliffs of Mediterranean vistas within the locale that is generally unfamiliar to most urban-dwellers in Beirut. Its single main thoroughfare is a short walk to the next hamlet of Qornet El Hamra, where Fraikeh begins at its west-facing frontier, and immediately entering the environs, a well-polished finely-engraved plaque reads: Ameen Rihani Museum. In terraced gardens built by Rihani himself, quotes from his prolific manuscripts are inscribed into stone. With a scheduled visit, Ameen A. Rihani, the nephew of the late author, greets with a conversational warmth as a kindred intellectual raised on the books of his famous uncle to become a professor emeritus, presidential advisor and editor of the

compiled posthumous publications that continue to generate worldwide interest in the Rihani legacy.

The home is a trove of exquisite aesthetic taste, with the furniture and paintings evoking the antique sentiments of a century past, when Rihani returned to the home that was for him an Eastern retreat to unwind from the psychological tremors of New York City and write under the prehistoric eye of his storied homeland. The classic stone masonry architecture of its arched basement entranceway opens into a richly curated collection of artifacts, documents, portraits and effects detailing everything from his hats, pipes and canes, to his first editions, artworks and the only extant recording of his voice on vinyl. Professor Rihani guides a comprehensive overview of the exhibits, from his debut book published in 1902 by Al-Hoda Press on Greenwich Street by fellow Lebanese littérateur Afifa Karam, who he met in Manhattan's bygone Little Syria neighborhood as it fostered the maiden Arabic-language press in America.

Their legacy still uplifts communities of Middle Eastern descent in New York and throughout America. In 2013, the multidisciplinary actress and director Ruth Priscilla Kirstein founded The Middle East Film Initiative, which developed a web series inspired by Manhattan's Little Syria. In a recent interview, Kirstein commented, "When you look at these people who lived in Little Syria during a very vibrant time in a New York that was possibly more cosmopolitan than it is today, you see how they found creative ways of making sense of their Eastern and Western identities in a way that can inform us today." From his letters with Woodrow Wilson to his reception of Arab royalty, the initial translation of his trilogy on Arabia into Hebrew, and the ongoing political sensitivity of his unpublished manuscripts, it is clear that Rihani is an epochal figure who bridged contesting world cultures during the most formative years of the modern era.

For his cardinal achievement, *The Book of Khalid* his contemporary, Khalil Gibran, also an Arab-American New Yorker, contributed illustrations, six of which are on display at the Rihani Museum to relay the esoteric symbols of his Transcendentalist, immigrant epic. Every morning, Rihani would wake at dawn, face the alpine horizon of Mount Sannine to recite the Christian prayer of renunciation, only with his characteristic Shakespearian knack for drama as enacted between God and man. And in that high-minded direction, between the

biblical, seafront cities of Byblos and Tripoli, the sacred Kadisha Valley plateaus in a semicircle against a snowcapped range to shelter the tomb of Khalil Gibran in a seventh century hermitage now exhibiting his paintings at a museum in his name. His writings and canvases speak to the human capacity to create a better world through love in the form of creativity. As is clear in his works, the arts encompass tried and true techniques for building a better world from within. In his subtle eye for spiritual realism, the lofty village of Bsharri permeates his altogether untitled life work. To him, visions go beyond names.

December 23, 2017
Beirut, Lebanon

Eats

Scandinavian

There's a little breezy spot, down a narrow alley in Yeldeğirmeni, a quarter that means "windmill" in Turkish, yet has since shed its bucolic airs for a the clustered urbanization that is so common to Istanbul. And as the next generation of youth aspire to walk down various avenues of their hard-won independence, enlightened by the ideals of individualism in the face of confined assimilation, they might get hungry. That's where restaurants, and their international chefs, offer glimpses, tastes of finer, more complex and expansive ways of living beyond the immediate horizon.

Within Kadıköy's alternative district, replete with artists in their compact studios, and freelancers in their corner cafes, Yeldeğirmeni is the kind of neighborhood where coffees are served in verdant environments, the roots and leaves of plants dangling overhead as thinkers, readers and writers peruse the contents of their minds. Craftworkers' shops are open for passersby as their polished windows gleam with the ceramic, wood and stone of their quirky, personalized designs. And just within the grouping of modest spaces, there is something of a hallway-like entrance, Scandinavian in its economic use of space, and in its name.

The word of the bistro, Pålegg, apparently indicates the Norwegian tradition of eating a festive bunch of fresh and cooked ingredients atop a piece of thin, healthfully dense bread. Perfectly simple, it would seem. But it's since been adapted by the likes of Mehmet Semet, whose graduation from Istanbul's prestigious MSA (which stands for Kitchen Arts Association, translated from its original Turkish acronym for Mutfak Sanatları Akademisi), was a harbinger of delicious reinvention somewhere between Norway and Turkey. Semet works hard at Pålegg, often greeting guests with a frank smile, happy to accommodate custom orders, especially for vegetarians.

Pålegg is more of a pescatarian's choice. Aproned, and clasping his palms with the look of someone ready to cook, Chef Semet is a humble fellow. His cooking has taken him across the globe, not only to Norway, but also to America, Japan, and Thailand, where he performed on an episode of the local Iron Chef. Despite his

photogenic persona, he is a personable sort whose warmth permeates the quaint garden patio in the back of Pålegg. It's a family spot with just a few tables for new couples inside, and picnicking furniture outdoors. The kitchen itself is unenclosed for patrons to view their hardy staff over a succession of hot plates and skillets.

A toddler might scramble on the dusty ground while a table of European travelers revel and laugh uninhibited. On a cool Sunday, the shade of nearby trees provides a quiet shelter. And bringing out rounds of lemonade spiked with oregano and lavender, the mood is as appetizing as the rustic palate of the menu. In contrast to Turkey, and other lands in and around the Mediterranean, Scandinavian food is relatively spare. Before the global advent of industrial agricultural commodities, people in a country like Norway would have found it difficult to acquire a bounty of seasonal fruits and vegetables.

But today, Norway, like the rest of the world, is fully immersed in a constant flow of goods exchanged according to the ever-increasing demands of a shrinking world. In that sense the specific distinction of regional cooking is under threat, towards a melting pot of generically, universalized traditions that, for lack of a better word, are whitewashed to satisfy the wealthy. Restaurants in Oslo, for example, might include more Turkish options than Norwegian, as is the case in America and many European countries, where Asian fare generally rules absolutely. There are only so many recipes for fried fish and heavy bread. But now, things are changing.

Chef Semet is going against the grain in more ways than one, demonstrating to people in Turkey that Norwegian food can be as good as anything local. His use of traditional breads, their crust flecked with multicolored grains, provides a bed on which he douses many sauces and heaps ingredients with the dash of his singular artistry. The menu can be found written in temporary chalk on a blackboard by the slim door. Its selection of meats are prepared like tacos or open sandwiches, and include a crispy sea bass, shrimp, seafoods with and without shells stylized with layers and textures colors of herbs and dressings.

One of the sweetest touches of the Norwegian-inspired establishment does not have much to do with Scandinavia at all, but with French New Orleans in the United States. It is a lot of good fun to see the classic beignet donuts as part of their

spectacular cookery. And bringing it out steaming with dollops of creamed caramel, the extra batter is only natural after all of that deep-fried fish. In its arboreal backyard, eating at Pålegg might not feel instantly transporting to the higher latitudes of Scandinavia, but it is sure to entice anyone's curiosity for the mysteries of international cuisine, and the infinite possibilities of their fusions.

May 3, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

There

They have that broad window, usually lightened by the seafront down the road, cobblestoned and romantic, where lovers young and old walk, arm-in-arm, perhaps on their way to a second sugar cone of ice cream, another round of stimulating drinks, or a mere look out over the horizon that gleams crimson and violet. The air of the Marmara region is breezy, warming and welcoming where it wends its way through the city.

The place where so many go to gather, past time and think, is called, “Yer”, which in Turkish just means “place”. The name conveys a sense of humor in the casual cafe culture of its friendly if distracted hosts, a coterie of trend-setting baristas whose eyes wander, dart, and shudder at the possibility that their world might be as small as the establishment where they daily grind out countless espressos, humbled by the diverse population density before them.

At a bend on the well-trammeled street, downhill toward a tea garden, the location of Yer has a singular effect on its surroundings. Those who sit inside are perched and poised to watch people pass, and comfortably, from a series of cushiony benches, cool outdoor furniture and plush couches in the bijou interior. In their casual dress, bearing the affectionate demeanor of innocence and naivety, youthful staff approach, smiling.

The music buzzes with the pulse of its newness, captivating, but subtle. The choice of tunes rain down like a misty trickle, background, but not elevator. There is a portrait of the Syrian wedding singer Omar Soyleyman above the serving counter. The artist has apparently been living in Turkey since 2011, and the display of his image at Yer might be said to be emblematic of Istanbul’s greater cultural shifts in regional taste.

Yer, in general, is indicative of a homegrown movement within a neighborhood to embrace gentrification, or the sway of global appetites, as intergenerational as they are international, and to localize it. It is not an example of a massive franchise based abroad swooping down to gut the family-owned businesses on the ground, but a spring of novel ideas in terms of architectural, social and culinary design.

There is a seasonal openness woven throughout the atmosphere at Yer. In the summer, their salads are spot on to the moment. Spicy arugula commingles with flecks of quinoa scattered about the oily tops of wide, green leaves weighed down with pleasantly overripe, sliced avocado, and halved strawberries. With a strong, milky coffee, the pairing of fresh fruits, vegetables and cold grains is as nourishing as it is energizing and enlivening.

Like its sister institution down the street, also named with one word, Dün, Yer is full of gregarious cats out to curl up beside a lone patron with a free hand to pet their irresistible, whiskery faces. But there are more likenesses, as waiters often go back and forth between the two spots, schmoozing with their fellow in-crowd of regular employees, who, by night, frequent some of the same clubs.

True to its contemporaneity, Yer offers a slew of vegan dishes, including a seitan wrap that's sure to fulfill the protein needs of any adamant herbivore. When it is dark, in the evening, its little room transforms into a cozy salon, with not more than five or six tables, where their house pastas are roundly satisfying, enough to tip the scale of the day's justice, when all else has settled and the only thing left to do is relax.

The people who go to Yer are often of a talkative sort. They might be a couple of afternoon strollers out to tap the strength of their wanderlust, and stopping at the watering hole of their fancy, share in a few hearty laughs. There, in the back, by a few nicely chosen, modest works of art on paper, such as by the idiosyncratic draftswoman Baysan Yüksel, colleagues of the freelance variety discuss the latest sensations in translated, global fiction.

At another table, an art critic has only recently returned to Turkey from his hometown in America, and he converses liberally with his friend, who knows Yüksel, and of the same generation, has committed his creative life within rectangular frames, in which he explores the fantasies of childhood, memories of boarding school in inner Anatolia, folkloric games and Turkish riddles. They talk late into the night, eat plentifully from Yer's bountiful kitchen, and continue to dialogue as they leave, making for the shoreline parks, and its arboreal walkways, lit and peaceful.

Sometime early the next morning, before too many people have surfaced on the street the regulars of Yer return to their favorite tables, as the waiters stumble in and take care of the familiar faces with a mixture of inner turmoil and quiet harmony that is natural to people when they come to know somewhere inside and out, especially while at work. It is the end of spring and the dust of the winter has washed away, every life has changed and people have come and gone. Yer, though, remains. It is a place, sweet and simple, confident, itself.

May 2, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Central

They stack up, one on top of another, gleaming with unsullied copper, polished wood, made by the artisan craft workers of the past, perhaps even before the modern borders that divide Turkey and Georgia formed. The many, ancient and multilingual histories of sociocultural interaction between the two nations runs deep in the waters, lands and peoples of their respective and shared regions, especially where the southeastern corner of the Black Sea meets the cities and towns between Batumi and Trabzon. It is audible in the music, as the sonic tapestry of polyphonous harmonies ascends over country fiddles.

But farther inland, in Tbilisi, the largest Georgian metropolis and capital of the Caucasian republic, traces of Turkish culture abound. In their sleekest cafes, alongside the global order of espresso drinks, young baristas are pouring cold water into ribbed, metal pots, stirring the fine ground bean that is the basic ingredient of the Turkish coffee. And served, according to old rituals, with a clear glass of water, it is customary to wait patiently, and watch, to see what the guest reaches for first. If they go for the water, passing over the coffee, and perhaps the Turkish delight, then they are, as prophecies may have foretold, hungry.

Eating well, however, is the least of a traveler's problems in Georgia, where street bakers dole out massive varieties of bread in large portions, stuffed with cheeses, potatoes and multitudes of other tantalizing tastes, filling and fast, like *börek* in Turkey, but by the sheer size and grit of it, more like pita in Greece. The basic alimentation of wheat and dairy for the masses is reminiscent of the legacy that the archaic Roman empire may have wrought over its pale since the dawn, or at least morning, of Western civilization. Georgian cuisine, even in its more quotidian incarnations, is as delightfully nourishing as it is warming.

And with their common linkages by way of the Eastern Church and its ties throughout Anatolia and Central Asia, from Turkey's Byzantine heritage to the early monastic societies of Georgia, the multicultural *cezve* of pre-modern Roman society looms large, full on every side of the horizon. In fact, various forms of the ubiquitous coffeepot known in Turkish as *cezve* (pronounced "jezve") are littered throughout Tbilisi's most famous flea market, located on the western shores of the

Kura River, over the Chughreti Bridge, where the golden dome of the Sameba Cathedral decorates the low-rise, medieval cityscape.

A Georgian man sat with his wife and two foreign friends at a vegetarian restaurant in the hip Tbilisi district of Vake. He had to have his espresso before eating. With a comic attitude, he relished in his rule, although the woman who had lived beside him for many years did not hesitate to make fun of him for his culinary quirk. While of Italian inspiration, the drinking of coffee prior to dining, as an appetizing stimulant, may have roots in the Turkish origins of imperial cafe culture, as the influence of the Ottomans, their trade with Arabic societies, essentially spread coffee throughout much of Eurasia.

His wife was from Batumi. She expressed her love for the Black Sea coast, for Turkey and Istanbul, where her daughter had many friends, and intended to enroll in university. It was plain in her eyes, a characteristic glint followed by a soft smile, that she was infatuated with the worldly verve of the Turkish lifestyle, its liberal youth, and their enthusiastic welcome to peers from neighboring countries who, together, with them, live under the same umbrella of historic, intercultural relations. While the men of Georgia may have leaned toward a more masculine, Russian alignment in their ancestral attire, women clung to the femininities of Turkish fashions.

Inside the permanent galleries of Georgia's National Museum, a vast building on the broad thoroughfare promenade of Rustaveli Avenue, one of Tbilisi's main arteries, there are vivid examples of historical clothing on display. Among them are dresses dating from the 1920s and 30s, such as that of an Abkhaz woman. Made with delicate weaves of silk, velvet, and golden thread, it could very well have been in the closet of an Istanbul socialite, only one or two centuries prior, as the Ottoman capital was then swept by an unprecedented velocity of cultural Westernization, leaving outlying peoples under its sway lingering in past milieus.

The garments and jewelry of the Abkhaz woman, apparently from the historical region of Samurzakano, might be found in an antique shop in Çukurcuma, the gilded embroidery, and paisley shapes emboldening the silver necklaces and white lace of a woman who must have enjoyed certain prestige in the bucolic environs of her native ecology. Oftentimes the dresses on display at national and folk museums

are heirloom bridal gowns, couched in local tradition, yet their styles mingling with what was hot in the imperial centers of the day. It seems that there was a strong industry of Ottoman textiles spanning the fringes of the empire, including Tbilisi.

April 25, 2022
Tbilisi, Georgia

Cool

The iconic poster of the 1984 film “Fahriye Abla” is the centerpiece of interior design at the eponymous cafe, Fahriye, where the mood is enlightened by a cineaste’s feast of books and artworks that grace its walls, lining its shelves, and issue from the mouths of its conversationalists, their breath heavy and richened by the coffee served from the bijou establishment’s welcoming counter.

On an early spring morning some years ago, a couple of roommates walked down the street from their shared flat just a hop, skip and a jump away around a few corners. She was from Adana and proud to say it, calling herself a native of the sweetest part of the heart of Anatolia. And he, he was from the south shore of Massachusetts, not far from Boston, though far, far from those lands across three seas and an ocean.

They were talking about a few things. She wanted to take a little inner-city vacation to the biggest of the Princes' Islands off the coast of Kadıköy, visible from the parkland seafront where they would often walk to catch a breeze. She pointed at the poster of “Fahriye Abla” and explained that one of their friends who had frequented gatherings at their flat was, in fact, related to Müjde Ar, the leading lady of the picture.

Her beauty was unmistakable. And from its saturated technicolor palette, they radiated onto those thirsting for every last drop of their espresso drinks, foamed with hot milk and stirred with a passion for the culinary craft. That’s where the baristas came in, a gregarious lot, many from the city of Van, bearing their Kurdish identity with a vocal smile, a word of who they are behind their accents, exotic to some Turkish patrons from the country’s western regions.

One such fellow is named Veysi, with a thick beard and innocent glint in his eye, he is quick to detail the ingredients of their latest baked specials, sweets that, it seems, have discovered a crack in the universe where all that is dark and difficult flies away instantaneously, with a single bite into the void of the mystery that is the perfection of their cakes. Their recipe for *muhallebi* pudding with mastic and coconut cream over poppyseed bread is exquisite.

With a sturdy, solid playlist resounding with the tones of blues artists like Ray Charles and Leadbelly, or the dynamic lyrics of Tom Waits and Lhasa de Sela, Fahriye preserves a calming atmosphere that's ripe for a digital nomad's remote workplace as much as it is a local's respite from the daily grind. And toward the evening, their kitchen is a soothing refuge from the world of dishes and solitude, as they serve up a mean vegetarian *mantı* dumplings with lentils.

Over friendly discussions, it's possible to meet and greet with their affable staff, including marrieds, the better half speaking English, with a sibling in America. The man is a more withdrawn sort, intelligent-looking, embodying the inspiring, literary dash that the cafe instills in its regulars who might browse its many and multilingual books for an old novel by Ernest Hemingway or an essay collection from *The New Yorker* magazine.

Back in the day, when Fahriye was one of the only cozy cafes to warm up with a *cortado* espresso and a book during the calm before the storm that has since overwhelmed Moda with the masses of Istanbul's weekend escapists, there was no counter, but there were pieces of velvet furniture and glass cabinets filled with ephemera and memorabilia from decades past. Outside, a chest with books for sale has remained, a treasury of cheap paperbacks.

An erudite barista of yore would discuss filmmaking. With an actor's visage from the southeastern parts of Turkey, he had that look of youthful ambition and soon disappeared from behind the scenes at the cafe. So did another young woman from Mardin, who studied law. Still, there are familiar faces who grace the tiled floor and step up the split level staircase to entertain the midday whims and fancies of travelers, writers and thinkers of all stripes.

Across the street from Fahriye is a Turkish-language bookstore named Moby Dick, curiously, despite the fact that Herman Melville's 19th-century American linguistic ties do not bind its modest institution, which is stocked with new editions of translated literature from across the globe. Its clerk can be seen frequenting the outdoor tables at Fahriye, where, chummy with the baristas, they enact scenes from Italian movies.

Amid the strange island of a society that is Moda, its bombastic nightlife and socialite egotism, Fahriye is a clean tonic, its naivety brave and consistent, where thoughts might be shared without judgment, a corner for strong tea and easygoing friendships. It is the kind of place that makes going out warm, even in midwinter, during the quiet of a Friday night, where it's alright to be a little introverted.

But so much of the time, Fahriye is crowded, even if there's downtime here and there inside its high-ceilinged loft. Its workers bustle about answering many requests, a toast here, dessert there, another filter coffee to top off the last of an afternoon walk, even if directionless. Fahriye is vibrant, cyclical in its temporality, hearkening back to the golden age of cafe culture, when people talked without question and exchanged even the simplest of ideas, listening as they gained momentum together.

April 20, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Sip

The filter coffee at Güten Morgen is fine, hitting spots like a superlative example of Istanbul's daytime culture when it comes to the roasting of imported beans. In the bijou room, furnished with not more than four tables and a counter overlooking a sleepy tree-lined street, its young and friendly baristas offer a sleek alignment of that precious global commodity hailing from Latin America to East Africa. Its scents are reminiscent of the Ethiopian origin story of coffee, said to have been discovered by a goat's curious munching on the red berries of the plant.

And such tales are woven aplenty at Güten Morgen, the kind of cafe where so many tongues rattle off insights and anecdotes into their private lives and social concerns while sipping the hot, black drink, perhaps lightened with milk, passing time like migratory birds at a watering hole. Beyond the filtration of roasted, exotic beans, Güten Morgen excels at the espresso condensation of its substance into shots of stimulating power, natural, yet artificial in terms of process.

Handed over in ribbed glasses and porcelain mugs, and topped with swirls of foam, such afternoon accomplices like the *cortado*, or cappuccino, are well-paired with their sweet, baked goods. Among them are thick slices of cake, prepared with bananas or citrus fruits. And after a long morning, their savory sandwiches are nourishing, green, fresh, smeared with avocado and cheeses, packed into artisan bread. The place is practically an institution, modest in proportion to the host of cafes that line the bustling quarter.

Güten Morgen is the kind of place where friends might meet, one traveling from Berlin, the other living in Istanbul. It's the sort of spot where they might converse about what it's like in Moldova, or Poland, sharing secrets on what to do at night in Kadıköy, or when to get away to the warmer climes of southern Turkey. With its German name, the cafe attracts a special blend of local foreigners, those whose anglophone stories are so often confined within the language barriers behind which they live and dream of breaking through.

With one of its tables situated squarely in the middle of the room, Güten Morgen is host to spirited meetings between new friends, whose conversations buzz with visions of their memories in the spirit of new relationships. An engineer from

Washington, D.C., spoke with a mutual acquaintance who had traveled in from the deserts of California, and sitting with their father from Tehran they shared that quintessential, American sense of transnational identity, accentuated by their common differences.

With its liberal air and reticent hosts, Güten Morgen is a space to think. That's why so many entrepreneurial creatives sit there for hours, so it seems, zoning out in front of their laptops with earbuds firmly in place, shutting themselves off from their surroundings while the person right next to them does the exact same thing. Sometimes they might open their eyes a bit wider, pick up their heads and notice the expression on a dog's face as it passes in search of warmth.

On weekend afternoons, there are low stools where people from across the neighborhood chat and read, contemplate and draw while knocking back a few rounds of coffee at Güten Morgen, and almost crouching, relish in the localization of their social ecology. By virtue of its precedent as a traditional pastime, coffee drinking has defined much of work culture, but it simultaneously stands for a break from that grind, and whereas metaphors abound, its chemical reactions continue to inspire dreamers to infinity.

With a passing glance, it is possible to spot an old friend, someone who has recently enjoyed the attention of an exhibition for their artwork, while potential connections await, also, queuing up, not only for a refreshing spike of caffeine but also to be seen, and perchance heard, when the opportunity to talk, impromptu, might occur between two remote workers or between meetings. Güten Morgen has a progressive bent, it is an inclusive place, and a conscious ground for everyday solidarity within the normalcy of human life.

While in English and German, the expression for greeting someone in the morning is quite the same, the Turkish is, literally a slight variation. "Günaydın" means "bright day," word for word, which is similar to the Arabic equivalent. And all of these languages do commingle at Güten Morgen, sometimes even through one person, who, while sipping on their coffee, might appear, as innocent as a sleeping cat in their lonely silence, until they say "good morning."

That multilingual patron of Güten Morgen might go on to recount their life story, surviving the move across the planet, remembering every moment of tragic urgency and dramatic absurdity, all in the duration of drinking a single cup. And just when they've landed on what sounds like the end of their narrative, they're likely to raise their arm, and ask for another splash of coffee to loosen their mind and sharpen their concentration as they return to the place in their minds, transported by the effect of the drink in their hands.

April 5, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Slow

It was a cold winter evening. The rain was turning to snow, and back to the slush that makes the black streets reflective, gleaming with the headlights of cars that pass by and turn about the rotary that, in earlier times, served as a place where locals would cool off while putting their feet in a shallow depth of water, perhaps while waiting for their daughter or son to get out of the primary school across the way, its children often heard screaming with delight in their concrete playground.

Memories of another neighborhood held water as a birthday party started to assemble against the headwind that made them shiver with excitement, to see each other, and share in the beauty of a night out in the city, warmed by the sheer presence of their closeness. It was a casual affair, and that's what Suvi provided, closing the little eatery for the crew of some 12 people, mostly couples and single women. The air was ebullient, as a philosopher who works with children was turning 35, and her friends were there to celebrate.

The menu was fixed. And it began with a stream of bowls, multicolored and flecked with seeds and herbs, marinated in butter and oils, richly scented and flavorful to the eye before tasting, and merging with its nourishing, healthful palate. There was a dish of cauliflower and purple cabbage, a staple of Turkish dining, sliced and spiced, as well as a vegetal variety that proved mouthwatering and filling on its own. And then, the carnivores of the bunch were given small metal plates and they sank their teeth into tender meats.

The ambiance of Suvi is fun and retro, with a marquee like a dairy bar on which various specialties are spelled out, letter by letter, against a backlit board reminiscent of the kind used to highlight milkshakes at a rural stopover in the American midwest. And the chief waiter, also an aproned cook, is as fluent an English speaker as any, greeting with the informal, friendly grip of his hand, a smile behind his whitening beard. To finish their cooked offerings, Suvi offers smooth, world-class coffees from their espresso machine.

The slogan of Suvi is that they prepare fast food slowly, adhering to the principles of slow food in the process. The movement that is known as "slow food" has come to acquire global significance in an age where industrial agriculture has not only

changed the environment but also the manner and substance of eating itself. It is clear at Suvi that they are attentive to each ingredient, respectful of its stalks, grains, roots, leaves and meat from the point of its origins to how it feels going down in the middle of a lively group dinner.

Suvi is sometimes described as a “Western restaurant,” but its simplicity is universal. Whether in its carrots, mushrooms, beets or broccoli, it brings out the freshness and nutrition of the vegetable, delivering its own inborn tastes afresh by complementing its juices with protracted cooking times and light interventions of seasoning. And serving up bowls and sandwiches with a plant-based foundation, Suvi is non-vegetarian, but consciously carnivorous, an eatery that conveys ecological knowledge.

The word “Suvi” refers to a cooking process, particularly the benefits of slowness when it comes to taste, and also, imaginably, the preservation of nutrients. If food is overcooked its living elements burn away. While cooking is an essential evolutionary trait, as environmental culinary writers like Michael Pollan have shown, the preference for salads, fruits and raw ingredients is a major part of public health. Suvi, like all proper “slow food” establishments, is finding a happy medium.

By vacuuming a vegetable, or meat, in a sealed bag, and cooking it in a bath with a controlled temperature just below boiling, the slow cooking process begins. In French, the term “Sous Vide,” means "under a vacuum." Suvi comes from its pronunciation. And as a promoter of progressive kitchens, Suvi is not only a restaurant but a pedagogical space. Their website is replete with information on the whole industry of slow food, and the tools that streamline its preparation for professionals and amateurs alike.

As part of their productions, on and off the table, Suvi also makes slow cooking easy for any level of practitioner, whether a master chef or a stranger to the kitchen. Their vacuum-sealed portions of sweet potatoes, for example, can be heated in a pot of water on low heat and then fished out of their packaging for a quick sear over an open flame, inspiring a flash of taste that will be sure to delight guests and hosts of all stripes. And when the weather warms, people will be out on the patio seating at Suvi.

They might sip an iced coffee and remember when Moda had that old pool when its days were refreshed by kids splashing about between classes while their parents waited for a late lunch in the languorous afternoon of Istanbul's hot season.

They'll be watching people pass from all sides on that corner, which is a busy one, where a tram slides past, ringing its bell, and the seagulls compete with crows for stale *simit* (traditional circular bread usually encrusted in sesame seeds), as fashionable youth and young families start their lives anew, out for some fast food cooked slow.

March 29, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Corner

There is some kind of magic at Yumma, as its spatial dimensions unfold with a sense of surprise fascination by the tiny nooks and eccentric angles of its inner life. Behind glass jars of cookies and a refrigerated vitrine of cakes, just under an espresso machine that seems to fit against the back wall like the last piece of a puzzle, there is a tunnel-like stairwell leading to a cellar kitchen. Up from its oblique light, servers and cooks emerge, holding characterful plates and dishes with tasteful blends of recipes for all times of day.

Their breakfasts in particular, are a delightful smorgasbord of the Turkish variety, including at one time a very aromatic, country-like cheese that seems to have just arrived off the farm. And their toasts, spiked with oregano and sun-dried tomatoes, are perfect occasions to lunch in the urban environs of a most alleviating stopover in the midst of hectic commutes and nights out. What sets Yumma apart is their choice ingredients, prepared as part of a string of foods that instill a warm, nourishing rustic naturalism in the heart of Istanbul.

There are usually only three or four tables inside Yumma. It is a haunt of modesty amid the buzzing cafe quarter surroundings. And on its high shelves, there are thick volumes on regional cooking, travel and the like, coffee table books for a bistro that, in summer especially, looks more like an overgrown private residence than a commercial outfit. It is situated on a roadway that sees quite a lot of traffic, but that does not impinge on the breezy quiet of its pacific moods.

On sunny days, rays of natural light beam down over its tables that stretch languorous across the well-trod concrete. Across the corner, a massive, gray, furry, territorial dog sizes up new patrons while licking its lips, on the make for a handout. But its large, beautiful eyes, do not stoke fear, its tongue lolling with a kindred, innocent naivety to that of a young worker with a hankering for someone to make them coffee in the blustery, coastal district of Kadıköy. Even well into the evening, its calm is ripe for an herbal tea.

On cold, early mornings, there are oftentimes crates of fresh vegetables, raw and dirty from their agricultural source, awaiting the door at Yumma – as it sometimes opens later in the morning with more of a laid-back atmosphere ideal for brunch, or

the lazy afternoon mix of jams and spreads with bread and tea that is a hallmark of the Turkish breakfast experience. Yumma adds generous heaps and dollops of its finest, ecologically sourced preserves and butters over dense breads.

One of the more curious features of Yumma is its half of a second floor, a raised platform up a narrow metal staircase, furnished with plushly cushioned seats and such. It is the kind of spot where a Turkish tutor might meet with their student to discuss the vocabulary and grammar of Turkey's official language, or where a wizened American translator might meet with an erudite acquaintance and bookish compatriot as they discuss Chinese-Turkish literature. Like most cafes, it has a youthful spirit but entertains a mature poise.

There were times when cafes were refuges, stimulating and nutritive, places of relaxation within the eye of the storm, where a thinker could sit back and observe urbanization at work, its artificial ecology swarming with overpopulated mechanization with one nose deeply buried in an old book by Renaissance French writer François Rabelais, or something more local from a nearby secondhand bookshop, like a thinly disguised, modernist Ottoman romance by the midcentury Turkish novelist Suzan Sözen.

With that irresistibly foamy cappuccino of theirs, their bakery is a trove of treasures, from raw chocolate to spinach cake, red velvet mascarpone and eclairs, they have a special penchant for crepes, pancakes and French toasts smothered in berries, for a vital seasonality. And if just stopping by is more on the menu, they have a wealth of packaged goods inspired by Turkey's shared regional palette with that of the Levant of the Eastern Mediterranean, such as *muhammara*, a red pepper walnut paste, and hummus.

It is said that the name, Yumma, refers to the sound of mother in Arabic, and that the owner called her grandmother that. In describing themselves, they identify as an ancestral, local kitchen. The personable woman behind much of their operations is Esra Hoşafoğlu, who also works as an astrological psychologist. With a perfect humility, their place on the map is an invitation to go within, as into a seed, in search of the sources of life that catapult its seer back into the stars.

Back on earth, the cats are ambling about, curling up to the legs of thirsty talkers with the name “Yumma” on their lips. They tell stories of their own past, the lives of their remembrance as they recount ventures abroad, or across the vast reaches of Anatolia, which, might begin after biting into an olive, listening to the wind through the low-rise neighborhood of Moda as the sounds of leaves swaying mixes with the clink of a metal spoon stirring sugar into a steaming glass of tea.

March 17, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Relish

With a glazed, ceramic decor of deep blues, wispy greens and faint reds, there is an Aegean sensibility to Lokanta Kru, even in the midst of Istanbul's humid, dark winter nights, when the moon is obscured by dense cloud cover and sprinkling, misty rain. Inside the eatery, informal tables are set much like a living room, with a wide glass display and broad counter that gleams with the latest inventions of its hard-working chefs.

During the chill after sunset, a pianist might arrive dressed in a warm sweater, to sit and play beside fellow patrons out for a quiet evening, to let down the worries of the day gently, easily over sumptuous plates of home-cooked *meze* appetizers and a round of recipes that seem to fit snugly somewhere between starters and main courses. Its mashed vegetables, thick leaves and dense roots are peppered and thickened with oily yogurt sauces. Among its dishes and plates, bowls and glasses, there are rustic numbers on the rotating list of nourishing eats. For one, its palate has an endearing plainness, healthful as the Mediterranean sun that breaks over the seaside pasture of its world-renowned agriculture. Whether it is broccoli suffused with delightful cheeses, spiked with herbs, or potato, lightened by spring onion and served cold, the fare is deceptively simple, resourcefully artful.

A printed menu is not entirely needed at Lokanta Kru, as people come from the street, wearing their business casual in the typical style of Istanbul's more European quarters, quick to use the power of their sense of smell and taste before reading, or even asking. They then awe in wonder at the mesmerizing fusions of color that meld together, issued from plant-based visions of vitality in a city that demands constant health-conscious choices to stay positive.

As is common almost anywhere, one of the immediate offerings of the place is a soup made with artichoke, a classic piece of the culinary puzzle in Turkey, generally seen hawked on street corners anywhere for its thistle-like flower head is a versatile foundation to many recipes. From Istanbul to the Thracian reaches of Greece, artichokes are seasonal for winter, a perfect time for soup, and overlap into spring, made with lemon, olive oil and fresh dill. The watery sweetness of artichokes are fitting complements to specially made broths, and Lokanta Kru exercises the magic of its natural potency with a straightforward sensibility. Food

is sometimes best kept basic, as the Turkish kitchen excels in home cooking, with its infinite variations on the theme of comfort. Artichokes are also prepared at Lokanta Kru in a strawberry salad, leaning toward the arrival of spring, and its eruption of biodiversity.

There is a summery version of the traditional Turkish dish *kısır* made with a fine bulgur, sometimes compared to Lebanese tabouleh for its use of cracked wheat. But unlike the Levantine variety, *kısır* in Turkey is lighter on the greens and steeps its main ingredient in a savory tomato or pepper sauce. It can evoke the sensation of its disappearance on the tongue, as someone floating in a zero-gravity space, making it perfectly suited for the hot season.

After having arrived at Lokanta Kru, the very amenable waiters bring out a small saucer of olive oil. With a single bite of a cracker dipped in its pool of emerald, golden liquid, it is possible to experience a change of moods. And as plate after plate comes out, replete with ricotta cheeses and such blends of custom and inspiration as okra and quinoa, they might precede oven-baked items, a healthier approach to sour zucchini, stuffed or as a pancake.

When talking about Lokanta Kru, locals have said that it is like going to a French bakery, adhering to an overall conceptual approach that is aesthetically tied to its seasonal, culturally specific kitchen, something that a weary wanderer might come across in a windblown, breezy town on the Aegean coast as much as in the heart of Istanbul. It attracts people from the neighborhood and across town who want to get away, without traveling too far from home.

One of the allures of Lokanta Kru is its profuse and varied portions. And the fact that its menu rotates means that a single individual might never taste everything. That is where community comes to encompass the breadth of its cooking. After tasting to abandon, its many main courses are sure to satisfy to the end of the evening, when the last of the ivory keys have been played, and the song of the spheres goes silent to the sound of footsteps walking home.

March 8, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Pleasure

The decor at Zevk Lokanta has that kind of aged golden sparkle, bordering on kitsch, and, in that way it is endearingly retro, especially when recalling the heady heydays of mid-century Turkish liberalism, what would now be imaginably linked to the grandparents of millennials who kick back and wonder just what it might have been like to grow up surrounded by old Istanbul before it went dusty with the ghosts of its mythical legacy.

Around the corner from the Aya Triada Rum Orthodox Church, where, on Sundays, gray-haired women walk from its pearly, high white gate with smiles, some solemn, returning from a service at one of Istanbul's rare, still-active Greek-speaking churches. But that is the air in Moda, a district that has preserved certain elements of life from the Istanbul of the past, which, to most storytellers and elders, was quite a different city than it is today.

Zevk, however, conjures the feeling of how Istanbul once was. Within its expansive, two-floor theater-like venue with bijou patio space, it seems to resuscitate the long-faded glory of its multicultural society, the crooning music with its intricate eastern instrumentation, as revelers from all walks of life, porters and socialites, artists and workers, commingle and become each other, as their glasses clink and *meze* appetizers swirl with shared delight.

Situated on the tramway route where the neighborhood trolley passes, ringing its bell, Zevk's exterior facade is unmistakable, and resonates with the architectural tendencies of its partner food and drink businesses, such as Dün and Yer, cafes that entertain with the buzz of young staff and an inventive kitchen. Whereas the others serve more of a modern global fare, Zevk is very much a feast of roots.

In a counter-intuitive turn that might be risky, but in its boldness proves redeeming, Zevk's kitchen does not try to stray completely beyond Turkey's longstanding culinary rituals in the interest of appetizing its thoroughly internationalized target demographic, which is largely the younger generations who inhabit the neighborhood. Nor does the place cater to an overtly touristic mode, rehashing the history of Turkish dining as a token affair.

That said, they come dangerously close to canceling out their attempts at inclusivity, within an ambiance that is not authentically traditional in the modern sense, because of its airs of makeover revitalization, but that also swerves right of appealing to alternative youth in Turkey who have been overwhelmed with the artificiality of national cultural resurgence. As a restaurant they are naive, innocent, but the redolence of misplaced conservatism is strong.

It is in the aesthetic of the walls, the furniture, the colors and music of the place, which quite chaotically bounces back and forth between tavern fantasies and electronic dance. Despite its historical anachronisms, the quality and ingenuity of the food is enough to let bygones be bygones and let the savory mix with the sweet over a full table of masterfully made regional delicacies.

The *meze* starters alone are enough to provoke mouthwatering joy aplenty, fulfilling as they are rich, immersed in oil of such quality as distinguishes the Turkish countryside from the Greek and Levantine varieties of the ancient fruit. At Zevk, they prepare a crushed olive salad known from the environs of Antakya, at the southeastern edge of the country, bordering Syria in a cultural melting pot rife with Greek, Assyrian, Kurdish and Arab influences.

What goes best with any particular dish at Zevk is no less than the company one keeps. While downing a drink, or basking in the purely wistful ambiance of the room, early afternoon into the late evening is as fine a time as any to smother a piece of bread in their sweet hummus or the unmistakably wonderful *girit ezmesi*, a paste of cheese and pistachio said to be derived, via its name, from the island of Crete.

And despite their lavish displays of seafood, from their pickled tunny to marine bass, what might enliven the imagination of the palate most reliably could be nothing more fancy than a simple pureed bean, the much-favorited *fava*, or oily Aegean herbs. The list is endless and perfectly reminiscent of seaside waves, the smell of salt in the morning and cool breezes that calm the nerves after a long, hot day under the sun.

That is the essence of Zevk, a word that means nothing less than "pleasure" in Turkish, evoking the ebullient pastimes of a national culture soaked in spices and

sauces that have the potential to vitalize human life through old age, as memories and recipes are shared over tables draped and lined with such culinary artistry as that which makes a salty zucchini *mücver* pancake, flavored with aromatic *mahlep* seeds.

One night an older woman, ostensibly from the neighborhood, came into the candlelit establishment bearing a few large shopping bags. She was dressed quite conservatively, although uncovered atop her head. She sat for awhile, and took in the spirit of the place, consuming nothing of its food or drink, but just being there, at the end of one of its long tables. And then she left, in few words. No one knew who she was. She was like a memory, herself.

February 21, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Upstairs

The place is somewhere down one of those ubiquitous dark, narrow side streets, atmospheric to the point of otherworldly on cold, rainy nights, when the mewing of cats and the squawking of seagulls fades into the blur of traffic behind the dense, ancient buildings. There've been folks talking about its fine kitchen for ages. They said it's around the corner from a historic French high school, the kind of quarter where it's impossible not to pass so many second-hand bookshops, dim cafes and storefront windows selling who knows what.

The entrance is almost like out of a horror film, with dusty surfaces everywhere, and blinking whitewash ceiling lights, but there is an irresistible pull, toward a mysterious warmth, despite the sneaking suspicion that the back alley apartment has a curious resemblance to a long lost friend from the past. But that is the effect of coming up for air within a business wholly set to the rhythms, language and customs of Georgian cooking, a hearth shared within the regional sphere of neighboring Turkey.

Utterly welcoming, the popularity of Galaktion attracts a coterie of patrons who could not appear to be more different, yet who have in common a love for the enigmatic intrigues that gush and steam from the pots and pans of such a busy, Georgian culinary outfit. On any given evening it is not far-fetched to espy a nun and her clerical staff enjoying the heavy food while seated across from an enamored, young couple, or a large family with screaming infants beside an Arabic-speaking guest who waxes nostalgic with the waitress about his years in Tbilisi.

Once having found a table, the placemats are unfolded to reveal maps of the Republic of Georgia, its vast and mountainous countryside practically leaping from the paper to entice hungry eyes into planning a trip to its remote, friendly locales. To a novice, its menu might appear to be a practical encyclopedia of transliterated Georgian words related to foods, as endlessly puzzling as they are beguiling. It is perhaps ideal to be in the company of a knowledgeable guide. That said, any kind of delicious, festive meal at Galaktion is hard to miss.

According to its profile, Galaktion is not only a restaurant. They proudly describe themselves as a culture center, and library. That seems quite natural, given the degree of amateur erudition embedded within the environs of the establishment once past its modest, introductory architecture at the top of a traditional Beyoğlu tenement. There is a sense about the spot that is boldly informative, as if its owners worked by day as travel agents and moonlighted as the overseers of their country's finest chefs in Istanbul.

Now, Central Asian cuisine is distinguished by its overt frankness, its breads and soups, salads and sauces. Whether after a pleasant coffee from Batumi, while under the sway of a summer appetizer immersed in a sweet Georgian Lemonade, the plentiful options of the fixed menu at Galaktion are prized possessions amid Istanbul's multicultural culinary landscape. Opening up with crushed walnut sprinkled over their national salad, a simple medley of tomatoes, cucumbers, spring onions, parsley and purple basil, Galaktion is a trove of tastes.

Its bread-based dishes are sumptuous indulgences of butter. There are lily pads of the churned cream that saturate the fleshy dough, its earthly palate as satisfying as it is calorific. Variously shaped, however, largely set as a kind of boat-shaped hull type of form, the dairy-infused, unmistakably favorited *khachapuri* is loaded with salted cheeses. The recipe is so important to Georgians that it's part of their intangible cultural heritage, and they even have a Khachapuri Day, February 27.

The word, *khachapuri*, means bread with curds and was traditionally eaten while dipping its oily, slick surface into a soft cheese. Oftentimes, it's baked with the heart of an egg in the middle, resembling the Turkish *pide*. And there are endless variations on it, including Galaktion's *acharuli*, *megruli*, *penovani*, *lobiani*, and *mchadi*. It is said that the shape of the bread originates from the enjoyment and baking of the seafaring Laz people, who share ancient ties to the Black Sea coast shared by both Turkey and Georgia.

The name Galaktion comes from the early 20th century Georgian poet, whose full name was Galaktion Tabidze. At the end of Galaktion's menu, there is a quote from the man, who tragically took his own life in 1959: "…Without love / neither beauty nor / immortality exist." It is a romantic phrase from a romantic country, one steeped in good drinks and nourishing food, heavy perhaps, though rightfully so, as

a measure of collective ebullience in the abundance of the wide Earth, boundless, if only on the surface of a tongue.

It is no coincidence, then, that Georgian cuisine affirms a solidarity with one of its luminaries whose voice called for the humanization of aesthetics. Galaktion's penchant for solitude is in contrast, though with the restaurant's communal ambiance, even if it is named in the memory of one whose verse whirled with the brutal winds of his age. Even the thought of his life's passion is enough to break from the worries of life, order up Georgian dumplings, *khinkali*, steamed or fried won't make much of a difference before Istanbul's eastern horizon.

February 8, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Uplift

In the middle of the pandemic, the titanic feat of opening a restaurant in a bustling, popular city like Istanbul might be aptly compared to the Greek myth of Atlas, a figure who was famously condemned to hold up the sky for eternity. In the classical work by Hesiod, entitled, *Theogony*, written in the eighth century B.C., the genealogy of the ancient Greek deities includes a tract on Atlas, born "stout-hearted," Ocean's grandson, made to stand forever at the very westernmost extremity of Earth in order to suffer his timeless, lofty order of damnation.

That sense of direction is part of the legendary folklore behind the string of mountains in North Africa ostensibly named after him, the Atlas Mountains, which stretch from Morocco to Tunisia through Algeria. Others say the range was named after the Berber word for mountain, which can be transliterated as *adras*. These are the kinds of stories that would be appropriate to tell while tasting the appetizing menu at Atlas in Kadıköy, where a particularly tantalizing recipe for fried, sun-dried eggplant with a Maghrebi, or North African *chermoula* sauce.

The Arabic word for west is also a homonym for strange, which runs parallel with its loan in Turkish, pronounced, *garip*. That root forms the basis for the geographical indicator, Maghreb, which was generally known as the west throughout much of Arabic history, with its major centers in North Africa and the Iberian peninsula. The overlap of cultures, especially that of Turkish and Arabic, is as immediate as it is warming as the flavorfully rich *chermoula* sauce, a forest green marinade relish typical in every North African country except for Egypt.

To first dry eggplants under the sun enhances their earthy textures and tones with a satisfying stretch of the culinary imagination before sautéing them to perfection, doused in a generous lathering of *chermoula*, the effect is transporting, from the tongue to the heavens. And as a beginning plate, it is favorable to mix tastes, such as with their delectably subtle roasted beetroot dish, served at room temperature over a marsh of strained yogurt and dill, with lemon peel, hazelnut and mint oil rounding out its singular palate.

Atlas is like the epigraph in Quentin Tarantino's film, *Kill Bill*: revenge is a dish best served cold. It is a summery affair, a restaurant perfect for balmy days under

the blaze of the sun when it rages after swimmers and sightseers. The building in which it is situated is unique in its architecture for the neighborhood, with a sturdy bulbous exterior of round, stone shapes, almost like a glorified cavern that stays cool for hungry and festive footsore wanderers and urban explorers to chance upon some nourishing delights, whether planned or impromptu.

But in the cold of midwinter, as snow lights on the glowing yellow sky of Istanbul caught between two seas, two continents and countless cultures, their herbal teas are the right remedies. That said, their house fare, while best fit for a hot day, remains practically irresistible. Even as cold drafts blow in, their spicy hibiscus chili mocktail goes nicely with their watermelon radish, red apple salad, which brings out the German turnip *kohlrabi*, flecked with flax seeds in a chilled Dijon mustard vinaigrette.

With vegan soup served all day against a course of carnivorous charms encompassing everything from hot fried chicken wings to lamb *tirit* and beef tongue, there is something for everyone no matter the preference. And even though Atlas may seem to be paradise for a roving health nut, it does not skimp on the elements of savory, cooking Western favorites like french fries that go with their perfect falafel recipe, either sandwiched in a thick pita or as a plate hovering over a smear of hummus with cucumber and seasonal herbs.

And with their round of fresh mocktails and homemade drinks, whether infused with beet and sumac or lemon and juniper, their fancy trove of desserts await. The chocolate cake is fittingly titled, "nemesis," for it is bound to be the death of anyone who might try to resist, flourless and spiked with sliced almonds. Their chocolate cookie is made with tahini and their *mahalabia* pudding with cardamom and dried rose leaves, their sweet pumpkin is topped with walnuts and again, tahini, an everyday, regional ingredient made with ground sesame.

To the North African, and Eastern Mediterranean kitchen, tahini is about as common as it is extraordinary, kind of like life on a rock in space, deceptively simply, until, when enjoying a good meal, time stops, and all comes to a strange, and transcendent focus, contemplating the mythical mysteries of the upraised skies. It is possible while eating Atlas's cauliflower drenched in their house tahini sauce, amplified by coriander, pomegranate, parsley and red pepper oil or the classic

hummus with Turkey's chickpeas from Ovacık, Fethiye on the Aegean coast, or their special tahini from the heartland Anatolian town of Bozkır, near Konya.

January 27, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Fine

Its design of raw-inspired wood panels and glossy stone surfaces complements the overall aesthetic at Ororo, enunciated by the presentation of its many and diverse dishes. Beginning with a vegetable gyoza is an appetizing diversion from the norm of tastes that fill the complacent air of Istanbul's often monolithic kitchen. With a lightly browned surface crisped to sautéed perfection, sprinkled with fresh onions, doused in a deep red oil and sesame sauce, Ororo is a stealthy outfit for prompting a certain order of deliciousness.

In two variations, there is a tempura tofu dish that, true to its Japanese muses, is listed as *dainamaito* on Ororo's menu. It is a vegan treasure, and comes either as spicy, or suffused with sweet chili. The soft, crackly effect of eating these hints of cherry blossom paradise are tantamount to taking a plunge in the cavernous reaches of the culinary imagination, where a thing as utterly contemporary as tofu takes on an immemorial pulse of palatal familiarity. And with plain or sweet and sour edamame beans, a rich and sumptuous feast is on its way.

The opening suite of plates at Ororo is not entirely vegetarian in the least, but is soaked with the seafood inventions authentic to Japanese dining. Shrimp are a focal point, whether as chips or fried in tempura batter. A step further down the evolutionary chain are delicacies with octopus, namely the *takoyaki*, topped with a salty infusion of sea greens and spread across with the specially piquant house mayonnaise. Although sushi is sometimes best fit for the heat of summer, Ororo serves a wealth of winter-friendly offerings, like their hot, sour chicken soup.

And encompassing not only the food culture of Japan, but of the Pacific region, including the Chinese *bao*, or bun, Ororo prepares it almost in the style of a taco. It is interesting to note that the idea of filling doughy bread with savory nourishments is likely part of a shared culinary and linguistic bridge connecting East Asian cuisine to that of Turkey, as the *bao* apparently originates from a dish popular in Inner Mongolia called, *mantou*, which, with a quick etymological reading, sounds quite close to the Anatolian *mantı* dumpling.

In a quartet of variations, from vegan, chicken and beef to shrimp, the *bao* buns at Ororo have the distinctive quality of integrating such ingredients as caramelized

mushrooms or marinated cabbage. As one of their complimentary salads, instead of noodles, they make what they call a “zoodle” out of daikon, served with pieces of pineapple to induce a tropical aura about their transporting fare. The range of their ordinary noodles are exceptional, including a beet-infused Pad Thai and a verdant rice noodle Midori with coconut milk and soy sprouts.

And stretching out with the typical pan-Asian sensibility of most sushi restaurants, Ororo uses wok cooking not only to take on such traditional southern Japanese dishes as “Chicken Nanban,” which is said to have Portuguese influences, owing to the early history of the two countries’ interactions. In the 16th century Portugal was the first European nation to reach Japan, and it can be assumed that, in nearly half a millennium, the peoples must have traded not a few recipes between their comparably exquisite kitchens.

For those in search of Chinese food in Istanbul, which can be a difficult and underwhelming venture, it seems best to look for restaurants that might lead, within, to a recipe from China. As such, Ororo cooks the well-Americanized favorite, General Tso’s Chicken, popular wherever takeout and night life is concerned. But on the breezy, quiet side street of Fırıldak in Kadıköy, it enjoys a more gourmet approach. And performing a welcome crossover with a Turkish street food too, the woks of Ororo fire up a *pilav* rice with steamed vegetables.

Finally, after a course of stimulating appetizers and regional wanderlust, the main event of sushi fans out with a luscious and vivid ink painting of selections, enough to cool anyone to a fixed point within its tranquil cheer. Over a pot of green tea, endless choices of classic rolls, maki options and Ororo specialties are enough to tantalize anyone for an infinite return to the tables and the counter of the restaurant, where chefs are busy, their kitchen open for viewing, as they slice and curate refined adaptations of the sushi concept.

A couple of beloved vegan rolls are the Kabocha, with puréed pumpkin and baby turnip, or the Shiitake, with the famed mushroom fortified by ripe avocado and blue poppyseed. And after rounds of nigiri and sashimi, there are unconventional sweets to be savored, like a roll named Reiko, with homemade peanut butter and delicate rice paper. While people watching on a bright weekday afternoon, or a

cozy weekend evening, Ororo is as fine a place as any to sit back with a lavender kombucha and observe one sliver of the world walk by, unnoticed.

January 4, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Society

The social mood of Yeldeğirmeni is so casual the whole neighborhood feels like the messy apartment of an old friend. It is a quiet, residential quarter, where on any given weekday ritual coffee-drinkers gather by their respective watering holes, open a book and let their minds wander through the romantic fantasies of a classic Russian novel, or feel the tensions of a domestic drama in a short story written by an author from Ankara. Despite the hour or whatever business might be at hand, the locals of Yeldeğirmeni seem to be whiling away their time without a mind to the pressing issues of the world. It is all as refreshing as a morning cup of joe.

If Istanbul were someone's house, Yeldeğirmeni, which means "windmill" in Turkish, would be that coziest part of the living room where guests go to curl up beside a cat and watch the steam of their herbal tea rise and disappear in the midmorning air. The arms of the mythical windmill that the quarter seems to have been named after turn with a pacifying sway, deliberate and somnolent. When not burying their noses in a dusty tome, the caffeinated folk of Yeldeğirmeni are usually engaged in benign, though stimulating conversation, likely about an artist, musician or intellectual who just moved into one of the studios that line its streets.

Yeldeğirmeni is akin to its neighboring community of Moda, yet its homes and businesses are generally more affordable, down to Earth, among the folks. It has gained a certain notoriety for housing independents who spend their busiest hours crafting wares and creative works of varying kinds. There are boutique botanists, like that at Roots Cafe, and serious ceramicists about the countless workshop spaces where deft laborers of every age and cultural background make things out of the raw material they've gleaned from near and far, withdrawing from the capitalist market just enough to breathe a little freer.

Along its main drag, Karakolhane Avenue, there are alternative venues for expressing ideas that fly in the face of the norm, as a more foreign demographic floats past. It is not uncommon to hear French, English, Japanese in passing dialogues, discussing everything from David Ben-Gurion's studies at Galatasaray High School just across the Bosphorus, to Voltaire's wisdom epic partly set in Istanbul in his 1759 book, *Candide*. Beside a particularly legendary spot for such

high-minded talk is a bustling cafe and warm kitchen called Kuff. Its patrons are a welcome hodgepodge of socialites and polymaths.

Kuff is just beside the Agios Georgios Rum Orthodox Church, which is a staple point of historical interest for travelers who might be up for a jaunt into the lofty spectacles of Istanbul when its diversity encompassed the spectra of its ancient Byzantine heritage. Behind its stone facade, the solemn affairs of the heavens are underway, glowing with the gold and fire of candlelit crosses and icons brushed with the vivid colorations of late antiquity. Just a few blocks away around the corner is a DIY cafe called Arthere, which demonstrates consistent, cultural solidarity with Istanbul's Arab communities through the arts.

But the wonders of Yeldeğirmeni are found in its modesty. At the mouth of its broadest, most popular avenue of Karakolhane, there is a bakery called, Cağrı Fırın, which sells perfectly risen breadstuffs, like their salty, olive-laced *açma*, which is almost like a croissant. Ideal for a taste on the run, the multitudinous cafes that unfold along Yeldeğirmeni's main drag are equally furnished with smorgasbords of baked goods aplenty. One kindly fellow from the eastern city of Gaziantep named Yunus Bey runs a shop that specializes in sweets, including the diverse arrays of baklava that have made his region famous.

And on down the road, toward the farthest reaches of the district where the sea begins to appear before leading down to the commuter ferries of Kadıköy, the municipality's performing arts venue, Yeldeğirmeni Arts Center, hosts concerts, among a wide range of events and programs. Over the winter, they hosted a classical music series, featuring two flutists accompanied by harpist Aslıhan Güngör. Led by the Belgian flutist Berten D'Hollander, and beside him on silver flute, Leyla Bayramoğulları, they played a tranquil set with everything from arrangements of *türkü* folk songs to Bach and Telemann. Under the impressive dome of Yeldeğirmeni's proudest concert hall, the music was effortlessly transporting.

An especially unique feature of Yeldeğirmeni, perhaps one of its best kept secrets, is a small pedestrian alley that runs beside the shuttered Hemdat Israel Synagogue. Although the long-neglected Star of David is visible over the high wall, it seems untouched since the place of worship opened well over a century ago. It is one of

the mysteries of the neighborhood that it has also become grounds for impromptu artists to present their latest ideas in its vicinity. And not far, past the dissonant ambiance of adolescence and age, there is one of many playhouses, as Yeldeğirmeni is a hot spot for theatrical productions.

January 4, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

East

The kitchen at 852 Hong Kong is open, and welcoming, as its cooks labor over deep, darkened woks, carefully preparing a smorgasbord of specialties while dancing flames burst upward from their busy stovetops. The clank of pots is only outmatched by the laughter of guests and the warmth of their culinary hosts. The restaurant, which opened just before the pandemic struck in Turkey, is a perfect cultural getaway within the city for those foodies who might be wary of traveling to the far-flung destination where its recipes were born.

No global city is complete without quality Asian food. If there is anything that globalization will have improved, it is the taste of fried rice and steamed dumplings wherever people are walking the streets in search of world cuisine. There is a distinctive blend of palates that Hong Kong food inspires, however, which is utterly unique in comparison to its neighbors in China, Japan, Korea, and the list goes on, tantalizing with palates that are unmistakably vital to the world's most beloved sources of nourishment.

As an eatery serving dim sum, 852 Hong Kong has a fantastic diversity of appetizers. Typically, families from Chinese-speaking communities would meet for dim sum on Sundays, and gab about their week, their families, jobs and hobbies surrounded by many generations, feasting over a steady supply of snack-friendly food items, generally meat-rich bites of any and all kinds, shapes and textures. Anyone who has ever spent a significant amount of time in a Chinatown district in America, for example, will be familiar with the delicious pastimes.

At 852 Hong Kong, there are cakes of taro root, an ingredient rarely found in Turkey, or anywhere outside of Asian food markets. Although a root vegetable, like a carrot, it has a light, even saccharine quality to it, and when sugared it is used to fill dessert-style white bread buns. The savory, fried taro cakes at 852 Hong Kong are akin to their variation in turnips, which they might have more often, seeing as how taro is hard to get in and around Anatolia. It is the case that there is a fine art to frying that is fundamental to their dishes.

Together with spring rolls with different fillings, and black-and-white mushroom salad, among other wide-ranging choices, the beginning of any lunch or evening at

852 Hong Kong is sure to satisfy. Where they shine is in the craft of their handmade noodles, thick, oily strings flecked with chili and garlic within a bowl of sliced vegetables. They also serve a thinner, clear rice noodle that is as scrumptious, perfect for a blustery winter night. And washed down with a Hong Kong-style milk tea, their kitchen is a fantasy of extraordinary delights.

There is a precious ambiance at 852 Hong Kong, a little storefront of a restaurant on the ground floor of a side street near Saint Joseph's High School in Kadıköy. With only a very modest space for a few tables, young families and rosy-cheeked couples sit next to each other over steaming plates as they're greeted by a smiling chef from Hong Kong and the chief waiter, her husband. The familial tone is palpable as they exude a genuine joy providing Istanbul with a different source of sustenance, one that is as interesting as it is jovial.

And once through its entryway, there is a wooden bookshelf replete with knickknacks and memorabilia that are reminiscent of Hong Kong culture, from mahjong pieces to chopsticks and imported foods. They sell homemade garlic oil, along with a selection of fine green teas. One of them is a flower blossom that blooms when steeped in a pot of hot water. The metaphor of cooking and its magic is evident as the pink petals float in the wavy liquid, simply because it is warm and in the right environment.

For a sweet tooth, 852 Hong Kong is a good place to try new things. One of the items on its fixed menu is a red bean bun, which has an indulgent texture, pleasant and nutritious. Their lemon tart and matcha brownie are surprisingly thrilling after a spicy sup. It would appear that the traditionally Western sensibility of dessert is just not the same in Hong Kong, but for weary world-travelers, their vegetarian, peanut-based "Hong Kongese French Toast" might do the trick of fulfilling a loner's belly over the holidays.

A curious addition to their menu is the imitation shark fin soup. This marks their establishment as wholly authentic. In Canada, and elsewhere around the world where people of Hong Kong have resettled, there is often a political debate around the cooking of shark fins, which is generally a wedding delicacy in Hong Kong but exploits shark fisheries in the extreme, leaving populations of the keystone species

finless. 852 Hong Kong shows itself as an upright and environmental place of business by preparing a mightily refreshing, tasty vegan version.

December 21, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Plates

Its name has at least two meanings, a space, or interval, and the month of December. Either way, there is a clever air about the place, architecturally imaginative and held to an aesthetic splendor that is as welcoming as it is given to a sense of exclusivity. The balance is just right, with its material and metaphysical ingredients in order, and prepared with the finesse of innovative cooks out not only to please but to change the way people experience eating.

And while serving more down-home varieties, such as toasted sandwiches with delightful medleys of mushroom and pepper, it is easy to catch a dish of utter distinction, something way out of the norm, and by virtue of its uniqueness, wholly inviting. Located in Istanbul's Kadıköy district Aralık takes a different kind of spin on the traditional Turkish appetizer called *mücver*, which is essentially a savory zucchini or vegetable pancake.

With pumpkin, and doused with creams and cheeses, their *mücver* is not only shaped in a spherical order, something dissimilar from that of the usual fare, as it is widely disseminated across the country, but it is rich with tastes that stir a reminiscence with a broader palate, perhaps akin to the pakora of Indian cuisine. It is cause for celebration enough when its globes of crunchy wonder come out, presented on cracked ceramic plates.

There is a simplicity and imperfection at work behind the cooking at Aralık that conveys its special spectrums of taste, making for a harmonious blend of cultural sophistication and rustic naturalism. Amid the electric green plants, broad-leaved and otherworldly, the stairway to its second floor, the lofty stretch of counters and slim outdoor bench seating make for a kind of ecological futurism like that of a Terry Gilliam film.

Aralık dreams an earthy respect out of its vegetables, and provides for carnivores and vegans alike, drawing flashy crowds whose youth is wasted on the alluring, and genius idea of affordable fine dining. It would seem that, oftentimes, creativity, or the lavishing of skill and experimentation, is a function of discipline, or limitation. That is why vegan food can open panoramic windows of opportunity to command what grows of the planet and its flavors.

Their dish of warm carrot under a curling blanket of green, leafy chard is immersed in a delicious swamp of hummus. The look, at first, is questionable, as the organic root vegetable protrudes from under its oily, verdurous covering. But then, after a first bite, it becomes clear that the Aralık chefs have concocted a masterpiece of counterintuitive edibility. They have transformed the modest, everyday carrot into something of a gourmet sausage.

There are things better left to the imagination, not totally unsaid, but less elaborated than might be possible, so as to effect a certain curiosity. That is the case with the carrot dish at Aralık, an absolute feast of culinary insight. It is more nuanced than vegan products that are made to taste exactly like the meat they apparently stand to replace. Their carrots are going elsewhere in the universe of good cooking.

And returning to the ordinary with another turn of incomparable artistry, Aralık pays close attention to the bounteous alimentary gifts of Turkey's many regions, which bloom and blossom with fresh foods aplenty that are the envy of the world. For one, their risotto is suffused with the famous lemons of the Aegean town of Çeşme. Its light touch has a most pleasant aftertaste effect throughout the mouth.

While Aralık is as fine a spot for breakfast as it is for dinner, the late afternoon and evening hours are especially magical on its bustling street, where choruses of joy ring out from the bellies and tongues of its lively and fun-loving patronage. And within a diverse part of Moda's popular central quarter, there's handmade pasta across the street at Semolina or a perfectionist Italian next door at Aida's.

Aralık, though, feels most akin to the people who live in Kadıköy, who know its ins and outs like the back of their hands. Its changing, seasonal menu is reason enough to break out as the sun's going down and the workday fades, as it will revive anyone up for a tasteful surprise. Even when crowded, the interior of its sleekly designed building still retains the exclusive spirit of their uncanny dishes, fashionable and intimate at the same time.

December 12, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Pyramidal

The place itself is smaller than the corner where it stands, as its gregarious if unassuming hosts greet passersby, patrons and regulars with neighborly humility, cooking out of the richness of their country's traditions from a wide open door, offering a few chairs and tables on a side street with which to encompass the illustrious and vast culinary cultures of Egypt, known by some as the mother of the world.

Egyptian food is synonymous with bread, as the concrete block rooftops of the sprawling African megalopolis are known to become de facto open-air ovens, the richness of its Nile-fertilized wheat baked under the heat of the infamously blazing sun. It is as if the Earth itself were one great stove, roasting grain and flesh at just the right temperature according to the human appetite.

The bread at Kem Küm is unforgettable, hearty with its peculiarly dense floury dough. The heaviness of bread is an indication of its substance, its wholeness, its textures a function of the air that courses through it. And the condition of empty space within it is not only advantageous for each bite of it on its own, but as a vessel by which to absorb the full-flavored sauces that come with its various dishes.

The top staple at Kem Küm is what they describe as Egypt's national dish, known as *koshary*, which, transliterated from Egyptian Arabic, means, "mixed." It is a common sight to see *koshary* stands throughout Cairo and across the desert-born lands that spread out from its Mediterranean delta and down the pyramid-building regions defined by life along the banks of the world's longest river.

Kem Küm prepares *koshary* more like a fine delicacy than the ubiquitous street food that it is in Egypt. It is often only available on certain days. But when their cooks do make it, the wait is more than worth it. *Koshary* is a mixture of pastas and lentils saturated in a savory tomato-based sauce. The trick of the dish is in the craft of its caramelized onions. Altogether, the ingredients are irresistibly delicious.

The size of the *koshary* bowl is important too, to affect its enjoyment. The fact that it is served in such plentiful quantities brings about all of the magic of abundance,

stirring a sense of joy at the mere fact that there is so much to be had. That is, finally, the significance of *koshary*, as a food engineered to make the most out of very little. Quite simple elements, when united and consolidated into a whole, become greater than the sum of their parts.

For the reasoning behind its preparation, there are ample metaphors that might be gleaned concerning the meaning of diversity within a single nation, a lesson that Egypt, as a Mediterranean country, is especially familiar with, but which, as also an integral part of the Middle East and Africa, it has struggled to accommodate. To link a uniquely satisfying source of nourishment with feelings of national camaraderie is a naive, but effective proposition.

The same goes with Egyptian bread on a deeper level. In Egypt's local dialect of Arabic, bread is pronounced *aish* or *aish baladi*, which is homonymously synonymous with "life," and "the life of the country," respectively. Kem Küm offers the Egyptian pita on its own, a flatbread in four parts. It goes particularly well with the Egyptian adaptation of falafel, which in the Egyptian language is called *taameya*, literally from the root word for "food" itself.

The many and distinctive items on the menu at Kem Küm are impressive in their scope, even more so by the fact that it is a vegan restaurant. But again, Egyptian food is characterized by its simplicity, utterly basic to the point of almost disappearing into the oblivion of its essential form. That is the case with *fuul* (pronounced "fool") a most authentic offering at Kem Küm, its name alone reminiscent of the gourd-shaped vats out of which Cairenes eat it.

With a party of friends, Kem Küm is a place for sweet and wholesome fare, where its Egyptian chefs and waiters are as generous with their smiles as they are with the wonders of their culinary artistry. There is such an array of dishes at Kem Küm. It seems practically endless from their walnut *muhammara* (a red pepper dip), to their *kabsa* basmati rice dish laden with dried nuts and spices.

Out of the way, only a few steps from the Sea of Marmara in Kadıköy's Moda quarter, Kem Küm is an insider's delight for Istanbul's more adventurous taste-testers looking for a different kind of alimentary experience that will complement the palates of the surrounding Turkish cuisines, while opening an avenue by which

to understand how food, like nations, are defined by the celebration of their distinctions, even if their likenesses are tastable in every bite.

November 25, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Style

The unrivaled elegance of the sculpted metal archways above the French Gateway in Karaköy to its passage of polished marble floors that gleam, reflecting a hallway of storefronts displaying a variety of commodities from the drinkable black gold of espresso cafes to a quirky paper crafts shop and other like-minded ventures piquing the recreational curiosity of locals and travelers alike.

But one of its proudest corners, where foot traffic eases along the bustling and historic pedestrian road, the first location of Paps Italian hosts a casual array of outdoor tables that lead into a modest room, accommodating four to five tables. The cooks can be seen in their bandanas as they deliberate over aged cheeses and variously shaped pasta. The mood is like that of Little Italy at three in the morning, authentic in its vibrantly quaint liveliness.

The air of Paps Italian is every bit as Neapolitan as its founding chef, Luigi Mariconda, who opened his place of business in 2015, to the ravenous joys of practically everyone in sight. And although having also expanded outward to a kitchen in Emaar Square Mall, the homely neighborhood locale of the original spot in Karaköy is perfect for a foggy night along the Bosporus after seeing an art show or simply going for a walk with a loved one.

Like its smiling waitstaff, the ambiance is entirely casual at Paps, where stylish men and women dating in their best beside a bunch of friends letting their hair down or a family of four frazzled after a day in traffic. The menu pricing is sure to be the highlight of the day for anyone who has the opportunity to sit there and order from its tantalizing list of dishes. Organized to its antipasti appetizers, or *dolci* sweets, there are pasta, pizzas, salads and specials aplenty.

Luigi, the head chef at Paps, is affectionately called Gigi, and he lets everyone know he's in charge of the kitchen, not by a show of force but by the exquisite perfectionism in every recipe. Within minutes after uttering the words, a chorus of delectable pasta is liable to appear on the guest's table at Paps, famous for its forty-year sourdough bread, Neapolitan sauces, a tiramisu that Gigi learned from his mother, and many other delights.

As a dense fog descended on the city of Istanbul, the chefs at Paps were preparing a pair of dishes that they do best. The first was a green, or *verdi* fettuccine with sage butter and parmesan aged for 36 months. The softness of the pasta itself, and its richness, infused with aromatic herbs, made for an utterly palatable sensation in every bite, stimulating a gushing Italianate romance complementing the food itself.

From their specials, however, the green fettuccine was well-paired and complemented by the porcini-spiked *ravioli al Tartufo*, a dance of wild mushrooms and buffalo-milk burrata that blended effortlessly with the thyme-garnished parmesan, in this case, aged for 24 months, all of which made for a spectrum of commingling tastes. These culinary ingenuities saturated the al dente pasta of the wide, circular homemade truffle ravioli.

The experience of eating such well-made foods essentially slows time because the idea is to savor it, not to consume it all at once, but to let it sit and to go back to it. That is part of the allure of the aged cheeses, perhaps. It acts as a remedy to the horrors of modernity and its runaway pace that there are still traditionalists who stick to the recipes and cooking of their old countries, their families and the memories of their kitchens.

Turkey and Italy share a common food history, as with all countries that border the Mediterranean. But the city of Istanbul, too, is replete with Italian connections. The most obvious, perhaps, is that of the medieval quarter of Galata, where a Genoese colony preserved its distinctive footing with its Ligurian regional past, its cooking held intact at such establishments as Il Cortile.

Other Italian regional food cultures are represented in Istanbul, such as at Aromi di Roma in Kadıköy, which swears by Rome's version of pizzas and lasagnas that are, according to their firsthand knowledge, different from that of the Neapolitan or Genoese types. And while the debates rage over how to compare and contrast the varying foods of Italy, the people of Istanbul can sit back and take in the freshness of their country's palate with that of their fellow Italian cooks and kin.

November 9, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Classic

The discussion has ensued countless times, down the quiet alleys and cafe boulevards throughout Istanbul's cosmopolitan districts. It is a question of culinary authenticity about what exactly defines a bagel, and whether or not Turkish tradition has accommodated its shape, texture and cultural air quite like its roots in New York. The answer is generally negative, as the occasional debate might resound from the seagull-screeching piers of the Bosporus over the literal ring of the *simit*, rolled sesame breads that sometimes are called the Turkish bagel.

Sadly, however, *simit* are a far cry from the bagel as they are known according to the coffee-addled kitchens of inner-city New York wherefrom the simple ingenuity of the bread has gained worldwide fame. Interestingly, alongside the *simit*, another type of breakfast pastry is hawked to the tune of its name, *açma*, which might translate to "unopened," as its dough fills the center that a *simit* leaves to empty space. While artisan-baked *simit* do approximate the multigenerational magic that makes New York bagels so delicious, they are another animal.

Recently opened, the sleek storefront of Bagel House in Moda near the forested Yoğurtcu Park offers perhaps the closest thing to the hard-and-fast wonders of getting a bagel in New York City, complete with the metal-cage baskets where the freshly hot, round loops of savory and sweet breads are on display, seasoned with poppyseed, olive and thyme, cinnamon and raisin, and of course, the staple "everything." Lathered with an overwhelming amount of cream cheese, Bagel House almost gets away with transporting its patrons to Williamsburg.

But there are distinctive, utterly Turkish differences in New York's style of bagel with that of Bagel House in Istanbul. Firstly, the cream cheese is smoother, wetter in its Turkish variation. If there is any zone where the United States' dairy culture offers more than Turkey's it could be in bagel cream cheese. Other than that, Turkey is light years ahead of the U.S. in its diversity of cheese cultures. It is a testament to how the frequency of repetition and intensity of appreciation affirms a certain standard of quality for bagels in the U.S.

At Bagel House, the tables are turning, and Turkey is fast integrating the peculiarly U.S. item of culinary genius into its urban palate. It is appropriate to have opened

in Moda, for example, where anglophone internationalists peruse its English menu and ready their appetites for healthy servings of salmon sandwiched between a bagel of their choice, just like the 20th-century folks of the Yiddish-speaking East Village parks would slap on a pink strip of lox onto their crisped, hand-rolled and water-boiled breads, fresh from the cold Atlantic sea.

While the Sea of Marmara might be a bit distant from the northern waters where Norwegian salmon descend aplenty to supply such eateries as Bagel House, the fact that it is prepared as their "New York Salmon Bagel" is a testament to their insider knowledge from the wide avenues of Manhattan to the complex environs of Kurbağalidere. Instead of hearing the clean-shaven choruses of Yankees fans, a patron of the Bagel House might listen to the booming masculinity reverberate from the nearby Fenerbahçe stadium during a soccer match.

Yet, despite the decidedly carnivorous and macho airs that might pass through the seaside breezes around Bagel House, its Vegan Chickpea Salad Bagel is one of the more delectably biodiverse choices around Istanbul, which is, to the perspicacious eye, a nexus for meatless zealots out for a wholesome bite of nourishing, plant-based foods. The boiled and mashed garbanzo bean within its sliced bagel is quite spicy, in that case maybe too much so for first thing in the morning, as it is doused with vegan Sriracha sauce and spices.

But with a heap of lettuce, and strips of what appears to be pickled beet, the sole vegan offering at Bagel House delivers with a peerless, tasteful grab. The purely vegetarian, however, might be hard-pressed to find a sandwich between the Jersey Bagel with eggs, smoked meat, cheddar and a special sauce, or the Vietnamese-inspired Banh Mi Bagel, which by the way, is very New York, with its steak, carrot, turnip and relish adapting the culinary spirit of Southeast Asia.

That said, there is a vast range enough between the types of bagels, jalapeño cheddar for a New Yorker's palate, olive and oregano for the more Mediterranean soul, gluten-free for the allergic and health-conscious, all of which go perfectly with a rich spread of cream cheese spiked with chopped walnuts and honey, or the traditional chive. And lastly, Bagel House is more than just bagels. Its espresso machine doles out a perfect cup along with a smorgasbord of cupcakes, cheesecakes and sweet rolls.

The kitchen at Bagel House has the power to transport anyone from Istanbul to another history of food across the globe, as its patrons close their eyes and entertain a simple bite into a piece of bread that brings them to the shores of a city across the wide Atlantic. Staffed with a friendly group of locals who are known to give a free bagel to anyone patient enough to wait while they take their orders, the atmosphere at Bagel House is quite international, yet so were the original bagel houses of New York, when so many foreigners came ashore hankering for a taste like the Old Country, only to create a new order of cooking that would eventually make its way back to their long lost motherlands.

October 26, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Little

The first thing that wafts from the slim, double door of Aida's kitchen in Istanbul's beautiful Moda quarter is not the bountiful aroma of their spicy pastas, creamy risottos or fruity cheesecakes but the sound of their piano, as their busy nights are frequented by players who tickle the ivories of their upright with jazz, classical and improvisational melodies. It makes for a homey air inside the old haunt run by an Italian transplant and bustling with waiters and cooks out to please.

Like any fine eatery, their menu changes according to the seasons, and to the inspiration of their lead chefs who have, over the years, enticed with a fancy smorgasbord of tasteful numbers. In the past, among their delectable antipasti, for example, they would serve a fried Roman-Jewish artichoke that has roots in the ghetto of Pope Paul IV, where Jews would sauté the vegetable that became their namesake in Italy over open fires.

At Aida, artichoke was prepared in high style, with a presentation to match, as its crispy layers unraveled over a plate of light oily sauce. Nowadays, a napkin-wielding soul at Aida will come across such classic antipasti, or starters in Italian, as bruschetta, burrata, and a pâté made of chicken liver, which comes with an enviable Indian-Italian fusion of onion chutney. It is currently more of a challenge to find vegetarian options at Aida, but for carnivores it's a feast.

A true mark of authenticity can be discerned when a traditional sweet is fashioned into a savory dish, as is the case with Aida's cannoli antipasti filled with creamed cod fish. Even the fried potatoes are saturated in pork lard. And the vegan nightmares ensue, with the likes of steamed octopus, rabbit garnished with dried tomatoes and fennel-spiked olives. That said, there are less meatier, yet no less rich choices to begin appetizing oneself at Aida.

The goat cheese tempura, doused with fresh honey, is a proud and exemplary vision of culinary joy. As the house pianist might delight in the inner workings of a composition by Turkish Western classical musicians like Fazil Say or Karman Ince, the toothsome fruits of Anatolian farm culture grace the Italianate dishes with a locality that bursts with the peculiar Turkish genius for good food, and its pan-Mediterranean appreciation.

There is a degree of right that is so consummate that to possess it would be to extinguish its presence. That is part of the experience at Aida when the dishes come out, as they are at times almost too good to be true, their visual appeal alone triggering a kind of hunger that wants but does not need to consume outright, but merely enjoy. That is why fine dining is usually brought out for the table in small quantities.

Following a hearty antipasti, or equally beneficial prior, are the lovely soups at Aida, which in the summer might have been cold, in the form of watermelon gazpacho, but towards fall then heat up as street vendors increasingly roast chestnuts on the open fires of Istanbul's world-famous palate. Aida, going with the flow of the Earth's yearly changes, serves a clear chestnut broth, which the waiter pours specially over a bowl of herbs.

The effect of the light soup is enough to trigger hunger aplenty, as it warms the body throughout in anticipation of the colder, darker months of winter, which even folks who have grown up along the sunny nation of the Mediterranean know well, and acclimate to with their fantastically diverse ranges of agricultures and cookeries. In terms of heavier fare, Aida is not a place for pizza, but for pastas in their wonderful diversity, from gnocchis to linguini and raviolis.

To enjoy something of the modesty of the Italian kitchen, which is, at times, best when it is utterly simple, their red sauce-lathered linguine fits the bill, as its subtly smoked bell pepper-based cream blends with a lathering of aioli, a sprinkle of bread crumbs and a carefully picked dispersal of olives. Even while gazing at a menu that includes the likes of sheep neck *ragu* and the regional *gremolada* sauce, or quail and Roman beef rolls, it is important to feel at home.

And the mood at Aida is a perfect balance of the refined and the casual, as its atmosphere of talkative guests and multilingual staff walk out to the garden tables and back up its narrow, wooden stairway, where, perhaps once a wealthy family on the bucolic Asian side of old Istanbul might have also been entertaining guests with an *ossobuco alla Milanese*, basically a dish of polenta around braised, cross-cut veal shanks.

The chief ingredient in salads is freshness, which is a sensibility, even a wisdom, which the Italian and Turkish culinary traditions understand intuitively. The addition of fruits in salads at Aida is then paired with cheeses, the right herbs and leaves proceed from there. For their softness and sweetness, pears and gorgonzola are best friends, and for their hardness and sourness green apples and parmesan go together like flowers and sunlight.

But really, there is always room for dessert, especially at Aida's. The irresistibility of salted caramel and walnuts only intensifies when they top a lavish cheesecake. There is no end to the seasonality, the diversity, the ingenuity of chef expertise at Aida, even if some locals from the neighborhood might have remembered them in earlier days, when they cooked differently. Then again, everything does change a little, and so do tastes.

October 13, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Balkan

The city of Ioannina was a jewel in the imperial crown of the oldest Ottoman territories in Europe, as its Turkish governance began in 1430, preceding that of Constantinople — today's Istanbul. It was arguably as important, where the gateway to Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire was kept under lock and key in the lake town's castle. The region is known as Epirus in Greek, which means mainland, abutting the high mountains of southern Albania, not far from Corfu and the shores of the Ionian Sea, its coasts long held under the Venetian spheres of influence that had taken much of the Eastern Mediterranean by storm throughout the premodern eras.

Like many of the Balkan cities in the Ottoman world, it was a melting pot of multinational communities, divided and connected by a plethora of languages and beliefs and whose integration in and among their neighborly districts and villages created a singular source of communal self-expression. In Greek, as in Turkish, there is a specific suffix used to refer to a person from a particular place. For example, if someone is from Ioannina, they would be called Ioanniote in Greek (sometimes spelled Janiote, after Janina – the "J" and "Ioa" pronounced as an emphatic "y"). In Turkish, the name for Ioannina becomes Yanya. And its local, a Yanyalı.

In 1891, Hüseyin Horp, ostensibly from a line of gentrified Ottoman cavalrymen in Ioannina, named his newborn son Fehmi. He looked out over the lake of Ioannina and heard the call to prayer echo from the rustic, stone minarets of its two mosques, which project upwards from the twin acropolis sheltered by Byzantine castle walls. Mount Mitsikeli stood motionless over the lake. Hüseyin Horp felt like a lucky man. He went out to a restaurant to celebrate with his friends and dined as people do in Epirus, where the meats pile high and the *meze* appetizers are mostly complimentary variations of whatever leftovers the cooks whip up.

Ioannina is humid. It is often nicknamed the London of the Balkans for the measure of its copious rainfall. Its highland, lakefront ecology is peculiarly appetizing. There are herbs and dishes aplenty that harmonize with its round of festivals and the gritty spirit of its daily life. And like all Ottoman Balkan cultures, its culinary landscape is infused with the folkloric diversity of its many inhabitants,

blending northern Greek styles of cooking with that of the Albanians, Turks, Slavs, Aromanians, Roma, Jews and others who ate and lived on its soil for generations. Its foods are as mixed and yet as synthesized, as its music. It is also as dramatic and complex.

By 1919, Fehmi had migrated from Ioannina to Istanbul, surviving the Balkan Wars and World War I. The city was on the brink of terminal, imperial collapse, occupied by foreign, colonial powers from the West, including Great Britain, whose field officers did not take kindly to Ottoman Turks while their military leadership under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk planned to defend their nation by forming a secular republic in Anatolia. But Fehmi, then an entrepreneur in his late twenties, had innocent designs. He simply wanted to bring the soul of his birth city to the Kadıköy district, where he relocated, by opening a restaurant in its name.

To friends and colleagues in Istanbul, he was known endearingly as Yanyalı Fehmi, and he had a predilection for the rich foods of his old hometown, and as the Turkish saying goes, his eyes were full. But there was a catch. He could not cook. Istanbul, however, was a city on its knees, and its people were looking for work. Among them was a young chef named Hüseyin who had come from Bolu, a small city directly east of Istanbul, closer to Ankara. They became fast friends, and sealed a partnership that continues to serve hungry patrons a delicious smorgasbord of delicacies special to the Turkish *lokanta*, a kind of home-cooking diner.

Among its fare are a typical cast of nutritious characters, substantial and healthy plates that ooze with oil and melt with cheeses. Yanyalı Fehmi Lokantası is a precious spot for fall comfort foods, especially for its pastas, baked in creamy sauce, or its sweet okra. The air is heavy with tradition, yet enlightening. To enjoy a hearty late lunch or early dinner across from a vintage photograph of Yanyalı Fehmi in his youth is to bask in the delights of pure nourishment, even if, at times, its foods might seem artless. But they are geniuses of Turkish classics, such as the *yaprak sarma* (stuffed grape leaves), which taste, unmistakably, just right.

Yanyalı Fehmi rose out of hardship, and his legacy is everlasting. He was thrown into a dungeon prison by British occupiers in Istanbul, and had to fight for his life. He emerged, stronger than ever, and more resolved, eventually opening branches of his restaurant in the Beyoğlu district and the Sirkeci neighborhood. And four

decades after his passing away as the elderly patriarch of a large family in 1980, his sons and grandsons are taking up the helm, poised to continue the traditions of Ioannina's Turkish kitchen in Kadıköy, where the sole branch of his establishment bustles behind windows that gleam with savory vegetables and sugary desserts.

September 15, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Supping

After a number of openings, Aromi di Roma has returned to Istanbul's Anatolian district of Kadıköy afresh. Its breezy, out-of-the-way locale can be found by a roundabout path down a hallway of clothiers on the busy pedestrian streets just steps from the bull statue that gives Istanbul's most livable quarter its iconic character. And through its passage, the friendly staff of cooks and waiters at Aromi di Roma await, as they themselves sit and eat, hard at work, yet equally whisked away under the transporting ambiance that transfixes like the aroma of Rome.

The man behind the name is one Gianfranco Sacchetti, a Roman by birth, who spent much of his life abroad, in Vancouver and elsewhere. He defends the unique qualities of pizza Roman style despite a worldwide culinary trend monopolized by Neapolitans or New Yorkers. He has many passionate words for the regional diversity of Italian cuisine, as each town, even different families, have their versions of everything from spaghetti to calzone, no less pizza. And at the helm of their round brick oven is a talented young chef named Davide.

The distinction of a Roman pizza is unmistakable, and it is perfected with singular relish by Davide, who is also trained as a vegan cook, yet rolls up his sleeves as comfortably topping off the well-crusted dough of his delicious, puffy pies with generous helpings of prosciutto and bresaola, among many tantalizing carnivorous delights. But while he is busy with his masterpieces of tasteful nourishment, Aromi di Roma offers a sweet variety of antipasti, appetizers that live up to their name. Their *caprese* salad is as refreshing as a vacation in Capri. It is absolutely unadorned, and by the sheer quality of its raw ingredients, gives the sensation of a full breath of air, as a beachgoer might inhale the mountainous shorefront of Italy's cinematic west coast. The way the *caprese* salad is prepared at Aromi di Roma is practically tantamount to an act of bravery. The hearty slices of cheese and tomatoes, doused with splashes of olive oil and garnished with sprigs of basil are as plain, and so, unaffected, as the rustic Tyrrhenian countryside.

Sacchetti has not only returned to his newly renovated restaurant in Istanbul, but to the roots of Italian cooking. To eat at Aromi di Roma is to feel the streets of Italy's quixotic capital, to smell the predawn steam of its neighborhood bakeries, the wood fires of its pizza ovens, enveloped by the impossible beauty of its skyline that

demands an earthiness on the ground in contrast to the lofty architecture of its historic center. The result is a humanness in the food, embracing a tone of simplicity that has made the Italian kitchen world famous.

Aromi di Roma is a fine dinner destination, with its getaway impressionability. It can make its guests feel as if they were in a back alley not far from the Vatican, though it is also ideal for lunch, and as pleasantly snug within Istanbul's workaday milieu. The pizzas that Davide fires are not oversized, suitable for one, or to share in the spirit of tasting. While also making a kind called Napoli, his range is broad, encompassing the culinary heritage of regional variation in Italy, including another titled after Puglia. The types of vegetarian pizzas at Aromi di Roma are plentiful. Their cheeses also vary. For example, one pie with ricotta and arugula exposes the underlying layer of tomato sauce with a spaciousness that allows each of the pizza's ingredients to breathe, a custom that respects the innate excellence of the bread, while perhaps hearkening back to the time of hardship when staple foods were paramount and had to be used sparingly. That said, the *funghi* pizza at Aromi di Roma is suffused with melted cheese and thick slabs of mushroom.

The irresistible charm of Aromi di Roma is its familial mood. An affable woman on staff named Selen added a quaint, homemade allure to the house menu with her recipe for lasagna, truly a labor of love, and it is tastable. Davide even promotes their special vegan *bechamel*, although its standard sauce is as exceptional. Either with meat, or vegetarian, the lasagna is a treasure in Istanbul, a wonderful Turkish-Italian fusion baked with a medley of vegetables. Along with favorites like bruschetta and *margherita*, Aromi di Roma has a home kitchen feel. And finally, there is the conversation, as the salads and pizzas, pastas and desserts go down easy, and all have eaten their fill, over a superlative espresso by Caffe Vergnano. It is part of the sublimely secluded environment at Aromi di Roma, as their canvas ceiling flaps in the balmy late summer wind that brings with it notes of seasonal change, enlightening their kitchen with honed culinary inventions in dialogue with Turkish agriculture and the local palate. Sacchetti is an earnest bon vivant and a promising entrepreneur, and his restaurant is fantastic.

September 6, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Dining

It's down an alley, somehow nondescript, where flows ecstatic gulps aplenty, conversationalists' paradise, as the moving, slow trickle of crowds move from Istiklal Avenue into the back quarter known as Asmalı Mescit, once the toast of the town, since transformed to a secret of its nostalgic resonance, that, as tables fill with whitened glasses, life blooms to the fruits and flowers of a city in love with itself.

There's a place called Mabou a short jaunt from the historic, underground tram funicular beloved by locals under the Turkish moniker *tüinel*, connecting the piers of Karaköy to the heady commercial airs of Turkey's most European of districts, where neoclassical and Levantine architecture commingle above a storefront line of eateries and clothiers whose gawkers come in and out like the waves of the sea.

Not exactly spacious, but terrace-happy, the quaint niche of physical domain positions the house chef upstairs, overlooking his wondering guests. The curiosity of passersby is peaked after seeing the chalkboard sign welcoming them, stating that the restaurant has a French soul, uses Turkish ingredients, and all under the helm of a German cook whose fares are prefaced by a warm, thick bread, a homage to the country where he learned not a few culinary tricks.

The presence of sumac is practically omnipresent at Mabou, making for that citrusy Middle Eastern grab, as it begins to appear over and throughout a silky butter that fill thin, earthy ceramic vessels. The grating sound of a knife against its inside delightfully contrasts with that of the perfectly soft dairy substance, which, when lathered onto the house bread, perhaps also soaked in a tad of their high-quality olive oil, is utterly appetizing.

Attention to the innate virtue of each ingredient is the mark of a truly innovative chef, as their adaptations to the regional palate in which they've set up shop to cook and serve. The blend of French and German cookery, with their abundant richnesses and generous admixtures of multilayered flavor, has ample room for creativity immersed in the fresh agricultural landscape of Turkey, where each season brings with it celestial gifts.

In summer, as the heat sears and floods rage from the Aegean to the Black Sea, there is a saving grace wherever peaches are ripening. At Mabou, they are grilled. Such leaning into the sharp corners of what has become problematic in the greater environment is quintessentially Zen in its grasp of catharsis. It is not just the selection of the whole peach, but every slice that is procured with a fine sensibility.

Mouth-watering is an insufficient turn of phrase. It is more like a deluge of the entire jaw that ensues when biting into the gelatinous flesh of a thickly cloven peach on the plate of Mabou's singular dish, garnished with rosemary and buffalo cream, again powdered with mounds of sumac. The top of the peach slices are caramelized with a crisp of sautéed sugars, giving the stone fruit just the right texture to then pair it with dollops of cooling cream.

And that is just one of the eight starters, which makes up the most prolific category on the menu, in fact, and placed prior to that of the "warm starters." Among the initial group of starters is a ricotta and zucchini dish in lemon oil and purple basil as well as a strawberry salad of rucola, goat cheese and almonds. As would be expected for a German chef with a French soul, there are more options for carnivores than vegetarians, but the balance is effectually pleasant.

As is evident in its spare seating, bijou and cozy, Mabou is a tantalizing spot for two, although a certain corner of the establishment is adequate for a small group of close friends. All in all, the compact haunt describes itself as a uniquely Mediterranean amalgamation of ristorante, bistro and tavern. With a capacity of around 18, the ambiance is almost familial, as chef Eksi smilingly greets his guests with an abrupt German sense of humor.

Among the "warm starters," Mabou does a number on the chanterelle mushroom, which by appearances looks like the pepper mushroom common to the contemporary kitchen in Germany. It has a similar consistency, spongy at its bells with a stringiness to its shoots, yet subdued and harmonious in the dish's sauce, a gorgeous medley of cognac, cream and chives suffused just right into the woody flesh of the fungus.

Despite its masterful displays, colorful and at times enigmatic, the food at Mabou tastes better than it looks. The immediate sensation of biting into the main

ingredients of its courses is that of a satisfying melt followed by gushes of contrapuntal tastes. For example, the pastas at Mabou have their own category, including agnolotti, spaghetti and tagliatelle, but the gnocchi is, for its capacity to absorb sauces, an irresistible item.

Listed as *gnocchi cacio e pepe*, and embodied with bold helpings of parmesan, butter and dusted with black pepper, the dish might, perhaps, be heavy to some, though, for a gnocchi enthusiast, it is a consummate recipe. Although Mabou entertains its presentation as German, French and Turkish, its diverse kitchen encompasses the cuisines of Italy, as well as others farther afield, including Chile, Thailand, and welcomingly, Şanlıurfa, for their fermented chilis.

August 19, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Heel

A high point of architectural renovation in concert with the medieval airs of its historic environs, freshly opened, the ristorante and pizzeria Il Cortile is a classy dash of an eatery in the shadow of the Galata Tower. Its entrance is a subtle hall, quiet, almost inconspicuous, but through it leads to a mesmerizing lushness of brick and wood, facades of stone that recall the breadth of Italian settlement on lands once feared and hailed as the beating lifeblood of the Eastern Roman Empire.

While on the steep end, its staff demonstrates an extraordinary degree of attention, leaving clientele to revel under the balmy balconies of the École St. Pierre Hotel, a namesake harkening back to the network of French schools that dot the cityscape about the downtown neighborhoods of European Istanbul. And at once, the tangible heritage of the building is announced in bold text, accompanied by images that detail the resonance of past epochs reverberating through its masonry like the Francophone choirs that would practice in its midst.

On first arriving, the host warns with a caveat, stating quite clearly, yet not without a soft smile, that the kitchen is not Turkish, in fact, but Italian. It is, perhaps, a must to disclose such information to guests who would otherwise have wandered in search of something more authentic to the overarching national culture. But that is exactly what Il Cortile offers, with all of the sophistication of Italy's globally renowned legacy of dining, namely, the deep-rooted Genoese foundation of the urban infrastructure, going back to the 14th century and still intact today.

Although mostly demolished by the district's municipality in the 19th century, today's sleekly streamlined, commercialized features have preserved something of the aesthetic that screams Middle Ages, however, whitewashed and decorated for contemporaries to relish in the myths of their neighbor's long lost ancestors. And when day wanes to night, as the lighting dims, Il Cortile comes alive with the scent and sound of utterly masterful cookery, where Ligurian, Mediterranean, Anatolian, Aegean, Italian and Turkish cuisines commingle.

In the midst of the intense summer heat that rolls Turkey to a full boil, and has become all the more bitter as fires rage in the photogenic south, salads are a saving grace on everyone's table, despite class differences. Whether hanging from a bay

window for a few sprigs of parsley, or ordering up a wide bowl of mixed greens weighed with cheeses, nuts and fruits, there is a common denominator in the cool, open air that Turkey's agriculture provides, regardless of how it might end up within the specific cultural tradition of its preparation.

A particularly spectacular blend of nourishing ingredients, raw and cultivated for a unitary effect on the tongue, is that of the *insalata con formaggio caprino*, which translates from the Italian as "salad with caprino cheese." The variety of caprino is served aged or fresh, and has a vast range of regional and production specificity. At Il Cortile, it is garnished with a layer of caramelization, gleaming and crispy with a sticky allure. And with a soft, bread-like texture underneath, it is the centerpiece of the salad, which also features seared nectarines.

Insalata con formaggio caprino is essentially the presentation of its cheese, because, while the bitter orange sauce poured throughout may have enlightened its greens, they are decidedly unfulfilled, even if punctuated with walnut. The simplicity, while tempting, is not in perfect balance with the sophistication of its core value, a mere emblem of Italy's diverse and classic dairy culture. There are two other salads on the list at Il Cortile that do offer one of Istanbul's best kept verdurous secrets, that of the harvest of its heirloom Yedikule gardens.

Together with a robust, appetizing salad, Il Cortile appears to be an ideal spot for the art of the pizza, a craft that Italy has gifted to the world in incalculable measure, and which Istanbul's foodies are enthused to maintain to a high standard within their localities. A choice like the *Alle verdure*, with its medley of zucchini, tomatoes, capsicum, eggplant, black olives and fresh basil, is as Mediterranean as it gets, seemingly as natural to the environment in Turkey as it is in Italy.

Yet, the beauty of life unfolds especially once every loose end has been tied, hunger satiated, thirst quenched, and all that is left is to overwhelm the senses with something of extraordinary delight. A word that comes to mind is delectation, for the peak of deliciousness that ensues in the midst of Italian desserts, when flavored and layered with the sweetness of the Turkish palate. Itemized first on the sweet list of Il Cortile is that of the *Soufflé di castagne* or the chestnut soufflé.

It comes out on a glazed ceramic pan, with a handle that glows soft in the low light, and although piping hot, even in the midsummer haze it is irresistible, for its fusions of caramel and chestnut, the consistency of its nut flour like a rich lathering of melted butter, but it gives back and asks for more. And topped with a thin, curved cookie flavored with mastic, the soufflé is reinvented, adapted to the redolence of life in Turkey, and as it has wafted from across the western seas of the Aegean, encompassing the fruits of the Italian kitchen.

August 4, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Earthy

There are tables alongside a busy thoroughfare in the German capital where people from all walks of life make merry, eating their fill over drinks from the country's distinctive neighborhood shops known, endearingly, as *späti* (pronounced "shpaytee"). *Spätkauf* or *späti* are a type of convenience shop, found particularly in Berlin, that is known to operate late at night. These shops have come to enjoy something of a cultural crossover, and they have become a nexus point of cultural integration that tastes like success. With generous doses of salt, the compact kitchen and bistro named Vöner hands out a satisfying array of favorite foods from Turkey, but with a vegan twist. Shocking for a cuisine traditionally packed with meat for that peculiarly Anatolian, carnivorous relish.

In light of progressive trends that embrace the future's greener horizons, Vöner is a proud example of a business model that creates visibility for both migration and environmentalism, increasingly urgent priorities for any 21st-century population. You could say that as you open your mouths to eat Vöner's delicious food, you are also opening your mind to an array of enlightened values. Its name is a clever turn of phrase, after the greasy meat dish *döner*, which is as common in most German cities as it is in Turkey. Its literal definition means "something that turns," appropriate as it is made from layers of meat served from a spit slowly rotating against a heat source.

The *döner* at Vöner, however, appears every bit as traditional as might be found down the alleys of Istanbul. Of course, its plant-based protein is farther from animal flesh than the Germanic language family is from the Central Asian origins of Turkish. Lathered with a spectacular array of exotic sauces, bursting with tahini, chili and herbs, the meatless fibers are practically parallel to that of their walking, breathing muse. The cows and sheep that graze the fields of Europe and Asia can now do so a little more relaxedly. Finally embellished by juicy slices of tomato and crisp layers of lettuce, the "vöner" wrap packs a palatable knockout.

Vöner is a gem in the rough, often stultified, stereotypical international cuisines made for the Western tongue. It is part of a movement across the planet – ecologically aware kitchens with unusual but surprisingly clutch fusion of traditional momentums. Since 2006, Vöner opened what it refers to as a

"permanent snack bar" in Friedrichshain. The borough is a newly sprung quarter for foodies, as chefs have arrived to meet the demands of its residents and passersby from every corner of the globe, bringing with them old recipes and new ideas for a collective imagination that grows hungrier.

Vöner is characterized by an illustrated beast, the playful "Vönermonster," which appears to be a unique manifestation of Berlin's inviting, youthful airs. It's a hipster of a creature who doubles as the modest restaurant's scribe for press releases and their promotional agenda in general. Unlike the milk-slugging "cookie monster" of childhood television fantasy, the Vönermonster is an adamant vegan. The sheer variety of ingredients enveloped by pita, lavash, or a plateful spread is enough to change the mind of any meat-consuming traditionalist.

Whereas vegan might be synonymous with tastelessness, Vöner responds with an abundance of richness, perfecting certain, uninhibited likenesses to dairy and flesh. As the fare served is amply balanced to both Eastern and Western palates, including a number of burgers and fries in a range of assortments and kinds, the house "special sauce" that accompanies roughly cut, twice-fried potatoes is as heavy as a French dessert. To top it off with the fresh, millennial charm of standard German delicacies, Vöner also cooks a mean *currywurst* (curried sausage).

All food at Vöner is cooked, at once, behind a single counter staffed by just two hardy, vegan lovers. The trendsetting culinary innovators behind the magic that is Vöner began as a mobile catering service, often trailing festivals and celebrations throughout Berlin. They have retained a festive air as part of their *je ne sais quoi*. The imitation *döner* that spins on a skewer like a trusty top in slow-motion is made fresh daily from wheat protein, vegetables, legumes, soy meal, herbs and spices. In the years since its opening, the word spread across Germany, and the Vönermonster appeared in the cities of Leipzig, Kassel and Bonn. In Berlin, the eatery keeps to its humbler roots, seating steady stream patrons outside of a bijou storefront.

As a complement to epitomes of Western dining, including *seitan* nuggets and a burger fashioned from cereals and vegetables, Vöner adds an Asian touch with its peanut sauce, which smothers the signature chopped fries for a redolence that harmonizes with Friedrichshain's ambiance of globalized feasting. But a

tantalizing treat for eaters with a hankering for more Turkish is their cigar-shaped *börek*, fried to the beige lightness of its flaky, doughy exterior and perfectly affordable to accompany the generous helpings of *vöner* that spill out of pita on Boxhagener Street like fish from the Bosphorus.

July 16, 2021
Berlin, Germany

Delicatessen

There's a certain comfort in speaking a foreign language over food in a country where neither the food nor the language are part of that nation's founding culture, but are the result of measures of inclusivity that, whether by force or diplomacy, have changed the social fabric and daily life of all who pass through. That is the quiet pleasure of speaking Turkish in Berlin, where so many businesses – restaurants in particular – are run by Turks who, in the absence of English, would be glad to exchange words in their mother tongue while bookending their greetings with a smattering of local German.

Within the heavily gentrified environs of Friedrichshain, one eatery stands out for its preparation of Turkish specialties with a modest, though potent grab. The *meze* appetizers of Lemon Deli encompass a broad diversity of dairy-rich and spice-laden delicacies that put a light, subtle spin on the usual fare of its kind as it's generally enjoyed back in Turkey. One such is the yogurt-based *haydari*, which, at Lemon, has a special tang, refreshing especially during summer even under cooling overcast skies of the north European latitude. And when paired with the house *sarma*, stuffed grape leaves, the effect is transporting.

Among its plentiful selection of appetizers, Lemon Deli purveys a particularly fantastic red pepper spread emboldened with crushed walnut both infused throughout, thickening its consistency with the nutritious brain food, and crushed on top. It goes perfectly well with the simple strips of warmed bread, served as cut from the sides of a holiday *pide* bread. The mixtures of olives at Lemon are perhaps not the very best, though in lieu of saltier varieties theirs are fresher, and like the *sarma*, have an aged, dried quality. That, however, is not the case with their *kısır* bulgur salad, which is decidedly flavorful.

According to the context of a mainstream German palate, Lemon might be, to some, more bland than how its cuisine, marketed as Mediterranean, would generally be cooked in Turkey. It is the unpretentiousness of the place that reinforces its charm, however, as its indoor salon has those characteristic wooden tables and benches covered in textiles reminiscent of Anatolian heritage. A woman and a young man can be heard conversing inside in Turkish, heated by the drama

of their daily lives as a kind, helpful fellow behind the counter doles out generous heaps of *meze* to a Turkish-speaking American traveler.

While the customary Istanbul-style appetizers at Lemon are palatably most pleasant, the talents of their cultural exports shine with unrivaled and surprising freshness in how they make *gözleme*, the savory crepe often filled with crumbly *lor* cheese, potato or greens like dill and parsley. The streets of Friedrichshain are arguably ideally suited to refashioning that time-honored recipe, which, as country fare, for example in the villages of the Aegean region, assumes a more dehydrated, brittler form, mostly cooked on belly-shaped oval stovetops in the open air.

Lemon's *gözleme* is crispy though far from desiccated, as fine oils saturate its flatbread like a thin crust, dusted with a *zaatar* spice blend of the Turkish variety. And when pressed with layers of spinach leaves and white cheese comes to round out its textural perfection with irresistible delectation. The kitchen is friendly to wholesome adaptations of the historical diet under question. Their vegetarian and vegan *mantı* raviolis, complete with soy yogurt, demonstrate a bold, responsive culinary momentum that embraces change in concert with their pluralist surroundings.

In business and flourishing since 2016, and having survived two lockdowns in the midst of Germany's relatively intelligent virus immunity policies, Lemon Deli appears to be surfacing from pandemic restrictions with a healthy uptick. Their manifold menu stands ready for a craving any time of day, from their breakfast special of *menemen*, a tomatoey egg dish, complemented with a European twist of gouda, to a smorgasbord of antipasti in differing assortments according to the hour, whether for takeaway or at their lively spot, animated by a constant flow of foot traffic ideal for Berlin's favorite pastime of people watching.

While accommodating to the growing trend for people to become herbivores, which is taking hold among progressive global youth, Lemon retains the popularly carnivorous conventions maintained by Anatolian cooks. Prominent is the mincing of meat, specifically beef, as filling to accompany the ancient practice of hand-rolled dumplings known as *mantı*. And so as not to step on the tongue of the largely tepid German cooking, it is offered both with and without the liberal dosage

of garlic commonly added from Thrace to Hatay and beyond, connecting Turkey with its Turkic roots through food.

It is the explicit profession of Lemon that, by way of cooking, they are exercising a form of cultural exchange, practically universal in its outreach. Their kitchen identifies with the Aegean and Mediterranean regions chiefly. Among their dishes is a Turkish version of moussaka, which, although associated with Greek dining, is, in fact, as traditional to kitchens throughout Turkey and the Arab world. The main difference is essentially that Greeks make it with a milk-based custard and serve it hot, while Turkish cooks have primarily simmered a tomato base for their sauce and serve it at room temperature.

The beauty of Lemon is that they frequently prepare much more than just the staple dishes that anyone from Turkey, or who has visited, will know and love immediately. They are a family-style, humble outfit with a panache for newness and fusion, unafraid to peer out from the edge of those culinary routines that might translate to mediocrity if they are not approached with a creative imagination and alternative perspective. By eating their food it is truly tastable how well the Turkish kitchen thrives on the streets of Friedrichshain, though not without a touch of nostalgia reminiscent of its stubbornest cultural signatures, at home and abroad.

July 8, 2021
Berlin, Germany

Regional

On the verdant Turkish coasts of the Black Sea, corn flour is sometimes mixed with ground anchovies. It is an example of a New World crop's far-flung integration by way of a culinary invention that has since become associated with Old World tradition. To kick off its popular vegetarian tasting list, the Somerville foodie haunt Sarma begins with cornbread suffused with honey, covered with sesame seeds and filled with liberal doses of melted feta.

If that were not enough to remind anyone nostalgic for the apiculture of Istanbul's northern shores, and other nourishing secrets of the forests that border Bulgaria on Turkey's western frontier and Georgia to the east, Sarma also added slices of jalapeño to its salty, sweet and spicy Black Sea cornbread, rounding out its peculiarly American palette where common Turkish and Mexican ingredients commingle ingeniously.

And the adaptability of corn in its various forms only continues from there out of the imagination of the creative chefs behind Sarma's widely praised, if slightly steep, menu for friends and families to share, toasting to health and wealth inside the roomy establishment and under strings of lights in view of one of Greater Boston's trendier, younger neighborhoods. Shaped into a square, the delectable dish of corn fritters is as combinatory as it is refined.

Although plural, the corn fritters come out as a single cube, topped with luscious pomegranate seeds over a nest of cilantro, an herb embraced roundly by Mexico's cooks since its export from the Mediterranean, where it goes by the English name coriander. In contrast with textures of sprinkled, crushed walnut and the grainy seeds of juicy pomegranate, the fritter is only delicately fried, for a gentle crisp, and perfectly soft, moist, under the surface.

A textural complement to these corn-led starters is a shallow bowl of sugar snaps peas, seemingly picked with a meticulous eye for their signature crunch. But the innovative minds behind the scenes at Sarma have further accentuated that irresistibly delectable effect by mixing in purposefully undercooked red quinoa. And again, the protein-rich Peruvian grain accompanies Middle Eastern elements with relish, spattered with pistachio-laced tahini.

As dishes emerged from Sarma's kitchen to the spacious, airy patio – a converted parking lot, though charming amid the hipster milieu – personable servers came out to present a slew of words as exotic as the look and taste of the food. Their descriptions and sounds would be foreign to most unilingual Anglophones in America, although, by the nature of their enigmatic vibrancy, desirable and appetizing.

In Greek, *keftedes* simply means "meatball," but to Americans unfamiliar with the Balkan Peninsula whose capital surrounds Attica, it is an elegant word to the ear. And the imported recipes of Greece are, at times, almost as newsworthy as a fiscal crisis in the European Union, especially when prepared by a kitchen with a sophisticated grasp of its interrelations with neighboring countries across the Aegean, Ionian and Mediterranean Seas.

Sarma cooks its pithily sized zucchini *keftedes* much in the style of two varieties on Turkish dishes, namely *mücver* (pronounced mooj-ver), generally noted as a savory pancake made of sliced zucchini, and a kind of *köfte* (which means meatball in Turkish, and is enunciated closely to that of *kefte*) of cooked lentil, formed into ribbed ovals when the cook presses their fingers onto its malleable shape.

But like a jazz musician absorbed in a dizzying quantity of notes, Sarma never does just one thing for each of its dishes. The degree of fusion practiced by its kitchen staff is nearly overwhelming, imaginably the result of a mad search for tastes beyond that prescribed by the world's culinary traditions and agricultural yields. The presentation as zucchini *keftedes* again betrays its pluralization, as it only consists of one piece of consolidated vegetarian meatball.

Yet, the Turkish *mücver* of a Greek *kefte*, as it might be understood, is crowned with a piquant tomato pesto, a dollop of plain yogurt, and rests on a foundation of caponata, which is essentially a Sicilian eggplant chutney, similar to the French vegetable stew that goes by the name of ratatouille. As flavorful and sustaining, the caponata is every bit as worth the dish as the green gourd of its title.

There is more than one tasteful indication of culinary compatibility between France and the Levant, as the countries exchanged foods, and likely dined en route since

time immemorial within the Turkish pale. An appealing recipe that they shared is a type of garlic sauce, which to the French would be recognizable as Provencal aioli and in Lebanon is termed *toum*, basically a creamed garlic with olive oil and lemon juice.

Toum heightens an otherwise simple stir of leafy greens with a subtle though potent touch of tang. The effect of eating Sarma's dish, Garlicky Greens, is that of a resurgence of appetite in the middle of a menu that might otherwise overwhelm, if not in sheer mass, then in the range of spices, harmonious contrasts and unprecedented fusions of esculent earthliness that seem to have been made to transcend the tongue's known capacity for sensation.

Another intriguing reference to Mexican cuisine occurs toward the end of the menu, and counterintuitive to its temporal placement, is a variation on an appetizer that would normally serve as the beginning to an evening out at a restaurant on America's streets. It is not obvious what makes Sarma's *Egyptian Lentil Nachos* Egyptian other than the Near Eastern origins of lentils, a legume that Turkey produces as a top competitor in the global food market.

In fact, according to archaeobotanical excavators, the oldest remains of lentils are found not in the region of the Fertile Crescent, which encompasses southeastern Turkey and the northern Nile river floodplains of Egypt, but in Greece, where in the Peloponnesian cave of Frankhthi, there are lentil remains going back 11,000 years. At Sarma, the cooks must be researchers as their lentil nachos are smothered in the yogurt-heavy *tzatziki* sauce.

Sarma, which means wrap or surrounding in Turkish, is a fine metaphor for regionality. And from the peppery Spanish eggplant *romesco* that complements their exquisite dish Rainbow Carrots to the Italian favorite of gnocchi, only stamped Grecian with feta, this bistro in Somerville, a stone's throw from the Atlantic Ocean, is leading the way toward an experience of Mediterranean culture that embraces uniqueness as an outcome of plurality.

And finally, no Latin, Arabic, Turkish or Greek table is complete without sweets, a finish that Sarma consummates boldly, especially during summer, with their strawberry frozen yogurt, the fullness of its dairy blend foregrounded and

accompanied by sticky coconut milk jam, chocolate baklava bark brittle and spoonfuls of jellied rhubarb. When coupled with a locally manufactured beverage, such sustenance tastes like humanity's love for the planet, and perhaps evidence that the feeling is mutual.

June 25, 2021
Somerville, USA

Tasting

As springtime in America unravels the tangled knots of a winter endured with unrivaled hardship, its cities are able to awaken anew with the lightness of movement as its people step onto the fresh ground of unprecedented regeneration. While the world as a whole is embattled by the ongoing difficulties of pandemic restrictions, more and more people in the Boston metropolitan region are breathing air unfiltered by paper or cloth, and converse liberally at a wealth of establishments that effectively bring the world's cuisine to the shores of New England.

After transplanting a kitchen across continents, oceans and cultures, the food is liable to taste differently. The phenomenon is comparable to playing music for a foreign audience who would react in their own way. Over time, especially if playing to a limited set of listeners, the musicians might aptly change the nature of their performance. A kitchen, in that sense, is an ecological space, tied intimately with the fertility and harvest of its local lands as to the social milieus of the greater community it serves.

Oleana, in Cambridge, is, like its sister business, the cafe Sofra, a metaphor for the integration of those people who embrace the roots of the recipes as their own. The balance between authenticity and mixture has always been at the forefront of broader issues pertaining to immigration, for example, but, at the same time, have a lucid microcosm in the culinary world. Oleana prepares a menu that would tease the tastebuds of everyone from multigenerational Bostonian to a Turkish tourist in Bean Town.

The dishes prepared at Oleana are hearty explorations that popular overlap where Turkish, Greek and Arab food intertwine. More, there is a tastable and visual house aesthetic at Oleana, in its chorus of herbs and spices flecked lavishly across a course of savory appetizers lathered and doused in varieties of yogurt sauces and colorful spreads that bring together mashed and whipped transformations of nuts and produce, cheeses and fruits. To identify an exclusively Turkish tradition is complicated, but not impossible.

For one, the cold *meze* options include an item called Turkish Green Olives, which is a deceptively simple name for what, in fact, adds a seemingly subtle but

especially powerful demonstration of the mutually enhanced spectrum of flavors that emerge, vibrantly, out of an otherwise common side. With the combination of Levantine *shanklish*, an aged and dried thyme-laced bluish cheese, and sliced almonds, the salty, sweet taste of these fresh olives alone is enough to feel nourished and happy.

The signature of good cooking is like art in that it survives on the edge where risk is mitigated by nodes of familiarity, that, on their own, would bear the costs of overcomplicating the basic, everyday need to eat. Oleana's kitchen, however, appears to brave the sharp corners with its manifold passionate gestures of culinary creativity, which, in the subtext of fusing their exotic diversity of ingredients, show just how harmoniously these cultures do coexist, if only on the plate.

In every exquisite bite at Oleana is the potential to imagine, even appreciate, the peacetime fruition of these respective agricultural heritages. With a studied eye, roaming the expansive and intricate menu at Oleana, the presence of Turkey's distinctive contributions to the contemporary Eastern Mediterranean palate is almost completely subject to the metamorphoses of cross-regional products like feta, pita, pine nuts, tahini, hummus, and Myzithra cheese (famously derived from Cretan goat or sheep culture, similar to ricotta).

It could be argued that even if Oleana does not have a thoroughly mainstream selection of Turkish favorites, its approach to encompassing a wider swath of culinary geography imbues very Levantine recipes with the richness of Anatolian generosity. That is the case with the *za'atar* bread, as its crispy baked exterior is utterly suffused with the flakes and aromas of the spiced herbal blend, often with hyssop, sumac, sesame and salt. American Turkish cuisine is generally the result of Turks living alongside post-Ottoman Lebanese and Greek immigrants.

While the accompaniment of goat's milk *labne* cheese spread is characteristic to how *za'atar*-bold bread is eaten from the streets of Beirut and Tel Aviv to the mountain valleys beyond Byblos and Tripoli, its pairing with tomato jam is a contemporary twist that recalls the diversity of preserves traditional to any Turkish breakfast. At Oleana, the bread is as good with evening fare as it would be to start the day. An intriguing nod to Turkey's multicultural kitchen as it has developed in the Boston area is found in the cold *meze* known as *topik*.

Inspired by its Armenian origins, the Lenten holiday appetizer is a vegetarian meatball in the same way that Turks prepare *köfte* with cooked lentil mash. The coalescence of currants, tahini and arugula is tantalizing within the stuffed potato that anchors the organic medley to tradition but does not hold it down. With six cold options and ten hot, the promise of each *meze* complimentary to every other is practically unlimited. And the difference between hot and cold is just one aspect of the menu's total resonance.

In Turkey, an affordable and convenient place to eat is often at a buffet-like diner known as a *lokanta*, where easy recipes are as wholesome as they are bountiful, doled out in heaping helpings. Among their favorites are variations on beans in an array of sauces, whether as strings, pods or broad. Oleana has adapted one guilty pleasure from the *lokanta* playbook with gourmet panache. Spare by amount, but strong in quality, the well-attended restaurant's Baked Gigante Beans are served with a nettle purée, a glorious spin on greens that, in North America, are gathered as a wild edible, sometimes made as tea or eaten raw.

The conversion of a quotidian meal intended for mass consumption into a tasting delicacy is part of the fun at Oleana, where the Baked Gigante Beans are rounded out with a feta-infused polenta. Other directly Turkish adaptations are a Sweet Potato Dolma stuffed with Kasseri cheese (an alternately transliterated appellation after the dairy farms of Kayseri) and lamb moussaka for a Grecian air. There is a kebab made with Vermont quail, and the unmistakably Ottoman tamarind-flavored beef dish known as Sultan’s Delight.

The desserts top off any course of *meze* appetizers at Oleana as they would after a feast somewhere down the alleys of Istanbul, where sweet shops fill clear cups and eager bellies with chocolate profiterole. The creamy finale is textured with Middle Eastern dash, lined with halvah and cashews, and serves as an appropriate finale to an evening in which the sharing of food is both symbolic and literally representative of what culinary treasures emerge from the kitchens of multicultural communities who, for generations, have lived and eaten together.

June 7, 2021
Cambridge, USA

Anatolians

The unassuming sound of Turkish is interwoven with fleeting instants of dialogue in Spanish, as the young wait staff at Cafe Istanbul organize aloud with their Latinx cooks, who, so it appears, have mastered some of the more prepossessing recipes shared along the coasts of the Aegean, Marmara, Mediterranean and Black Seas, those bodies of water that have ever provided the diverse richness of the Anatolian palate.

Its walls, furniture and decor have the peculiar, ground-floor Los Angeles ambiance of bleak, ahistorical functionalism. But there is a saving grace, transporting as the fare, which, under palm trees and near Pacific beaches hints of exotic locales. Encircling the cafe seating, almost like an American diner, are framed photos of the Bosphorus, its commuter ferries, and other iconic fragments that recall nostalgia for the urbanized marine ecology that is Istanbul.

Their cooking, however, extends beyond the citified airs of Turkey's largest metropolis to include more bucolic lands within the Anatolian pale. Their thick, white *yayla* rice soup is yogurt-based and flecked with mint. It is itemized as a "highland meadow" appetizer, and although hot, its fresh, dairy richness is also cooling, making for a proud comfort country dish that is as appropriate on a hot California summer day as in the chilly Black Sea hills.

Yayla, which means highland in Turkish, conjures that humid forest ecology on the coast of a shoreline shared from Eastern Europe to Central Asia. It is almost tastable in the Cafe Istanbul recipe, executed with convincing authenticity. Half of the planet’s circumference dissolves the moment its silky texture is savored. And beside a light, flaky variety of long, thin cigar *börek*, it is well-paired.

Dusted with dried herbs and spring onions, the cigar *börek* is larger and distinct from its traditionally lighter fry. The many outer layers of its phyllo dough shatter and crumble to the touch. It is as irresistible as it is delectable. In a home setting, where much of this fare is liberally consumed, there would be countless numbers of these salty pastries filled with feta and mozzarella, which, when melted together create a tantalizing fusion.

The history of food in America is defined by the reinvention of the Old World kitchen, rearranged to suit a population who, after many generations of displacement, whether by choice or force, turn around and attempt to imagine how their ancestors cooked. Luckily, as an immigrant nation in which foreign business is generally welcome, America has become a testing ground over which the rules of dining are rewritten.

In a climate where both cooks and foodies are perhaps not as steeped in a knowledge of the cuisine on the fixed menu at Cafe Istanbul as the casual, young Turkish-speaking staff, anything goes. That said, Cafe Istanbul adheres to tradition where it might have otherwise veered off course. While it offers an Americanized Mediterranean ensemble of Greek favorites, its strictly Turkish dishes could very well appear on someone's plate in Istanbul.

Such is the case with their *imam bayıldı*, a storied name for a beloved recipe, which, in Turkish simply means, "the imam fainted." There are many folktales that forward colorful explanations for the moniker behind the fried, whole eggplant stuffed with onions, tomato, garlic, slowly oven-baked and served with a creamy sauce of garlic-laced yogurt mixed with mint and chopped cucumber.

In the Bosphorus shorefront village of Kuzguncuk, now within the metropolitan region of Istanbul, a bubbly, stout female chef ruminated aloud on the origins of *imam bayıldı* while preparing it in her personable kitchen cafe. Kuzguncuk has an air of intercultural mixture with its multiple and prominent Greek and Armenian churches, as well as two synagogues, and a reputation for sheltering bohemians like the poet Can Yücel.

Raising a wooden spoon, aproned and in her usual humorous mood, she wondered if she had finally cracked the mystery behind the legendary fainting of the imam who had inspired a Turkish culinary classic. She turned to her hungry guests as they cupped their hot teas and said that it would not be out of the question if a Greek woman had simply added too much garlic to the formerly plain eggplant fry that she would make for the local imam.

The heavy degree of garlic in both Greek and Turkish cooking is enough to make a foodie wonder if these culinary cultures have been locked in a competition over

how much they can get away with using, especially in the *jajik* sauce (spelled *cacık* in Turkish) that goes with *imam bayıldı* and the dish itself, which, it seems has been designed to accommodate a plentiful mass of garlic-induced relish.

Elsewhere from the kitchen of Cafe Istanbul are carnivorous favorites whose traditions span the Anatolian countryside. Eastern Turkey might have an ecological affinity with the desert-like living conditions in southern California. The meat-centric dishes of Adana and Iskenderun circle back to Istanbul out of a hole-in-the-wall eatery in Beverly Hills and include an array of Mediterranean-style seafood, such as gilt-head bream, or *çupra* in Turkish.

At all times of day, Cafe Istanbul is a proper haunt to appease anyone's appetite for Turkish dining, even if, in comparison to any actual on-the-ground experience of Istanbul it is, in fact, wildly steep, utterly unaffordable. For example, the average Turkish tea, served in a tallish, curved glass, while legit in color and taste, is ten times more expensive than it would be from a luxury cafe overlooking the Bosphorus (and Cafe Istanbul does not look over anything).

Added to that, the absolutely basic *simit* or Turkish bagel, and *açma*, another bread item for breakfasting commuters, while baked with black olives or cheese and served with honey and butter (as it is on the streets of Istanbul), seems wildly overpriced at fourteen bucks. But so is property in Beverley Hills, and all of Los Angeles for that matter. It is a wonder that, with its Spanish-speaking kitchen and mute mood, the food at Cafe Istanbul is, finally, worth it.

May 28, 2021
Los Angeles, USA

Vitalized

On any given day in the week, it is not uncommon to see a spillover of people lining up, whiling away their time and conversing to abandon as they await their fare outside the cafe and restaurant Sofra. Although still closed to indoor dining due to pandemic restrictions, determined and hungry crowds gather for the delightful medley of tastes uniquely prepared by a kitchen that seems to have perfected one of the most successful fusions of Eastern and Western cuisine in Greater Boston, all from a modest storefront across from a busy intersection in Cambridge.

Sofra, from the Turkish for “feast", also has the connotation of a traditional setting in which a table is prepared and filled from end to end with every special delicacy local to the region in which it is harvested, made and served. In its literal definition, *sofra* translates as “table,” which, according to popular Turkish thought would be unthinkable without a splendid variety of foods on it. By the diversity of their menu, as generous as it is integrated to local tastes, Sofra lives up to its name. Their drinks alone indicate a deep knowledge of the Turkish palate.

Seasonal sherbets, offered still or sparkling in mango or key lime, recall the sweet and fruity Ottoman palace refreshment that remains a staple, especially for Ramadan breakfast. Yet, the kinds mixed at Sofra further the exotic bent of the drink that was originally intended to impress the sultan with the latest culinary appropriations along its once-far-reaching frontiers. And after imagining the mango-infused iced victuals of Mughal India exported westward to the high palace in Constantinople, Sofra also purveys a health-conscious, anti-inflammatory Persian recipe known as Golden Milk, or by its ingredients, as a turmeric latte.

The inclusion of broad regional libations and dishes is classic for Turkish cooking, which has been enriched by its neighbors’ mixtures, encompassing Slavic, Greek, Arab, Iranian, Turkic, Kurdish, Georgian, Russian, and other domestic minorities and folk communities, not to mention the pervasive influence of the Western cultures that continue to have an overarching influence in the tastes and cooking prescribed as part of the constantly changing, yet stubbornly ancient Turkish kitchen. Perhaps to familiarize Americans who generally develop a Francophile bent in cafe culture, Sofra blends a fine Turk Au Lait – Turkish coffee with milk.

As would be expected from a Turkish restaurant in America, there are culinary overlaps at Sofra that appear to brush quite close to having been made to appease those patrons who might have rather enjoyed dishes made on Greek or Levantine terms, a sensitive and often complicated blur of similarities and differences. But, Sofra has not given to the temptations of such generalization, as is often problematic with fusions of Asian cuisine that tend to cancel out the genuine soul of a rooted tradition of local cooking in favor of an Americanized smorgasbord out to satisfy everyone at once.

Instead, the culinary genius of Sofra has uplifted the essence of traditional authenticity to especially original heights, according with the refined tastes in both the Turkish and American kitchens. The powerful simplicity of an acknowledged favorite on the Sofra menu, deceptively plain by its title, cheese *börek*, is a revelation, adapting what to many in Turkey would be of fleeting interest as a widespread, convenient standard to every city street and home oven. In fact, the simplicity of the *börek* is its strong point, as the savory pastry of layered, thin dough mixed with cheeses and herbs can be altered practically infinitely.

Sofra's cheese *börek* is crispy on the outside, effecting a golden-brown crust that, together with the soft, melted cheese throughout holds an irresistible, appetizing consistency. Dished out with a light cream and a bruschetta-like, dense and oniony tomato salad, it is a visionary version of the normal Turkish street food variety that is as common as daily bread. Another ordinary item prepped in droves throughout Istanbul is a stuffed baked potato called *kumpir*, which, in the hands of Sofra gets a gourmet makeover. The selection of ingredients bridge the recipe from its conventions to innovations of their possibilities on the plate.

It is a completely different culinary world in the Western hemisphere, where the potato originates, and so, a *kumpir* in Boston should have a distinct taste from its Old World relative. Emboldened by a stout helping of cauliflower, Sofra's *kumpir* is packed with positive calories on account of its mashed interior absorbing a harmonious assemblage of barley and chickpeas rounded out with Kasseri cheese and Aleppo honey to sweeten its complex, and pleasurably edible textures. A gregarious Bostonian of a waiter at Sofra confessed that the cheese *börek* and sweet potato *kumpir* were his go-to choices.

The menu at Sofra balances the fine line that divides health from enjoyment when it comes to the excesses or moderations of salts and sweets. Most importantly, the experience of eating Sofra's delicious cheese *börek* borders on euphoria, as it leans in where it overwhelms in its generous amounts of cheese, with liberal investment in oils and butters to lather and fry its surfaces, heated down to the middle. At the same time, the quality of the flour, and the freshness of the cheese and cream is tastable. Ultimately, it has the double effect of apparent relish, while conscientiously instilling a thoughtful, healthy provision.

For a foodie accustomed to the massive dosage of sides heaped onto a *kumpir* baked potato on the shores of Ortaköy, for example, the *sweet potato kumpir* at Sofra may seem spartan and conservative in comparison, something out of the health nut playbook. Yet, the choice of an apparently misspelled Kayseri cheese, named after the famed dairy industry of southwestern Turkey, and endangered honey from the tragic city of Aleppo, builds what might be called a "Boston *kumpir*" into a nerve center of health-conscious, downtown eating.

As a global city on the rise, Boston is home to a vast spectrum of culinary diversity that in one place fertilizes a specific ecology of palatable intermixture. Whereas Boston is known to some Turkish speakers as Bostancı (a homonymic joke literally meaning gardener), for its sizable Turkish community, the talented cooks at Sofra serve not only a complex and nutritious menu, but with each order are very possibly reinforcing networks of engagement, familiarity and creativity between Turks and Americans. It could be said that Sofra has a more American leaning than Turkish; however, their inspiration to perfect imaginative recipes delves and soars beyond territorial or cultural categorization.

May 11, 2021
Cambridge, USA

Seabreeze

The mastermind behind Lazuri Cafe is a Laz-speaking cook named Chef Ziya who is said to have run a professional kitchen for a quarter of a century. Local regional varieties special to seafood-rich, and dairy-heavy Black Sea cuisine are conspicuously absent from the modest place of business where, on afternoons, mostly male guests converse and order in Turkish as their beloved mother tongue reverberates over the stoves and sinks throughout. Yet, for a crash course in the basic alimentary foundations of life in Turkey, it offers a fair spread.

A quick gleaning from a backlit board above the cashier lends itself to impulsive, snappy decisions. As the spring sun gathers heat over the worn blacktop, where dense traffic merges along lanes beside walkers ambling about between a corner taqueria, donut shop, and vegan diner. Lazuri Cafe is at home amid the diverse representation of ethnic establishments that color the tapestry of peoples who have made the city of Cambridge in the U.S. state of Massachusetts home for decades, and in some cases generations, yet, have not lost their taste in the foods of their ancestors.

Still, long distances change the ecology of ingredients and how they come together when divorced from the heartland and encapsulated in a sense of time that pivots around the unsettling drama of international migration, especially from a place so far, culturally and geographically from America's northeastern shores. The whipping gusts of the Black Sea still blow over waves that slap hard against the industrial bedrock of the north Anatolian forests that brave Russian winds, Georgian airs, Eastern European moods, and Greek heritage.

In step with the practical wisdom of tradition, the ample consumption of yogurt is a boon as summer approaches blazing. Lazuri Cafe prepares a fresh *cacık* (pronounced "jajik") soup, which is perhaps thicker than some might know and enjoy back in Turkey. And together with thin slices of raw cucumber, which prevent dehydration, the nourishing, cold bowl is a simple delight and goes well with a tall glass of *ayran*, a salty yogurt drink that, with a healthy serving of *cacık*, is cooling and yet wholly substantial.

Like its population and history, culinary culture in Turkey is as subject to variation as the features of its mysterious landscape. At the same time, the roots that run through its food go deep, and remain firm, strengthening the body of its mass with the real power of life's joys and sorrows, and with time-honored knowledge of the land proven and applied by proud, healthy communities who have farmed, gathered, cooked and eaten seasonal produce since time immemorial.

Transplanted to the commercial concrete of Boston, and the homogenizing influences of American assimilation, flour whitens, spice softens, and recipes that would otherwise crackle with the finishing touches of olive oil and village eggs harvested in the shade of ancient, millennial trees. For example, at Lazuri Cafe, there is a dish, traditional to the Aegean region, though made throughout Turkey called *gözleme*, and is translated into English simply as a kind of flatbread.

In Turkish, *gözleme* is a homonymic play on the words for “grill,” and “eye,” which are “köz” and “göz” respectively. The flatbread, which, in Turkey is either made with a very thin, rolled dough called *yufka*, and grilled over a round, belly-like stovetop, or with a denser kind of bread known as *bazlama*. At Lazuri Cafe, the flour resembled that of *yufka*, though, for a naive guest unversed in the Anatolian kitchen, particularly when filled with feta cheese, it might seem like a skinnier, whiter version of a crispy, corn-based quesadilla.

Lazuri Cafe offers *gözleme* with spinach, or *kıymalı*, which is generally a sautéed minced beef with onion. The *gözleme* of Chef Ziya, when filled with feta cheese, is light, scant and dry. And while many accustomed to the rich, fat American diet would consider this to be a fatal drawback, it is, in fact, utterly authentic. In the shorefront mountains along Turkey's green Aegean coast, talkative women in loose shalwar pantaloons, embroidered vests, felt slippers and florally patterned head shawls flatten *yufka* and prepare *gözleme* so that circular burns on the surface of the bread look like eyes staring back at the eater, encircled by village gossip.

For starters, Lazuri Cafe is true to its origins, as Turkish cuisine facilitates appetizers in the literal meaning of the word. Their approach to zucchini fritters, *mücver* in Turkish (pronounced “moojver”) are healthier than might normally be enjoyed in the city of Istanbul, for example, where, even in health-conscious restaurants *mücver* are fried longer, crispier and are less eggy than that at Lazuri

Cafe. In its grated summer squash, *mücver* are customarily laced with herbs, cheese and sometimes potatoes to round them out.

As a late-night haunt, Lazuri Cafe would be almost perfect. In the midst of a bright, clear weekday, the kitchen, however, is not entirely nuanced or vibrant in comparison to many of the neighboring restaurants, and particularly when reflecting on the normal course of fare in the old country. But, it is a genuine establishment and prepares a hearty fixed menu that, among its miscellany of appetizers, includes the party favorite, *sigara böreği*, or cigar pastry, a long, cylindrical deep-fried dough lined with feta cheese and parsley stuffing.

The cigar *börek* at Lazuri Cafe is satisfying, as the phyllo dough is crisped to a delicate degree, allowing for a texturally complex experience around the salty, hard cheese added quite lightly along its interior. Unlike the generous use of yogurt, Lazuri Cafe is more spartan when it comes to cheese, a relative contrast from Greek restaurants which would tend to serve a block of feta over salads, doused in bright, greenish-yellow olive oil. But there is a lack of rawness at Lazuri Cafe, an element that, whether as washed arugula or sliced tomato, celebrates the local environment when dining on such foods in Turkey.

And finally, getting to the meat of the issue, there is, authentically, no shortage of options for carnivores. One wrap, popular across Anatolia, named after Adana, a southern Turkish city just north of the Mediterranean Sea, is packed with chopped lamb. Lazuri Cafe made a valiant effort, though nothing so extraordinary as to compel a rewrite in the history of Turkish cuisine as it has moved from the kitchens of the Black Sea to the streets of Boston. And though Lazuri Cafe is not above average for an American or Turkish kitchen, it is honest, wholesome, straightforward, and does the trick of ameliorating and conveying the bittersweet nostalgia that accompanies life lived in memory of better food.

April 30, 2021
Allston, USA

Trove

The fusions of Turkish cuisine are not only appreciated within the bounds of restaurants but in the total ambiance of life in Turkey as it blends into various spaces, carried by pervading sounds and smells – some delicate, others harsh – but all resonating like a chorus of perceptions.

At the root of its allure is a conscious plurality, one that drives public awareness with unmistakable if inescapable grab, within its local spheres of influence. That is the essential crux of urban living – the melting pots and multicolored mosaics, the assemblages of people and their customs that define and glorify the reason for being in a cosmopolitan metropolis.

With its name signifying Friday, and with connotations of the Islamic sabbath prayer, mixed with that of the quarter, Çukurcuma, the bistro Cuma and its in-house food shop, aptly titled, Çukur, offer a trove of understated yet impeccably prepared, tasteful recipes.

Surrounded by antique shops, sharing its grounds with part of a mosque, Cuma is an admirable experiment in the integration of Istanbul's downtown neighborhoods as they are increasingly gentrified. The architecture of the place appears to as carved out of a slew of artifacts at any of the neighboring antique collections, which house related stonework.

Cuma welcomes its linguistically diverse, international patronage with freshly baked sliced bread and an oily, red dip. The menu begins with ingredients that come together for tantalizing, and substantial variety of delicacies, such as its broad bean and glasswort bowl, pairing a smooth, savory mound of the pureed hearty legume with a decorative and nutritious topping of either a warmed cauliflower stalk, or the succulent marine herb that is a favorite in Turkish taverns during the summer.

As the weather cools and cravings mount in search of comfort foods, Cuma's appetizer of Georgian dumplings in a rich sauce with a salty Antakya yogurt base is a perfect invitation to cozy up during the long winter nights. The cooking at Cuma delights in commingling the exotic with the familiar. Its *pizzettas* are thin-crusted

masterpieces of subtlety. The vegetarian version melts its texturally refined layers of cheeses into slivers of carrot and scattered bunches of cauliflower heads. And under the tawny yellow lights, strung over the large stone tiles of the ground-floor terrace, the atmosphere is nourishingly romantic.

Indoors at Cuma, a narrow staircase leads to a comfy cafe, complete with soft couches and broad tables. Down a hallway, aromas from a lively kitchen waft through the corridors as the work of its chefs hum with the clank of metal and the hiss of steam. A wall displays a healthy assortment of natural goods, jarred and bottled, purveying an organic assortment of wholesome products – from elderflower syrup to specially procured tahinis and honey that seem to grace the plates of their finest dishes.

There is something of a drawback to the cultural outreach of their menu, which while staying true to the regional wonders of the Turkish countryside, also extend farther afield to Mexico, for instance, with their veggie tacos, accompanied with generous quantities of avocado, green lentil, beet, cilantro and turnip.
Although the menu has changed, in the past Cuma also served a vegan curry with seasonal vegetables on jasmine rice. But these distant culinary traditions are difficult to meld with formidable Eastern Mediterranean cookery.

The specific, almost aesthetic, attention to the house quality of their ingredients is what makes Cuma unique in its allure. There is an overall sense of substantiality in their bread, cheese and sugars as a world-class bakery in their own right, claiming the tongues of classy types painting the town, dining before they saunter off in search of play and diversion among the theaters and bars, cinemas and auditoriums that dot the interior cityscape in the neighborhoods around Çukurcuma between Taksim and Cihangir.

Cuma maintains a homely character in its outdoor terrace, walled in by tall plants and frequented not only by the hungry but the prayerful. The spectacular diversity of its menu is a testament to the surprising versatility of Turkish cooking in Istanbul, where a quiet cafe off the beaten path bears the charm and sophistication of skilled cooks, whose touch might rival that of any restauranteur around the globe. Despite the rising living costs in Turkey, where such establishments as

Cuma have upped their prices in the last year, the fare and the accentuated flavors of its setting are reason enough to embrace its casual exceptionality.

September 29, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Dream

Among the 10,000-plus civilian residents deported from Ottoman Palestine from 1914 to 1917 was a Polish Jew named David Grün. In the winter of 1911, after living in Palestine for five years, he moved to Thessaloniki to learn Turkish. It was in the multinational Ottoman city where he saw the future.

Months later, he met Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, a fellow Jewish law student who had recently graduated from Galatasaray High School in Istanbul. Together they enrolled at Istanbul University. Until he received his alma mater with Ben-Zvi in 1914, Grün also worked as a journalist in Constantinople, where he changed his surname to Ben-Gurion after the 10th century Romaniote historian Joseph ben Gorion.

Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi returned to Palestine at the beginning of World War I to recruit Jewish militiamen in the service of the Ottoman army. Within the year, as Turkish authorities went door-to-door checking for Ottoman citizenship, they were deported. Returning to Palestine in 1918, they allied with Great Britain to defeat the Turkish army during the Palestine Campaign. Three decades later, Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi signed the declaration of independence with twenty-four compatriots to establish the State of Israel in Palestine.

As many as 80,000 people pass through Ben-Gurion International Airport on a single day, yet likely few if any realize its name descends ten centuries because a Polish Jew found lifelong inspiration in a Greek-speaking Hebrew scholar from Byzantine Italy. Even if the name of the airport carries modern political weight, its original story speaks to the holistic cultural history that is arguably best found in the local culinary landscape. Also known as Tel Aviv Airport despite its official territorial designation in an unincorporated area, there are brilliant signs among its food vendors that relate the premodern history when Turks ruled the land as they continue to influence the kitchen. From the modern port skyward to one of the most ancient in the world at sea-level, Ben-Gurion International to the biblical Jaffa Port, the taste of Ottoman cuisine is still ripe for the picking.

Ilan's "The Alternative Cafe" serves a sweet, piping *salep* in the central lounge at Ben-Gurion International. Before coffee and tea grew to popularity, Ottoman

citizens powdered orchid tubers into a valuable flour that currently goes for about 180 Turkish liras (then $50) per kilo. It is said that Turks first made *salep* to replace traditionally alcoholic, warming, medicinal fermented drinks after converting to Islam in the eighth century. A recent consumer craze led to species endangerment, ultimately restricting orchid export from Turkey.

Salep brewers in former Ottoman territories like Tel Aviv will often use glutinous rice flour, despite the fact that orchids are widely distributed in the region. Its benefits to health continue to complement the global health food culture popular in Tel Aviv, as *salep* is known to alleviate respiratory and digestive illnesses, empower the heart and mind and increase sexual appetite.

Once within city limits, the global hubbub tends to gather on Tuesdays and Fridays as the pedestrian mall of Nachlat Binyamin Street transforms into a vibrant art market. All forms of original craftsmanship are on display under the welcoming smiles of local artisans. Clever syntheses of creative utility are purveyed, from psychedelic kaleidoscopes to three-dimensional puzzles, all harmonized to the irresistible music of wildly talented buskers. Within the wonderfully contemporary open-air ambiance, the white headscarf of a traditional Turkish cook appears over her bulbous, round-faced grill commonly seen on the streets of Istanbul, where she cooks *yufka* a thin slice of wheat flour for *börek* (Turkish pastry).

The Ottoman past is clearest to living eyes in the oldest neighborhood of Tel Aviv, Jaffa. Its inscribed buildings, mosques and eateries resound with echoes from early 20th century Constantinople, and more faintly with Turkic roots in the culinary history of Central Asia. In one of Jaffa's trendiest bars, Mainbazaar, tucked into a graffiti-filled alleyway, a curious item is listed on the menu: *lahmag'on*. It is a variant spelling for the Turkish delicacy, *lahmacun*, a crisped dough most often prepared with minced meats and mixed spices. Said to originate thousands of years ago in southeastern Turkey and the Levant, Jewish migrants brought *lahmacun* directly from Urfa to Jerusalem in the 1890s. Its emergence in history is contested as hotly as its oven-fired toppings are consumed. Armenians, who were integral to the pluralist Ottoman society, pronounce the dish closer to present-day Jaffa locals, as *lamadjo*.

And onward in the shadow of the Ottoman scripts engraved in buildings over the centuries, as the high minaret of Mahmoudiya Mosque looms against the seaside to reflect its early 19th century past, the people are feasting at Onza Restaurant on Rabbi Hannina Street. It is the only full Turkish kitchen run by bonafide chefs in the neighborhood environs of the Jaffa Flea Market. At the helm overseeing gourmet *pide* and a unique diversity of *meze* are Muli Magriso, from a Turkish family, and Arik Darhani, who has worked in Turkish cuisine for over a decade in the long lost lands of Ottoman Palestine. They have a palate for local history as they serve an array of fruits and herbs, nuts and seasonings, from pomegranates and dates to almonds and tahini.

Many of the dishes at Onza are made with ingredients taken straight from the markets of Istanbul, such as for the *Pide* Bianca Abdul Rachman, with its basil cream cheese from new Constantinople cooked with regional wild spinach in a husky envelope of bread. After a fresh-baked *simit* and a cooling thick drink of cucumber-yogurt *gigik* (spelled *cacık* in Turkish), the Feta from Istanbul meze appetizer is as authentic as it gets, recalling the aromas of Greek taverns behind Dolmabahçe Palace.

Hyssop is served with Feta from Istanbul and with Honey Gin Tea, a soothing concoction also made with gin, chamomile, honey, and lemon. The legacy of hyssop as an herb used to cleanse sacred places conjures the archaic ecology of antiquity, when the Levant and Anatolia shared country in a landscape of smoky temples and wandering prophets between the Babylonian Empire and Hellenistic Greece.

Preceding and throughout the Ottoman era, Palestine was known as the land of milk and honey. In the 19th century, beekeeping technology made a leap, as people realized the dream of the Holy Land more abundantly than ever. Research scholar Tamar Novick recently aired her findings on the Ottoman History Podcast, proving how moveable hives greatly advanced the cause of early modern European settlers. And that ingenuity of transport, specifically in export was the basis for the most famous local food with the emergence of the Jaffa orange as its especially tough skin opened new citriculture trade routes from Ottoman Palestine to England.

As historians revisit the land, they unearth findings that are often relevant to contemporary society, such as the special role of minorities like Palestinian Arabs in the culinary heritage of Tel Aviv. Along the beachfront in Jaffa, they pour tamarind from ornate metal vessels seen in other formerly Ottoman cities like Cairo, and gaze at the turquoise-domed Sea Mosque over the storied port where myth tells of Jonah sailing out to the whale. Of perennial importance are the transnational and micro-local histories of foods. The sources of bodily nourishment are not only found in places, but also in times. In Tel Aviv, the past is tastable.

August 23, 2017
Tel Aviv, Israel

Roads

Parkland

A middle-aged woman in a long, flowery skirt sells bunches of roses to the couples who hold each other affectionately on the rocks that form the boundary between the neighborhood of Moda and the Marmara Sea. On windy days, the waves roll, crashing up and onto a wide promenade that points directly to the tip of the historic peninsula. The spires of Sultanahmet are illumined, hinting of bygone eras across the water from Galata, where the Genoese tower has stood for nearly seven centuries as one of the proudest symbols of the landscape that has become consolidated into one city.

Kadıköy is sometimes reminiscent of the cultural and geographical relationship that Brooklyn has to Manhattan, where the heart of the urban core is at a remove within the more countrified setting that defines the paces of life within the Anatolian or Asian region of Istanbul's intercontinental area. On its streets, under the shadow of low-rise blocks, residents relish in sounds of nature, comfortably distant from the hustle and bustle of daily life in the midtown rush. Even Moda itself can become hectic, however, which is why locals flock to the waterfront, joining what appears, at times, to be a vivid population density.

On sunny days, and weekends in the warmer months, crowds from across the land rain down on the coastal parks that wrap around what is colloquially referred to as the nose of the upscale district, with a boat-shaped sundial of a public artwork furnishing a walking path at the foot of apartment blocks decorated with mosaic panels, whose panoramas are some of the most enviable around. The vista overlooks a swathe of seascape including the lighthouse of Fenerbahçe, and the marina of Kalamış, from where sailboats often flash their canvases, whipping in the hard winds that blow north from the Dardanelles strait by Çanakkale.

While cyclists are a rarity in the parklands of Moda, before they fan out with less foot traffic toward Caddebostan, another seaside quarter farther down the coastline, there are strong showings of scooters, skateboarders and joggers, but mostly walkers. Because of how many people there are in any given stretch of pathway, it makes for a practically impenetrable mob that, on some days, even feels prohibitive for a walk. Nonetheless, leisurely sorts are out in force, displaying their

talents for slackline balancing, and impromptu musical performances, usually plugged in facing the picnickers with their back to the sea, or acoustic on the lawn.

The parks of Moda, in that case, are jubilant, freewheeling and festive. Within their socializing circles, friendships are made and broken, lies told and truths uncovered, as tongues loosen toward the evening and everyone, together, sheds their collective, seasonal repressions, all the more so in the wake of a post-pandemic ambiance, electrified with shared sentiments of bodily liberation. Under a gazebo at the edge of the park, another sundial pays homage to the old Byzantine myth of Kadıköy as the land of the blind, as the prehistoric communities of Chalcedon inhabiting its shores missed the opportunity to settle the auspicious hills of Fatih.

It might seem, in retrospect, that those ancient people of Kadıköy whose traces along Kurbağalıdere stream stand as some of the earliest evidence of habitation within the bounds of modern Istanbul, going back to the Stone Age, were onto something, as the sociocultural trends of the city have lately swarmed increasingly to its scenic, expansive ecology. It could be said that the environs around Hagia Sophia are overly settled, as its multilayered foundations remain unshakable, drawing an international buzz of passersby. In Moda, while there is a touristic bent to its allure, it has a localized focus, outward and upward, facing the sea and sky.

Moda and its green, forested parks are a haven for young people, as the many schools in Kadıköy pour out every day with adolescents in need of well-deserved breaks from their indoor concentrations. And newly furnished with a broader bike path that connects seamlessly with Fenerbahçe, by the side of a canal where little boats are docked and cleaned by men who seem to spend their days like fishermen off in some far-flung, exotic locale. Instead, they are neighbors with popular tennis and basketball courts, fenced obstacle courses for dogs and long lines outside of nearby cafes that dole out coffee and croissants like hot cakes.

With Yoğurtçu Park on one side and the port of Rıhtım on the other, the wide walkways of Moda's seaside parks are meeting points where divergent groups gather in the spirit of mutual regard for the land and its waters. While city workers collect trash from the ground, environmentalists monitor the marine health of the Marmara Sea. Next, a cargo ship passes a commuter ferry while a cellist plays a Baroque air, mixing notes with a singer and guitarist powering through a radio

classic. Dogs bark at each other as crows, cats and seagulls fight over handouts, then an aging woman sells a budding flower to a teenager in love.

April 4, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Local

The shift toward post-pandemic thinking altered the course of everything from workplace culture to travel plans, as countries ease restrictions and globetrotters tie their laces all the tighter to make up for lost time, art exhibitions reemerge from the digital world and cafe society resumes its dedication to the caffeinated enlightenment of the overeducated, underemployed masses. But on a smaller scale, for workers and locals in the neighborhood of Moda, Istanbul, the seemingly simple move of a humble greengrocer from one corner to another feels like a harbinger of greater changes on the horizon.

Umut would display its reliable stock of fruits and vegetables like a folding hand fan, spread out for the nearest circle of residents to fortify their home supplies of the nutritive items that grow aplenty across the land. Although their shiny, enlarged forms marked the produce as commercially grown, the market's outdoor staff would wait and weigh and joke and help, even advise, imploring their patrons to try the latest stock of purple basil, *reyhan* in Turkish, as its steeped leaves make for a particularly refreshing drink when served chilled as the weather warms.

They were a tough-looking bunch of middle-aged men, with gnarled hands that reached for soil-smeared potatoes and tomatoes dripping with water with a grasp that evoked the physicality of rugged farmers. But they were quick to smile, and at the sight of a foreigner who knew a little Turkish, they might declare that they were open-minded, and enjoyed meeting every kind of person, no matter their beliefs or origins. That was the case along the bustling Moda Avenue, where teenage partygoers and European vacationers would brush shoulders with an old man in search of the right shape of onion for his next hot salad.

Although the organic market, Ada, across the street from Umut, sold a more palatable, seasonal round of competing produce with rustic naturalism, stocked shelves and a bijou storefront that captured the imaginations of the upwardly mobile folks who ambled about the seaside quarter, Umut was down to earth. Its interior also had an ample bounty of vegan and alternative options, as well as goods from various small-scale agriculturalists and dairy farmers from the breadth of Anatolia. There was an herb-infused, soft white cheese from Van next to yogurt from a milk cooperative from the Aegean province of Tire in the region of Izmir.

One American environmentalist who lived down the street would come in with empty glass jars, asking for dry foods in bulk to be poured into his special containers, so as not to add to the overwhelming amount of waste that is usually habitually forced onto daily shoppers encircled by storms of plastic bags, paper receipts and coded stickers. Affable cashiers exchanged places as they'd call out to their buyers with terms of endearment, pronouncing the everyman a king as he exited with his arms full of garlic and eggplants. They might even try their English, especially when the main counter was run by the manager's daughter.

All in all, it was a friendly place, as workers laughed among themselves, spreading that normalcy that runs through everyday life, bringing a kind of dependable cheer. No matter the world's dreary events, or what argument might have ensued between a loved one, or friend, someone would be there to brighten the mood when the only thing left to do is buy bread and milk for the morning. And now that its facade has been stripped, its wide, green cupboards removed from the sidewalk corner where it took up so much space, there is a visible absence, palpable not only by the disappearance of its stock but of its grounding presence.

They say that the Beyaz Fırın bakery franchise will replace Umut, and with it, Moda will attract its elite, leisure class who, on their way to the coastal restaurants, picnicking along the Sea of Marmara shorefronts, they might fancy a sweet cake, or stop to sip on a milky espresso. But the character of the place is already missed.

Umut could be said to have been one of the last working-class establishments active in that part of Moda. And while it might not have had the best-tasting carrots and lemons on that one block, what it did was stay true to the spirit of inclusivity that is increasingly rare in a capitalist society bent on infinite upwardness.

There is no question of whether or not the displacement of Umut is part of the long haul of gentrification in Istanbul's core districts. It is, even as its slow rise is incremental. But what people might fear is a future in which one of Istanbul's most picturesque quarters becomes closer to a summer resort than a livable neighborhood. Whereas Umut held down the fort, Beyaz Fırın might swing the door wide open.

There is, nonetheless, a fine balance between openness and vacancy, whether of a city or a country. As the world becomes more mobile again, the contrast between inhabiting and visiting will be subtler, perhaps like experience versus perception. And yet, the difference for those who live in Moda, as for the locals of any popular city neighborhood, the change will be as sharp as buying ingredients versus getting a coffee.

March 21, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Hilltop

The world's finest cities are not just agglomerations of sites, points on the map to which global masses flock on a seasonal basis, but areas inhabited by generations who, whether over a century or a decade, define its ambiance to the extent that it is social, or inclusive within the buzzing change of identity and culture, as people have moved with relative personal freedoms within and across national borders, geographically and psychologically. That idyllic sensibility is contained, perhaps with a tone of elitism, in Cihangir, which maintains a kind of downtown vitality evocative of the once-affordable streets of London or New York.

The limits of Cihangir end too soon for some, for others not soon enough. Its widest, busiest avenue, the double-lane Akarsu Slope has seen better days, recalling the heyday of life in and around Taksim Square not so many years ago. Despite the aura of faded glory that defines much of Istanbul's strained allure, there are yet reasons to delight in the fruits and flowers that have blossomed out of its peculiar soil, turned and cultivated by the unlikeliest of characters from around the world. The international profile of Cihangir, then, is unmistakable, immediate as the ubiquitous presence of its popular cafes.

When ascending the hilly urban terrain up from Karaköy into its environs, a seer might be struck by a powerful vista, of the trio of waterways that stream into each other at the tip of the historic peninsula that was once the prehistoric castle town of Byzantium, its coursing flow meeting the Golden Horn inlet and the southern point of the Bosphorus strait. There is a stairwell that overlooks the marine panorama, where folks sometimes gather to while away the time basking in a particularly impressive vision of their place on the planet. And walking from there to the corner of Coşkun Street and Akarsu Slope the neighborhood opens up.

A cluster of public establishments and private residences is more urban, right beside traditional homes that retain wooden architecture reminiscent of the Ottoman era. An alcohol-tinged spot called No. 21 is known for complimenting a constant supply of fresh water with some of the best-mixed nuts around, while Journey, a bustling cafe popular among expats, runs a world-class kitchen dicing up superlative inventions of the Mediterranean and Anatolian culinary fusions. And

down the broad avenue, there is a plethora of bistros, eateries and shops. It seems conducive for a pedestrian promenade, but cars continue to race past.

Cihangir, like Moda in Kadıköy on the Asian side of Istanbul, has a chip on its shoulder when it comes to how it looks, and who wants to be seen in it. But unlike the uppish quarters farther north along the Bosphorus, these two districts maintain a mixed, residential status that is somehow cool for both those who are more economically mobile and for those who strive to swim in the deep waters of expensive nights out and ever-changing wardrobes aligned to the power-hungry facades of global fashion. These two overlapping sociologically distinct perspectives arguably come together when looking at new art on the fringe of the mainstream.

The definition of cool is oftentimes more than a subjective notion of being or playing, doused in the fairy dust of Hollywood glamor. It can be a matter of objective attainment or the informal education that the cultural moment increasingly provides via mass media. But these sentiments do not hold water for long. At the end of the day, cool is an indifferent shrug despite total absorption into the capitalist paradigm in which consumption is rote and default. That is why young artists and their failures, off-site art spaces and their quirky shows are an apt reflection pool over which to gaze back and wonder at the illusions of self-consciousness.

One of the paradisiacal mirages of youth is persistent, and at times dogmatic belief that newness is always best, or from a philosophical point of view, that it is even possible in a world subject to permanent change at all times. The delusions of intractable sameness are only the other side of the coin when it comes to the flashy prerogatives of apparent novelty. Such highfalutin thoughts, the likes of which might be heard at any hour in a cafe in Cihangir, will not stop artists from creating aplenty, floating in a daze on the lazy river of experience. Their works are fantasies of independence in a slew of artist-run initiatives in the quarter.

Between the video vitrine of YAYA, tucked away in a passage to house the permanent, eccentric locale of Viable Istanbul, or the 12 square meters (129 square feet) of Kiralık Depo, both of which are around the corner from each other, at street-level, under the homely interior of Sync Society or above the institutionally

prominent Pilot Gallery, not far from the workshop-based Daire Sanat. The list goes on, with Ark Kültür hosting the last Design Biennial, Cihangir is a district distinguished by its burgeoning role in the contemporary art landscape of Istanbul, one that appears to be growing, while its spaces and works retain a candor of intimacy all their own.

February 28, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Flaneur

When Hemingway arrived in Istanbul in the Roaring '20s, he did not plan to party, not exactly, but to cover the movement of peoples between Greece and Turkey. The year was 1922, and a dreaded policy measure was due to land on the international conference tables of Lausanne, Switzerland, when, in January of 1923 the government of Greece signed the "Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations" with the parliament that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had newly formed in Ankara.

While Hemingway gained well-deserved and riveting material from the front of the humanitarian crisis on the landmass of Thrace, he would later say that journalism was good for a writer, but the whole business was best left as early as possible, so as not to stifle creativity. He was only one among the bohemian intellectual writers and artists who graced the floor of the Pera Palace Hotel, among them Agatha Christie, whose 1934 book, *Murder on the Orient Express* immortalized Istanbul as a Belgian's detective's crime fantasy.

Nowadays, the redolence of mental diversion and imaginative allure is still hot on the busy streets of 21st-century Pera, where the highland urban environs of Tepebaşı offer a powerful cocktail of sights and activities. Overlooking the Golden Horn inlet, with the complex and overwhelming urbanization of Istanbul's sprawling hills in the distance, there is a formidable representation of culture between Pera Museum, the Big London Hotel and neighboring contemporary art galleries.

Oftentimes presenting their latest exhibitions with a billowing, building-wide canvas, Pera Museum holds a treasury of late Ottoman and early modern Turkish art, including permanent collections of paintings by one of the fundamental artist-intellectuals of his day, Osman Hamdi Bey, whose observational paintings and portraiture are almost surrealist in their fanciful imaginaries, depicting the people and traditions of Turkey as the undying pursuit of internalized Orientalist fascinations. Their displays of official portraiture in the age of empires are as essential as they are ripe for historical critique.

A few skips and a hop from the Pera Museum, there are surprising, multilayered revelations that wait, opening the city like an onion, the sting of its outer skin accentuating the taste of its experiential bounty as a whole. The Big London Hotel (or, in Turkish *Büyük Londra Oteli*) is a sumptuous gem of architectural singularity. Inside, its antique furniture and elaborate wallpaper is a paradise of embroidered upholstery and ornate wood. There are outmoded artifacts from the 20th century all around, such as a peculiar, irresistibly charming German-Turkish jukebox.

But perhaps most curious is a caged bird named Yakup, a Turkish appellation that would be Jacob, as anglicized, and conjures an air of Jewish heritage. The parrot is a relic of the place, perched proudly, though confined, beside the old bar, where a man who has worked at the hotel for decades kindly answers touristic questions with more reliability than the shy, tropical pet. And if talking is a probable pastime amid such a wealth of ancient design, there is a dark, little hall of vintage rotary phones that will tickle any playful spirit out for a joke.

Despite the grab of the Big London Hotel's terrace in summertime, and its use as a movie set for such films as Fatih Akin's masterpiece Head-On (2004), it is mostly the setting for light amusement and heavy doses of nostalgia. Only a minute or so walk away, Istanbul Research Institute prepares a serious measure of programming regarding the history and culture of the city, with one of the most substantial, well-backed foundations for research into Byzantine, Ottoman and Republican eras.

If that's too much erudition and pedagogy for something like an afternoon stroll, it is best to try an exhibition at Galerist or Art On, two major institutions for contemporary art with a splendid array of represented artists whose works are on the cusp of the international scene. Galerist is housed within a historic apartment, the peeling paint of its hipster decor reinvented in the interest of stimulating dialogue and thought on the nature of visuality and its aesthetic, philosophical dimensions. Art On has a more commercial feel, yet its artists, like Burcu Erden or Ali Elmacı, are young, empowered to create what it means to make art afresh.

When whiling away the day, and perhaps into the night, strolling and sightseeing, whether as a local with some well-earned downtime, or a globetrotter out for the next venture, every neighborhood, especially Pera, is rich with ways to kick into

slow gear, to sit back and relax a little. The patisserie Pera Bakery is one mellow haunt for that kind of ambiance, and it is situated within an elegant, former residential building downstairs from a cultural space called Kiraathane Istanbul Literature House, which supports writers and minorities.

For more, the stylish cafe Noir Pit is always bustling, if not exactly with very gregarious, caffeine-addled clientele. And on down the way, the streets open up with a wide view of the historical peninsula and its inlet ports, where industrial behemoths rise up, and yet magically, they do not obscure the beauty of the watery, citified landscape. It is a confluence for people from all walks of life who amble about not far from the feeding frenzy around Galata Tower, or Istiklal Avenue, and so many countless points of beguilement within Istanbul's core.

February 15, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Stroll

There are many boats that encircle the shores of Beşiktaş, a busy juncture for travelers and commuters alike. A few are headed upstream, toward the Black Sea, where the quarter of Emirgan is situated. Once having floated past the decadent Çırağan Palace and the various inlets that snake by the towering castle embattlements of Anadolu Hisarı, including an artificial island, there are countless shorefront mansions, untold sights and the visions of a city embedded in forests and waterways that stretch outward, upward, and within its more pastoral environs.

Emirgan is a quiet neighborhood of thin, sloping alleys, as verdant as it is historical, carved along its outer edge by a thoroughfare of constant traffic from Sarıyer to the urban core. When arriving from Beşiktaş one of the first and most apparent landmarks is a tall, broad-limbed plane tree that presses skyward out of a glass encasement, behind which the restaurant Helva hums with the bustle of families and travelers. And if entering the quarter by land, perhaps on foot for a long jaunt along the Bosphorus promenade, a Japanese garden awaits.

The district's Emirgan Park hosts a tulip festival, in which rows of the multicolored flower's blooms are displayed in various arrangements, bursting from the ground like rainbows emerging from the soil. Within the homes of its locals, many of which are renovated to revitalize the maroon-hued wooden houses of their ancestors, the breezy streets are lined with evergreen palm trees that fan passersby and hush the ambient mood of study and repose. The sound of a marble fountain swishes in the afternoon daze.

Emirgan is a place where Istanbul's older residents have retreated just far enough away from the cosmopolitan craze of the downtown and youth-centric neighborhoods not to feel entirely detached from its beating heart. On one of its green cliffs, overlooking the rolling hills of the Bosphorus where little village-like quarters dot its intimate horizon, the world-class curations of Sakıp Sabancı Museum hosts a wealth of exhibitions, detailing the unsung art history of Turkey from traditional calligraphy to modern painting, alongside famed global contemporaries.

It is not uncommon for a passing conversation in Emirgan to hold, in one breath, references to artists like Ai Wei Wei and Marina Abramovic, while simultaneously discussing something humdrum and local. The neighborhood has a classic, almost Aegean elan, in which the rural and urbane meet and share their thoughts in what might feel like a never-ending harmonious flow of human interaction, at once introspective but also social. That is the air of its opening plane tree tea garden that doubles as a fine bistro.

Emirgan is the kind of cityscape that seems to taper off into an arboreal wilderness, as its newfangled, concrete seaside boardwalk wraps around, inwardly, into marine vistas of bucolic oblivion. From an anthropocentric perspective, Istanbul's sprawl allows some, like those who inhabit Emirgan, to live within the singular vitality of the Bosphorus ecology, so as to enjoy a brush with the roots of nature while still entangled in the course of heavy urbanization that has claimed most of the city with its iron grasp.

There is warm, homey Turkish traditionalism in Emirgan. Its kitchens steam with the familiar scents of cheese melting over a *pide* bread, as confectionaries and dairy shops collaborate on milk-infused sugary delights. Like an excursion to one of the Prince Islands, venturing on a day trip to Emirgan from within Istanbul can have the feeling of a getaway, as its fresh markets and food stalls are replete with yogurt cultures and dessert recipes, *sahlep* in the winter, ice creams in the summer.

The culinary spirit of Emirgan, as part of Istanbul's northern regions, also exists along the southwestern reaches of the Black Sea. Its land-based knowledge and domestic customs have been cultivated and shared back and forth across the Bosphorus strait by the diverse, multicultural communities of Istanbul and its adjacent countries since time immemorial. But amid the influx of fusions, the district retains an individual spirit altogether distinct from nearby Arnavutköy downstream or Beykoz on the other shore.

For anyone who might be intimidated by the seemingly exclusive geography of Emirgan, it is best to imagine what life might be for a local who skips past its waterfront facade of extroverted, cultured society, so as to burrow within the cozy confines of leaves and flowers, perhaps while lucky enough to grow a home garden with a view of the intercontinental strait that flows with the memories of

storytellers and visionaries who sung of the city, and whose voices have not faded among those who read, quietly, keeping their eyes open at night.

Among the tales that have all but faded from communal remembrance in the neighborhood is the origin of the name, Emirgan. It refers to the Ottoman statesman Emirgûneoğlu Yusuf Paşa, whose legacy is celebrated in the idle pursuit of happiness and peace in Emirgan Park, or spiritual solace at Emirgan Hamid-i Evvel Mosque. And as a curious urban explorer might have boarded a ferry from Beşiktaş to experience its pacifying moods, so they might stand at Emirgan Pier, an antique wooden outfit, and sail away just as tranquilly.

February 3, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Idyl

Its famed fish restaurant, Ismet Baba, protrudes out over the glowing, turquoise waves of the Bosphorus, facing the pier of Ortaköy, with its pearly, ornate mosque reflecting the crests of the swirling surface of the intercontinental waters that divide Istanbul. It is said that poets, musicians, cineastes, artists and architects would flock to the traditional seafood restaurant, as the establishment seems to hover over the shoreline like a magic carpet.

Kuzguncuk hosts a homely spread of tales, fables and stories. Its apartments and streets speak for its people, who merely wander and take their part in the grand play of the quarter as it dances its choreography of guests and hosts. The place name translates from Turkish to "little raven," and is rumored to originate from the Ottoman-era fountain that still stands in the tea garden across from the wooden entrance to Ismet Baba.

Under the sprawling limbs of a tall plane tree, the kind of which grace the squares and playgrounds of districts across the Anatolian Bosphorus shorefronts, thirsty locals sit and talk in the shadow of their centuries of presence, demanding a singular respect for nature, a truth that elders say is tastable in the tea when drunk about their falling leaves. The clink of glasses follows the dissolution of sugar cubes as impromptu conversation strikes.

In his bathrobe and slippers, the old, grisly versifier Can Yücel would come down from an alley up on a nearby hill that now bears his name. He would buy a slice of grilled fish, and slake his thirst in front of a keen audience of lifelong chums and fawning acquaintances before clearing his Bosphorus-wide throat to air what strings of words had lately surfaced in his mind, like fishing for a catch out of the cool strait whose spirit he embraced as his muse.

And nowadays, younger generations of his inspired listeners come for the mere echoes of his literary humanity. Yücel is not the only luminary to grace the village airs of Kuzguncuk, as the waterfront quarter was also home to artists like Füsun Onur, who would summer amid its forests and hills. Its ferry station was once home to a popular movie house, where flashes of silvery images would display black-and-white classics from the golden age of cinema.

On a single corner in Kuzguncuk, at the end of its main drag on Icadiye Avenue toward the Bosphorus, which spills out along the busy Paşa Limanı thoroughfare, there is a synagogue, Bet Yaakov, an Armenian church, Surp Krikor Lusavorç, and a Greek church, Ayios Yeorgios. The intimate proximity of the three minorities has sparked the imaginations of Turkish residents and foreign travelers alike.

There is a saying in Kuzguncuk that evokes its old multicultural communalism. It went: "After an Armenian dinner, make love to a Greek woman in a Jewish home." The time-honored adage is rife with metaphors that speak to the mixture of peoples, not only side by side, but within each individual. It could very well be that the Greek woman cooked an Armenian dinner, and was also Jewish, or part of a Jewish family.

The saga of intermarriage among Ottoman-era minorities and their remembrance of their respective cultural distinctions in modern Turkey has been chronicled by Turkish writer Buket Uzuner in her 1997 novel, translated into English as *Mediterranean Waltz*. The unique pluralist heritage of the neighborhood has become the subject of scholarly inquiry, among them Amy Mills, in her 2010 book, *Streets of Memory*.

Mills won the 2011 Jane Jacobs Urban Communication Book Award for her work, which was subtitled, *Landscape, Tolerance, and National Identity in Istanbul*. It was the urbanist Jane Jacobs who said that cities are not buildings, but communities. And no one merged those ideas as inspiringly as architect Cengiz Bektaş, who almost single-handedly revived Kuzguncuk's uniquely exquisite apartment facades into the fantasy it is today.

And walking uphill past the increasingly numerous crop of cafes, there is a particularly stylish bookstore housed within a flatiron-style building designed by the Balyan Brothers, whose architectural genius is responsible for such 19th century gems as Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul. In between the sweet shops and traditional bakeries, daily makers of *börek* and chefs of Turkish cuisine's finest dishes, Kuzguncuk is a trove of endlessly intriguing mysteries.

Before the soft boundaries of Kuzguncuk change hands with the forested highlands of the Fethipaşa Plantation and the environs of the greater municipality of Üsküdar, there is another Greek church, a magnificent edifice called the Iglesia de San Pantaleon. The site evidences the power and wealth of Kuzguncuk's Greek Christian community. Its stained glass and exterior of sculptures and gardens appear to be impeccably preserved behind a high, white gate.

On a grassy knoll not far, there is a Jewish cemetery which proves just how important Kuzguncuk was for Jews, not only within the Ottoman Empire but also for their related communities in Eastern Europe. There are historians who have written that Kuzguncuk was a stopover point for pilgrims from the Russian Empire on their way to Jerusalem. They sailed down the Bosphorus and enjoyed company with their fellow coreligionists in Kuzguncuk.

The aroma of the past lingers in Kuzguncuk like a light, festive spring, refreshing the present moment with a rose-tinted longing for a past that while seemingly idyllic in retrospect may have been less appetizing than the chorus of next-wave espresso bars and trendy eateries that have since lined the neighborhood's bustling avenue. Yet, despite a whorl of new changes, the quarter maintains the cozy, sheltered ambiance of home. It is a world unto itself, a quaint and quiet Bosphorus village in the middle of Istanbul.

January 17, 2022
Istanbul, Turkey

Modish

What begins with the piers of Rıhtım slowly rises along the breezy cliffs of Moda overlooking a wide, panoramic view of the Sea of Marmara out toward the park of Fenerbahçe and the marina of Kalamış. The songbirds are chirping, as stray cats and dogs trade places with seagulls and crows. It is a festive ecology of earthly settlement, built atop the ruins of a mythological place along the streams of Kurbağalıdere, once called Chalcedon in ancient times.

The contemporary local sculptor Eli Bensusan dedicated a braille-engraved sundial to the historic environs on its coast, which storytellers say was known as the Land of the Blind by the elders of Byzantium who looked across the auspicious waters and wondered how earlier sites of human habitation could have missed the peninsula where Sultanahmet Square now stands as a pivotal node in the making of civilizations since the dawn of recorded time.

But perhaps those prehistoric people knew exactly what they were doing and saw as clearly as the people who live in Moda, Kadıköy today, confidently going about their business despite their apparent distance from Istanbul's core districts encircling Beyoğlu and Fatih. Nevertheless, a 20-minute ferry, or sometimes a quicker minivan, will shuttle commuters to and fro across the metropolitan region that is reminiscent of the divide between Brooklyn and Manhattan. And if a comparison might be made to another city, it could be very well the case that Moda is in many ways quite like Brooklyn, with its trendy, hip notes of cultural vitality, where the movers and shakers of the social establishment sit back at a cool distance from their institutional affiliations and live, more freely, in a distinctive air, not of cold exclusivity, but of warm thoughtfulness.

Between its dizzying arrays of nightlife spots, vintage shops, used bookstores, stylish cafes and fine eateries, the quality of life in Moda is top-notch in Istanbul. But where it outmatches its perhaps more outwardly wealthier quarters across the Bosphorus in places like Bebek or Emirgan lined with *yalı* mansions and yacht promenades, is that it is down to earth, walkable and homely in a way that could seem welcoming to just about anyone.

On the northeasterly fringes of the *çarşı* marketplace in the heart of Kadıköy, the chill ambiance that is Moda begins with a cluster of espresso bars, colorfully coded and aligned to a landmark fork in the road where Moda Avenue branches upward from a triangular piazza furnished with a greengrocer. Across from the multihued displays of fruits and vegetables there is a playhouse beside a record store, and confectionary-doling teahouses.

The arms of thin, bustling alleys of roads that stretch downhill and up from the broad avenue named after the neighborhood itself, which, from the Turkish, literally means "fashion," are all replete with a tantalizing spectrum of commercial and cultural ventures. There are friendly jewelers who craft metal and stone with a precise and gifted knack for beauty and lure. And when greeted beside vogue clothiers, the streets come alive with the romance of youth. With its pulse of promise among the freshest generation, there is a keen lead toward entrepreneurialism in Moda, where the literary and artistic stretch their legs and dream of strengthening their collaborative networks. The bookshop 645 Dükkan, for example, is also the house of a publisher specializing in creative literature, ranging from Plato to Franz Kafka and Stefan Zweig.

Just near to 645 Dükkan, which has an impressive selection of English books, a rare and precious commodity in Istanbul, including a number of Irish titles, there is a plaza known to the locals as *havuz* in Turkish, meaning "the pool." It was, apparently, once a shallow pool, but has since been drained and fixed with the metal sculpture of a fish out of water. There is an apt metaphor to the piece of public art, as it stands in Moda, an utterly unique place in Turkey.

"The pool" is surrounded with businesses like Vegan Bakkal, specializing in a variety of tasty meatless foods and desserts, as well as aromatherapy kits and other knickknacks bristling with the love of life, animals and community. Across from it, where a trolley passes a primary school, the broad avenue called Bahariye begins to wind toward the Süreyya Opera House, along the way passing countless venues for taking care of business while enjoying life all at the same time.

December 15, 2021
Istanbul, Turkey

Mystical

Early in the fourth century of the Christian era, the Christian emperor celebrated as Constantine the Great revived the ancient Greek city of Byzantium, established over a millennium earlier, renaming it New Rome. He was a crowned Illyrian man from modern-day Serbia, enthroned atop the mythic landscape's temple-peaked acropolis overlooking three bodies of water. From the mouth of the Golden Horn inlet, the sloping environs of the ancient imperial capital now bend inward from half-constructed shorefront promenades through tangles of spiraling Albanian cobblestones that pattern the timeworn streets of Istanbul south from the Galata Bridge, a symbol manifest to connect epochs and peoples where two continents fuse under the burning summer sun that beats down on the light maroon, terracotta roofs and thin, emerald pines over the westward horizon, reminiscent of the Hellenic dream that once spanned the edges of the known world.

Outside the newly minted Roman capital, Christians occupied a pagan site to bury the relics of the martyred Saint Babylas from Antakya, a famous Hellenistic city in the Anatolian southeast. It soon sprouted into a monastery, for its remoteness, which Orthodox Christians still favor to reach spiritual oneness through solitary refuge from the world. It bore the name, *Chora* due to its geography, which in pre-modern Greek, loosely means "country," denoting its distance from the fast-growing metropolis closer to the Sea of Marmara and Bosporus strait, poised for worldly power and unbroken influence. Others interpret its name in a more mystical light, signifying a "dwelling place" for the soul of the Virgin Mary and Jesus, in his title and image as Pantocrator, ruler of the universe. Archaeological findings date the substructure of Chora Church, also called Kariye Mosque, to the sixth century. For the next 800 years, the holy edifice rose to its current shape.

The last gasp of the civilization modernly referred to as Byzantine, was in fact inhabited by people who called themselves Romans, then a Greek-speaking people who feared the migrant armies of the East descending from the northern shores of the Bosphorus to snuff out the light of Rome, the heart of culture, law, art and history for Europe, plunging its people into plague and darkness until they found the New World at the round edge of the endless ocean that led to bounties yet exhausted, greater than any direct route to India. A century before the Turkish dynasty of the Ottomans conquered Hagia Sophia, cosmic center of Eastern

Christianity, transforming its breathtaking expanse into the architecture of Islamic prayer, a local poet, scholar, statesman and patron of the arts named Theodoros Metochites saw visions at Chora Church. In his lifetime, he went from the heights of political fame, the equivalent of prime minister in the Byzantine empire, to dying a poor monk, buried under the gaze of the frescos and mosaics that he commissioned and that have given Chora Church its exalted reputation as home to one of the foremost, artistic achievements of Istanbul's multicultural legacy.

The young and passionate guide, Yasin Karabacak, stood under the marble doorframe outside Chora Church where he often awaits groups from around the world, from Americans to Nigerians and all in between. In his footsteps, travelers become seers, as they follow his lead and listen to his explanations that are as keen as a sharpshooting hunter in the thick of a jungle. He is an intellectual time traveler with a sixth sense for the past, able to illuminate the complex, interwoven narratives of Istanbul's material history through experiential visualization, to usher firsthand witnessing of creative resilience before the passage of time, to grasp shared humanity in the face of mortality, to see through the veils of posterity to the afterlife in earthly paradises of the imagination fashioned from color and stone. His special weakness for the incomparable breadth of Hagia Sophia and his taste for global heritage in Turkey often sends him flying throughout Anatolia, most enjoyably, as he says, for the spices of Urfa and the sweets of Antep.
He walked over the polished foundation, where a central mosaic of Jesus the Pantocrator stared down above a brilliantly cut quartet of marble, set with symmetrical precision so as to display mesmerizing abstractions of natural design.

And above, the semiprecious, gilded and colored stone layers of mosaic shot forth with a signature, three-dimensional effect that catapulted art history into what has been termed the "Chora movement" for the vivid colors and proportional accuracy in the legendary human figures of religious fame. There are scintillating whites and shimmering blues that, even in the dim, medieval interior, stand out with ingenious, aesthetic dynamism. Well-traveled, secular contemporaries do not generally peer into the typecast mien of Jesus at length, but at Chora, his Zeus-like demeanor is transcendent, reaching the heights of artistic prowess liable to captivate even the most ardent atheist. While so much of the church's mosaics are off-limits, including in the inner narthex chamber, due to ongoing renovation efforts, there remains a visual feast beneficial to anyone open to inspirations that

breach the mundane orders of time. The shading and texture of garments are riveting, as are the emotive facial expressions of notables who petition Jesus for the salvation of humanity, beside Metochites presenting the church, and Saint Mary of the Mongols, whose storied name is dedicated to the sole remaining church still active from Byzantine times in Istanbul.

There is a nonlinear, mystical arrangement to the Chora mosaics, as they rise and fall in sweeping crescendos of sacred space under the bulbous domes of the multifaceted structure. While much of the stone is broken, and almost all of the mosaics are fractured to worn shards after successive earthquakes, speculation that Ottomans desecrated the work is quickly overturned by the fact that they ruled the land absolutely and could have categorically demolished the building if they wished. Interestingly, however, there are accounts by European travelers who paid to acquire invaluable pieces of the site-specific artworks. Karabacak combed through the mosaic narrative with finesse and subtlety, conveying hard facts along with the emotional grace of the religious art like a descendant of its great thinkers.

Although obscured by scaffolding, the story begins with a pantheon of Mary's ancestors, going back to the Jewish prophets and kings of Jerusalem. Its figurative representations pictured her like a typical Byzantine lady, in late Roman garb, with a long flowing robe wrapped tightly around her head as she emerged from the scenes of her miraculous birth by Joachim, her marriage to Joseph and conception of Jesus. In the innermost chamber, also blocked, her death scene has seeded perennial contemplation about the afterlife, as her Jesus seats a newborn child on his lap opposite her deathbed.

The weight of history is uplifted by the ecstasy of faith over Istanbul's ancient foundation where Karabacak lives to speak of great, though often little-known teachings that evidence the unity of the human story and the intimate intricacies that reveal a total solidarity. He held his head back to examine the radiant patchwork of ceiling mosaics, which he admits has led to some chronic sore necks after years guiding in Chora, and beheld the mosaic, *The Virgin Fed by an Angel*. It depicts the Virgin Mary sitting isolated in a temple, under a canopy, where she is visited by an angel who offers her bread, or manna. In one of the longest chapters in the Quran, titled, *Ali-'Imran*, about the family of the Virgin Mary, verse 37 recounts the same exact story visualized by the Chora mosaic. The relationship is

doubly profound because it shows the great rift of imagistic versus calligraphic cultures that differentiates Muslims from Christians, but more, it identifies unmistakable proof of accord between the two religions, accounting for the beliefs of over 4 billion people.

And surprisingly, not all of the mosaics are directly religious. In one, depicting the life of the Virgin Mary and her husband Joseph, they travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem and back to be counted in what is likely the very first official census that the Romans took immediately prior to the year now remembered, simply, as 0. Another picture shows Joseph just going to work. It has no higher meaning, which is part of the reason why the Chora mosaics have a mystical tone, simultaneously aligning to an ecumenical worldview and also to the union of religious art with the historical record. Yet, the anonymous artists of the church mosaics and frescoes at Chora, many of which are masterpieces, endure as mystics beyond time, far from contemporary glamor, from a world that vanished with the Renaissance.

September 7, 2018
Istanbul, Turkey

Watches

Age has a palpable smell. It lingers indoors, exuding the odors of stale paint and smoke-stained upholstery, hanging in the air like an invisible film, sheer as a spider's web and equally absorbing in its intricacies. That sense is thick and dense as ever while wandering deeply into the maze of antique dealers in Çukurcuma. Inside its sprawling, nebulous circumference between the gender-segregated 15th century Firuz Ağa Hamamı (Turkish bath) all concepts of linear time and space dissolve under the spell of the untold secrets that emerge silently from the dusty traces of long-lost possessions, properties, stories, heritages. Many of the storefronts are plain and nameless, yet they all hold compelling mysteries buried under clues that, however fascinating at first glance, often lead to nothing more substantial than a passing curiosity toward an inevitable dead-end in history.

The antiques dealer is a peculiar sort of character, one immediately recognizable down the length of any street in Istanbul (which is rarely ever far). They belong to an altogether distinct set of public eccentrics who while away the day animating the early modern archaeology of the city. And as experts in the field of selling old things, they have enviable talents due to the uniqueness of the trade and its clients. For one, they can spot a buyer instantly and are able to sift profit clearly from the pervasive window-shopper who would vainly ponder over the overwhelming kaleidoscopes of artifacts. To sell antiques demands a thick-skinned indifference to the recurring, naive speculator who arrives predictably imagining that outdated means affordable without the slightest idea of the expensive nature of rare collectibles, many of which have been vigilantly preserved for over a century.

Before the core district of Çukurcuma condenses into a stunning perplexity of door-to-door antique shops whose sidewalk displays blend into each other with an indiscernible chaos, an initial pair of storefronts open together under the condemned Zenovitch Apartment building on opposite sides of Bostanbaşı Avenue, forming an island of history entirely displaced from its original context in time, jumbled and crooked, heaped and cluttered. A man surfaces from the motionless waves of metal and frames that seem likely to crash at any moment. He promotes an outmoded tray shaped specifically to serve boiled eggs, and then points to the *menemen* skillet, a piece of cookware still common in even the trendiest of restaurants to prepare Turkish-style scrambled eggs.

While apparently mundane, domestic traditions and the media through which they are expressed and maintained speak volumes to the infiltration of history as an evolutionary phenomenon that directly influences personal and family life. As is obvious among the highly exotic antiques, many forms and aesthetics did not survive the dissolution of Ottoman society after the first generation of moderns lived and died in the Republic of Turkey. In the environs of heirloom collections visible throughout the streets of Çukurcuma, stylish contemporary shops stand next to thoroughly confusing disorders of the old-fashioned and the passé. The simplest and most practical commodity is suddenly transformed to lucidly depict the relationship between historic time and cultural movement. The material used to make a pre-modern pot, for example, once rustic and unfinished, reveals the classism of modernist perspectives when in the light of a contemporary antiques window. In the absence of technological sophistication, to contextualize something as old and vestigial is arguably to impose the cultural superiority complex of the predominantly modernist, Western global paradigm.

Stacked atop elegant chairs and draped over parked cars amid diverse spectrums of folds, decoratively woven, carpet tapestries called "kilims" are hawked in front of many antique shops. They are sold alongside rotary telephones and the anachronistic vests and *shalwars* that return Ottoman fashion to full color on the street of bygone mercantilist nostalgia. The saturated fabric dyes in bright violets and rich crimsons, embroidered with gold and silver silk threads for the conventionally loose-fit, are throwbacks to an age of dress now reserved for such pastimes as historical study and period theater. In one of the more prominent antique shops, named *Osmanlı Antik Palas* (Ottoman Antique Palace), *kılım* rugs are only the beginning of a deep dive through the puzzling tangle of stuff around the entranceway and into what seems like an inner exploration into the Turkish subconscious. An unsmiling dealer answers only in numbers, as to the price of two sterling 19th century dresses. For an authentic long-sleeve *bindallı* worn to tradition ceremonially during Ottoman weddings and other formal occasions, a serious antiques patron will spend upwards of 5,000 Turkish liras.

It is a typical hodgepodge in the window of *Osmanlı Antik Palas*, which encompasses three storefronts on Bostanbaşı Avenue, as pocketknives are laid out next to tobacco pipes and opera binoculars. Yet, the treasures lay within. It's

common for dealers to prohibit photography to those who enter, as the more valuable and most precious of antiques are usually kept further down the crammed and loaded hallway shelves, decked and stocked with disparate and counterintuitive strategy so as to trick the eye with the something like the riddle of significance that tested Indiana Jones as he saw the Holy Grail in a simple wooden cup. In other words, when placed beside worthless nonsense, pieces that are actually of value and significance remain protected from the constant perusal of disrespecting individuals who would treat them like any obsolescent, throwaway shopping mall commodity.

Appreciation for the past and its value for the present is something that philosophers throughout history have echoed, from Hegel and Nietzsche to Foucault. And even if they appear far from intellectually comparable, the careful, watching eye of the antiques dealer haphazardly follows suit. It's easy to get lost in the nostalgia shops of Çukurcuma, as they are disordered like broken mirrors of sharp corners with all things jutting upward and in every possible direction into whatever space is left for anyone curious enough to take a closer look. The dealer is always surveying with a hard eye, sometimes indirectly against a hidden reflection, sometimes glued to every move of the new visitor. Such is the case once inside *Antikacı*, the shop owned by Ms. Hikmet Mizanoğlu, the director of BLOK art space located around the corner, and it is expected among the virtually priceless decor of hardwood dressers, filigree trays, stone-framed mirrors, backgammon sets inlaid with mother-of-pearl, tusks displayed to form crescents, aristocrat busts, wooden angels, an Ottoman-starred horse saddle and a dervish headdress among an eclectic diversity of polished, courtly fineries.

The antiques dealer is liable to change the story as quickly as a price, as is the case with the piano centerpiece at *Karadeniz Antik*, an upright of questionable restorative potential classically fitted with candleholders and running some $2,500, unless, of course, a buyer is at hand. If the city of Istanbul were a man, he would be a shameless hoarder. The utter profusion of things once manufactured only to become lost to the abstract developments of time is beyond reckoning. Material waste and cultural amnesia are symptoms of modernity, which is essentially an ongoing episode of the prevailing capitalist ideologies that divide resource from laborer and consumer from everything (as perpetuated by the illusion that the consumer is connected to everything). Time itself becomes irrelevant when the

head of a lion is sewn into a rug and sold beside a birdcage, a fencing helmet with a telescope, street lamps with chain mail, gramophones and a mace club.

November 29, 2017
Istanbul, Turkey

Cannon

On Aug. 5, 1716, a general in the imperial Austrian army was wounded in the first battle of the Austro-Turkish War in a place known as the Gibraltar of the Danube, now Petrovaradin in modern-day Serbia. He was a Frenchman named Claude Alexandre de Bonneval, and despite returning to the front to capture Belgrade, his luck soon ran out in Europe, where he was condemned to death, suffered a year in prison and faced banishment to Vienna for picking a fight with his superior in the Netherlands.

After his release he feared worse and quickly entered into the service of Ottoman sultan Mahmud I, converting to Islam with the name Kumbaracı Ahmed Pasha, a title of importance as he led the Turkish artillery to defeat Austria with the signing of the Treaty of Belgrade in 1739. As a military man, he had been effective on both sides, arguably contributing more to Ottoman imperialism than to the broken alliances of his European origins.

The name *Kumbaracı* is a transliteration of a Persian loanword into Turkish, referring to bomb manufacturers and those who fire explosive shells from mortars. Ahmed Pasha the Cannoneer, as Anglophones could say, conveniently resided on what is now a sloping street named after him, Kumbaracı, only a short walk from the foundry where he blasted the might of his vengeance against French-Austrian warhorses. He apparently had two apartments, one furnished in European style, the other to Ottoman tradition.

In 1744, at the age of 19, Venetian traveler Giacomo Casanova sailed to Constantinople, first setting his sights on the Venetian Palace in Pera before retiring to the Prince Islands to evade the July heat. As a foreigner, he was advised to have a bodyguard despite news of Ottoman peace treaties with Russia and Austria, which told him otherwise. Still, he did not take his chances the day following his disembarkation. Safeguarded by a janissary, he walked under the resplendent rococo square roof of the Tophane Fountain, built only 12 years before. Besides glorifying the newly enthroned Mahmud I, it offered drinking water to him and his fellow travelers, as well as the ritual wash for Muslims praying at the Kılıç Ali Pasha Complex mosque, where it was rumored among the literate that Miguel de Cervantes himself worked there as a slave.

Casanova soon entered the ground floor apartment on Kumbaracı that Ahmed Pasha kept in the French fashion. They became fast friends, relishing in the company of Neapolitan slaves who performed pantomime and Calabrian dances. They went out to experience 18th century nightlife at the residence of an Ottoman elite who whispered into the ear of his eunuch before a woman in a black velvet mask sauntered in to display her talent for the most violent of Venetian national dances, the *forlana*. As he wrote in his memoir, *Story of My Life* (1822) she was better than anyone he had ever seen back home. In quieter moments, Ahmed Pasha asked Casanova if he knew of a certain woman devoted to the Roman Catholic Church, his mother.

A generation later, a European artist who would become famous as the unrivaled Bosphorus painter left home in pre-modern German territory at 19 years of age, bound for Constantinople. He was Antoine Ignace Melling, a name that continues to echo down the halls of the Turkish imagination, as in Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (2003). With his skill for drawing dignitaries throughout Italy and Egypt already under his belt, he impressed Hatice Sultan enough for her to persuade Sultan Selim III to employ him as Imperial Architect. He designed labyrinths and interiors for her palaces, as well as her clothes and jewelry.

In an oil and gauche on linen 72 centimeters wide and 92 tall, Melling painted his *Tophane fountain* before the structure's first major restoration in 1837. It stands among his other meticulous depictions of Tophane, often viewed from the water. The intricate detail revealed by Melling illuminates the subtleties not only engraved and painted onto the marble fountain, but of the neighborhood itself. The age of transition loomed before Ottoman rule began to trend to the West by the early 19th century. Barrel-heaving porters hunch over beside an opulently dressed, bearded man fingering his prayer beads while merchants converse around heaping watermelons patiently awaiting the passage of a janissary column.

One of the earliest manifestations of the aesthetic and cultural shift in Ottoman life cropped up between 1823 and 1826 in Tophane with the building of Nusretiye Mosque, a spectacularly distinct architectural innovation for the cityscape of Istanbul designed by Krikor Balyan, from the Armenian family whose visions were central to the imperial family's move from Topkapı to Dolmabahçe, signifying the

European influences that remain dominant. Its synthesis of baroque motifs into an Islamic place of worship is eye-catching at first, and perpetually intriguing as the aesthetic blend evokes the inborn fantasies of historic time in direct relation to late imperialism.

Along with the Nusretiye Mosque, an iconic landmark in the pre-modern neighborhood cityscape is the Tophane Clock Tower, said to be the oldest of its kind in Istanbul, surviving urban renewal projects in the 1950s, about a century after it was built. Surrounded on all sides by overhauled, multiform construction efforts promising its restoration since 2010, it is decrepit, appearing in a state of near-collapse beside art lovers who picnic in the outdoor sculpture garden of Turkey's premier contemporary art museum, Istanbul Modern, which formerly housed Feshane, a 19th century textile manufacturing plant.

Much of what was the glory of Tophane is off-limits to the public within the cordoned off customs warehouse at Istanbul Port, which came into effect from 1957-1958. It was part of a long process of industrializing the port, beginning in the last two decades of the 19th century as more piers were built, eventually accommodating depots and hangars before sowing the seeds for the Turkish Maritime Administration to form in 1984.

Most recent Tophane renewal developments revolve around the Galataport project, first proposed in 1995, and begun in March only to cease operations a month later to avoid demolishing cultural assets. Its 1.2 billion dollars invested seeks to revitalize Tophane Square into nearly 30 acres of parkland by returning the industrial, privatized space to the public. If the project reaches its initial completion date by the end of 2018, the 60,000 square meters of the old Karaköy-Tophane shoreline will reopen the historic neighborhood with seaside boulevards, walking paths and waterfront gardens to give Istanbul Port back to the people who made it the central docking point for ships arriving to Istanbul from Europe since the 17th century, and for the Genoese four centuries earlier.

Kumbaracı is notably the main drag in Tophane, as it reflects both the cultural history and the greater contemporary about the neighborhood with its lucid contradictions. Its extraordinary multiculturalism is visible midway up the sloping street in the shadow of the Crimean Church and an adjacent mosque where cross

and crescent rise together over the red graffiti "This is Tophane." Only a few paces uphill, weekenders stroll nonchalantly to the vegan restaurants, art galleries, artisan workshops and vintage clothiers advancing on all sides from İstiklal to Galata, Karaköy to Cihangir.

November 14, 2017
Istanbul, Turkey

Anglo

The earliest confrontation between Turks and the English was likely around the time of the First Crusade. If before, such a meeting would have occurred following the height of the Roman Empire's territorial expansion in the second century. It was only a relatively short-lived span of about three centuries when Asia Minor and England shared imperial subjection under Rome. Even then, from the perspective of contemporary historiography, world civilization looked westward as Rome first seized Britannia in 43 A.D. before occupying the ancient Greek-speaking lands of Hellenic Anatolia 70 years later.

Unlike the proud Greek legacy left by Alexander the Great, the Romans did not impose a universal language. Latin was reserved for legal courts and the military. One of the earliest writings about Turks in Greek and Latin literature survives in the works of Byzantine Greek historian Theophylactus of Simocatta, dating from the seventh century, about a hundred years after Rome had lost Britannia. And later, as the initial Turkish occupations of Anatolia and the Levant began after the Seljuks triumphed at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071, the English reeled from the Norman Invasion five years prior.

The son of William the Conqueror, the first Norman king of England, had short legs and a shorter temper. Named Robert Curthose, he was fond of plundering castles and counties in his native France. At the age of 28 he unknowingly wounded his father on the battlefield. He was not favored to inherit the crown of England. At 47 he was the sorely impoverished Duchy of Normandy who mortgaged his territory to his brother, the English king, to finance a personal army to join the First Crusade. He first met Seljuk Turks near the present-day Anatolian city of Eskişehir at the Battle of Dorylaeum in 1097 before seizing Jerusalem.

Although he never spoke English and was illiterate, *Biography.com* asserts that William the Conqueror "had more influence on the evolution of the English language than anyone before or since - adding a slew of French and Latin words to the English dictionary." Yet that was not enough to persuade many powerful Anglo-Saxons from the greater public to remain subservient. They petitioned Byzantine Emperor Alexis I Comnenus for land and soon boarded ships in the hundreds to Micklegarth, the "great city" that had recruited Scandinavian

mercenaries for as long as they knew of it. History tells of the first possible English meetings with Turks by a migrant route along the Black Sea, documented as the medieval New England by an English monk in France in his 13th century Latin chronicle titled *Chronicon Laudunensis*.

At least four written sources tell of the Anglo-Saxon colony on the Black Sea following the arrival of maiden English voyages to Constantinople in 1075. Written about a century later, the *Chronicon Laudunensis* dates the disembarkation. A parallel account titled *Edwardsaga* (the Icelandic Saga of Edward the Confessor) from the 14th century also mentions the Seljuk Turks as "heathen folk" who were then besieging Constantinople. The English political refugees became Varangian Guards, protecting Micklegarth as settlers of the Crimean region for some eight generations into the 14th century. They used Anglophone place names like Londina and even sought autonomy as they fought Tatars at home and the Seljuks in Constantinople.

While the Anglo-Saxon Varangian were said to toast to the Byzantine Emperor in English, the degree to which they socialized with Turks, and even possibly exchanged cultural and linguistic knowledge, is all but lost to the historical record. The word "Turk" itself is rife with complex ambiguities as its usage transitioned through the literally byzantine kaleidoscope of empires and cultures, languages and rulers. Throughout antiquity and the medieval eras, Turk was synonymous with barbarian and infidel. Only during the late 19th century, as Turkish elites who identified as Ottomans promoted European nationalism among loyal Anatolian villagers, did the word "Turk" gain enough positive connotation to assume its respectable modern identity.

Not only is the Turkish language itself rooted as a regional dialect common to nations as geographically and culturally diverse as the Chuvash Republic in Siberia and Northern Cyprus, but like with any language, it absorbs linguistic elements from its surroundings. In a recent book published in May of 2016, Moscow State University Prof. of Byzantine Studies Rustam Shukurov has shown that from the early Seljuk Sultanate to the Ottoman conquering of Constantinople in the mid-15th century, late Byzantine Anatolia had distinctly cultivated and preserved Greek and Turkish bilingualism. It could be argued that with the Hellenic and Byzantine heritage of the land base in modern Turkey, Anatolian Greek integrated

with the development of Turkish more substantially in many ways than any other language.

The fact that Greek and Turkish respectively were the lingua franca for empires that lived and died alongside one another has modern parallels to the bygone contexts of bilingualism. English, for example, is the predominant global language not only as a result of its imperial history but in dynamic relation to contemporaneous imperial societies and postcolonial states. Its transition from the language of the British Empire to that of a modern nation-state is worlds different than the story of Turkish, which shed its Persian-Arabic influences and Latinized its script to become practically indistinguishable from its pre-modern counterpart.

Interestingly, there are a great many words in English of Turkish origin. Besides place names like Balkan, which comes from the Turkish for "a mountain chain" there are words like bergamot, literally from *bey armudu* (the bey's pear), kiosk from *köşk*, an open summerhouse pavilion, and doodle, after the Turkish flute *düdük*. In August 2012, the BBC published a special feature demonstrating reports that showed English originated in Turkey, as part of the Indo-European language family. It's known as the Anatolian Hypothesis and it stems from the 1980s in the research of Lord Renfrew, whose data on evolutionary linguistics was reconfirmed by phylogenetic DNA analysis.

In an old bilingual Turkish-English dictionary by Redhouse, a scholar named Charles Wells introduced the second edition from London in 1879 with a statement in the opening paragraph reading: "It is difficult to account for the absolute neglect of the study of such an important language, considering that it is used by a people who influenced half the world, who overturned and established empires, who have possessed the thrones of Persia, Syria, Greece, and Arabia, whose power was once dreaded by Italy, Germany and France, and to whom our proud Queen Elizabeth applied for aid against the Spanish Armada."

During the time of Queen Elizabeth I, the first Muslim on record settled in England. He was a Turk from present-day Euboea. It was the 1580s, and the English Barbary Company was established to trade slaves and deter Spain. Captured from a Spanish ship, he converted to Anglicanism in 1586 before six pence a day was paid to Turkish converts two decades later as nearly 40 Muslims,

most Turks, soon called London home. By the 17th century, they opened coffee houses and Turkish baths.

Anglo-Turkish is an ongoing intercultural fusion arguably heard loudest in music. In the last decade, Dr. Dre and Mos Def sampled Selda Bağcan's *İnce İnce* based on a folk song by Aşık Mahzuni Serif. And in 2003, Turkish pop singer Sertab Erener insisted on singing in English at the Eurovision Song Contest, to the chagrin of everyone from the Turkish parliament to the head of the Turkish Language Society. "Half the world listens to English," she said. "Why shouldn't they listen to a Turkish artist in English?"

October 21, 2017
Istanbul, Turkey

Neighboring

A year after founding of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk applied his modernization reforms by closing both secular and Islamic madrassa schools in 1924, and later the dervish lodges in 1925, but the Muslims of Çarşamba held a unique political advantage neighboring the Greek Patriarchate. Its residents remained where they have ever been strictly observant to the leadership of Ismail Ağa, uniquely conserving Ottoman Islam into the Republican Era. As most Islamic orders (*tarikat*) across Turkey went underground following the dissolution of the Caliph and a slew of laws that would forbid everything from clothing to music, Çarşamba prayed on to tradition relatively uninterrupted.

The Greeks of Fener were powerful despite the population exchange of 1923. Situated along the coast of the Golden Horn since antiquity, they had maintained the Patriarchate of Constantinople through successive imperial transformations from the Tanzimat Era in 1839 following the loss of the Greek War of Independence and into the post-imperial paradigm. To successfully build the modern Turkish nation Atatürk had to make at least a few concessions with the past. Çarşamba was one.

The prevailing inhabitants of Çarşamba are Sunni Muslims, meaning that they follow the Prophet Mohammed in accord with his example, called the *sunnah*, and believe that his father-in-law Abu Bakr was his rightful heir as first caliph. The way they observe the sunnah sets them apart as they adhere to Mohammed's lifestyle as the ideal model of human behavior, social and personal, material and spiritual. Çarşamba is considered the most conservative Muslim neighborhood in Istanbul, and it not so merely because of its religious practices as part of the Naqshbandi Khalidiyya order led by the 18th century Sheikh of Islam, Ismail Ağa, but due to its political history alongside neighborhoods of unrivaled importance to the largest ethnic and religious minorities from Ottoman times, that being Greeks and Jews.

Jewish history in Istanbul begins along the Golden Horn in the Fatih neighborhoods of Hasköy and Balat, where the synagogues of Ahrida and Yanbol claim Byzantine cultural roots as founded by Romaniote communities from the Balkans. As its Ottoman homes inscribed with the Star of David attest, it is regarded by regional historians and heritage descendants as a place where many

Jews lived prosperously, and had strength in numbers. Even last year, one of its early synagogues, Istipol, was at the center of international attention when it was vandalized.

In Turkish, one of the words for light is *fener*, as is common to the Greek *faros*. The neighborhood of Fener, immediately next to Balat on the Golden Horn shorefront, was named after a columned lighthouse that once guided ships through the waterways of Constantinople when it was Greek-speaking New Rome. Interestingly, the people of Fener had lived there for such a spell as descendants of Byzantium that by the early modern period they were speaking and writing in a Greek dialect known as *Phanariote*.

Atop the steeply sloping hill past the unmistakable architectural landmark of the Fener Greek High School, established in 1454, the year following Ottoman rule, the Ismail Ağa Quran School rises above the cityscape horizon as the streets of Çarşamba flatten on the high ground. Downwind about its lofty, arched entranceway is the more modest girl's school. Like the dervish lodges, present-day madrassas such as the gender-segregated Ismail Ağa Quran School are still obligated to follow reforms set by Atatürk. They are formally private education centers without the privilege of granting diplomas. In lieu of greater legitimacy, the neighborhood organizes such affairs as the *icazet*, where children memorize and recite parts from the Quran, and some carry dreams of becoming a *hafiz*, one with the ability to sing the full Quran by heart.

And around the corner from the five-story Ismail Ağa Quran School is the community environs of the neighborhood, with its storefronts that to many Western travelers could seem to appear out of an Orientalist tale. During one entirely ordinary day in the week, three men held down the fort inside a common tailor's shop on Ismail Ağa Street beside storefronts named *Medine Gömlek* (Medina Shirts) and *Osmanlı Terzi* (Ottoman tailor). Two of the men specialized in stitching and selling the *cüppe*, a long flowing overcoat garment seen as often in Çarşamba as a sport jacket is in the rest of Istanbul. The third man was fully adorned, with a cropped, long beard and a *sarık* turban, that when topped with red lining identifies a sheikh.

Traditional religious clothing in Çarşamba recalls the classism of Ottoman society when to wear certain garments signified hierarchal standing among men. As the well-dressed religious man and his fellow merchant in the tailor's shop explained, the *cüppe* is worn, accompanied by its loose-legged pantaloon, the *şalvar*, to both cover immodest areas of the body, and to serve men's health. Simply, it is comfortable, and facilitates an ease necessary for wellness in the groin area. In the window of that storefront was a peculiar, blue plaid *cüppe*, as it aesthetically aligned to the dominant fashion of the day with its collar and shoulder lines cut to fit in proper businessmen and even a head of state.

The neighborhood shops and small businesses of Çarşamba are rife with religious symbolism as they are named to reference everything from the sutras of the Quran to cities in Saudi Arabia. Locals circulate wealth and goods in a small-scale economy as so much of what they manufacture and sell is specific to the community. A vibrant example are the publishing houses distributing Arabic books, Turkish translations and Quran studies. Ottoman-signed *tekke* caps are for sale next to 33- and 99-count *tesbih*, prayer beads, for the *zikr* or remembrance prayer to recall the names of God, and for the *namaz* prayer, to bow prostrate repeating sacred phrases. Connoisseurs in Istanbul come to Çarşamba to buy perfume, as they sell alcohol-free scents in countless varieties, and with irresistible names like Friday Breeze and Calvin Clean. And of course, they purvey the *miswak*, a premodern brush that looks like a stick and that the Prophet Mohammed is said to have used to clean his teeth.

On the corner of Ismail Ağa Street and Manyasizade Avenue, the main thoroughfare through the neighborhood is the community core, the Ismail Ağa Mosque, first ordered built by Ebu İshak İsmail Naim Efendi, who served as the Sheikh of Islam from 1716-1718, the highest ranking title in Ottoman Islam holding the power to confirm the sultan. Ismail Efendi is buried on the mosque grounds, which include immaculately maintained polished marble architecture with a fountain centered inside an arched caravanserai-style madrassa. Its original structure is the exact width, height and length of the Kaaba stone in Mecca, and due to the special privilege of the community going back to the days of Atatürk, they were able to restore and extend the building with the last renovation in 1952.

The story of Çarşamba and its social conservation is increasingly important to the fabric of Istanbul and the nature of multigenerational urban life everywhere. As the historic minority neighborhoods of Fener and Balat gentrify anew and swell with the rise of contemporary Turkish capitalism, the relatively small and introspective neighborhood that survived the Republic is now facing the new wave of modernity on the front lines of globalization.

October 14, 2017
Istanbul, Turkey

Spice

There are four basic cornerstones to every human community: To pray, cook, create and play. Georgians have maintained each with a fine and jubilant vitality in the core districts of Istanbul. As a bordering nation with common Central Asian affinities, cultural movements from Georgia have been influenced by life in Istanbul, exemplifying the perennial eastern perspective on the intercontinental metropolis as a gateway to Europe.

The greater modern narrative of the Georgian experience of Istanbul and its influence begins with the Russo-Turkish War, especially the early 19th century conflicts. There was then a wave of emigration from the rule of the Tzar in Georgian Transcaucasia to the Ottoman territory. Most went to the Black Sea region near Trabzon, as the endangered Laz language is related to Georgian. Those multigenerational exiles came to be known in Turkey as Chveneburi.

By the last decade of the 19th century, efforts were made to account for the Chveneburi, as nearly a million people had fled from their village homes in Georgia to resettle in the reign of the Ottoman capital of Constantinople during its twilight era. During that time of epochal migration, a Catholic priest, Petre Kharischirashvili, had foresight enough to bank on the social capital that would continue to fill the streets of Istanbul into the 21st century.

In 1861, Kharischirashvili founded Notre Dame de Lourdes, better known in Istanbul as the Georgian Catholic Church. It still opens its doors most mornings on a quiet, dedicated city block in the neighborhood of Ferikoy, surrounded by a peaceful flurry of primary schools and sheltered by a magnificent grove of 500 recently planted pines that cast lofty shadows over the iconic cave-shrines to Mother Mary. Its entranceway is frequented by Catholic Turks and traveling scholars who have much to appreciate about the contemplative environs for secular purposes.

Kharischirashvili was a cultural visionary. He drew inspiration from the scientific and medical scholarship of his antecedents by organizing the monastery not only as a place of worship, but for education and leisure, attracting non-Catholic Georgians as well as broad representation from across old Istanbul society. The library

archives at Notre Dame de Lourdes initially doubled as a Georgian-language printing press, where more than a hundred books have been published on everything from literature to geography and politics to philosophy. While the monastery collections are not open to the public, they are cataloged online courtesy of the Georgian Catholic Foundation, where curious bibliophiles may scan to obscurity before scheduling a research visit.

One of the most impressive literary works among the Notre Dame de Lourdes' thousands of books, newspapers and magazines in Georgian, French, Italian, Russian and Latin is a travelogue, *Georgians in Istanbul*, written in French in 1920 by the Italian Evgeni Dalecio, who then served as the secretary to the Georgian diplomatic mission in Istanbul. He often traveled to Georgia to learn its language and document its cultural upheavals as its people resettled in the Ottoman capital. Dalecio and his intellectual labors were preceded by a compelling compatriot, Don Cristoforo de Castelli, a 17th century missionary from Genoa whose extant drawings brilliantly capture Georgian culture following the Ottoman occupation.

More recently, Simon Zazadze, who succeeded his father Paul Zazadze as trustee of Notre Dame de Lourdes in 1989, published the bilingual Turkish-Georgian magazine *Pirosmani*, named after the famous Georgian primitivist painter, Niko Pirosmani, and distributed a new issue throughout Istanbul every three months from 2007-2010. The Zazadze family is chiefly responsible for upholding the cultural foundation of Notre Dame de Lourdes with relevance to contemporary life in Istanbul. In 1977, the most important bilingual Turkish-Georgian magazine, *Çveneburi*, was founded in Sweden and remains widely read and published in Turkey.

Like every truly global city, local life in Istanbul is rich with minority expression, an advantage that constantly attracts renewed awe and fascination from even the most worldly and intrepid travelers. Most often, the first glimpse of a community leads to nourishment, and that is a field where Georgians shine with tantalizing culinary skills. Eight months ago, the Georgian kitchen Galaktion opened on Kumbaracı Slope, the steep lane that winds up from the trendy streets around Karaköy Port to the historic commercial drag of Istiklal Avenue. Its tasteful location sits immersed in the defining qualities of Istanbul, as traditionally-clothed

Turkish women lower roped baskets down from upper floor apartments between the windows of sleek art galleries and simple family markets.

The young chef at Galaktion has been a resident of Istanbul for three years now, a bespectacled lover of literature who is quick to talk up a storm about novelist Otar Chiladze and the 12th century epic poem, *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* by Shota Rustaveli. He often stands smilingly aproned beside a Niko Pirosmani painting and collages of a newspaper from his native Tblisi while cutting dough into savory, meat-filled dumplings, known as *khinkali*, as his accomplice and server brews up a rustic, grainy Georgian coffee from Batumi.

Despite the carnivorous penchant of Central Asian cuisine, Georgians prepare delightful salads, heavy on walnuts and eggplant. The *khachapuri* cheese bread, a Georgian favorite, is delectable at Galaktion, as is the sumptuously garnished eggplant stew, especially sweet when paired with the from-scratch special, cinnamon peach compote.

An elder to Galaktion is nearby, Galata House Restaurant, a hot spot for Russian-Tatar-Georgian fusion cuisine since 1999, housed in a former British civil prison. Besides the literally jaw-dropping unique dishes of exotic meats and homemade raviolis, Galata Evi as it is called in Turkish, is perhaps best reserved for late evening. The dry red wine from Georgia or a small glass of vodka flavored with walnut leaves goes down easily with the Georgian chocolate cake while listening to the multilingual co-owner Nadire Goktuğ sing out her Tatar heritage over an old German piano festooned with metal candleholders in classic Constantinople fashion.

And for the ultra-contemporary, the Istanbul Biennale is currently hosting Tbilisi-born artist Vajiko Chachkhiani at the Pera Museum. For one of his recent international appearances at the Venice Biennale, he reassembled a pavilion from the Georgian countryside and exhibited the abandoned wood hut in the Venetian Arsenale on the dreamy shores of the Rio della Tana. In Istanbul, he shows stylish audiences a three and a half minute video of a nondescript man staring into the eye of the camera, beckoning viewers to look at each other and wonder how long they might stare back. It's a forceful piece from 2015 named *Life Track* that reverses objective attitudes to art with a startling intensity.

Georgian Istanbul is founded in the mutual influence of neighboring people. It is a success story of integration from the Baghdad Kiosk at Topkapi Palace, built as a dedication to the Georgian military leader Giorgi Saakadze, honored as a pasha for returning Baghdad to the Ottoman Sultanate, to the sheltering of Noe Jordania and his colleagues from the first Independent Georgian Republic in the Georgian Catholic monastery in Istanbul. Its traditions of faith are as diverse as its spices, as expected from a people who have leapt through history and landed square on both feet in contemporary global culture to pray, cook, create and play, though not always in that order.

September 23, 2017
Istanbul, Turkey

Plantation

The Fethi Paşa Plantation (Fethi Paşa Korusu) is the perfect microcosm for Anatolia in relation to the Turkish state. Facing westward, the café seating offers a panoramic view of glorious historic and natural beauty, placing every permitted liberty and common pleasure just within reach. To the east, the Parkland Groves are walled in, containing the reality of Anatolia. As the Asian landscape of Istanbul stretches out into the sky behind the Fethi Paşa Plantation, a live-in garment factory housed in an irregular construction known as a *gecekondu* (shanty) is surrounded by subsistence garden farms that stand starkly against the brazen six minarets of the Çamlıca Mosque, which reach to the greatest heights of the urban highlands. Along the horizon, a single column of metal pierces the heavens with what is a skyscraper still under construction, minimizing everything in its vicinity.

On the plantation's western side, the steep ridges of the Sultan's Hill (Sultantepe) ascend to offer a bird's-eye view of the turquoise-flowing Bosphorus and the European continent that stretches beyond it. Facing the shore from within the off-white marble and chestnut-colored wooden pavilions, Istanbul's Dolmabahçe Palace is a pearl in the eye of its beholders who crowd the terraces throughout the summer to sip mastic-spiked Turkish coffees and cold, frothy *ayran* yogurt drinks. Under floral headscarves and rolled-up sleeves, the city locals contemplate the historic landscape that emerged from coast to coast in old Constantinople, together with the plantation groves of Fethi Paşa, during the meticulously studied Ottoman age of reform in the mid-1800s.

The Sultan's Hill slopes up from the shores of the Bosphorus, where the seaside homes, or *yalı* in Turkish, were built to receive such waterborne Ottoman dignitaries as Ahmet Fethi Paşa, whose shorefront residence is known as the Pink Mansion. As husband to the sister of Sultan Abdulmecid I, Ahmet Fethi Paşa would return to the bucolic respite of his private dock on the Anatolian shore after his eventful outings in the capital. Shortly after he passed away, Ahmet Fethi Paşa's neighbor, Hüseyin Avni Paşa, whose plantation and mansion bordered his, was accused of murdering Sultan Abdülaziz in the summer of 1876, and was later assassinated amid conspiracies. The plantation groves and pavilion mansions of Ahmet Fethi Paşa were placed in the possession of his successors until 1958, when the city municipality finally took over.

Like all areas located in the center of Istanbul, the Byzantine past practically flows from the mouths of storytellers like New Rome from the water and soil of its urban roots, where ancient civilizations once turned to the cliffs of Scutari in modern-day Üsküdar to see the gilded roofs of Asia. Based on its history which delves into the Ottoman era, the Fethi Paşa Plantation is arguably best defined as such, derived from the translation of the Turkish root word, *koru*. The plantation symbolizes a cultural milieu in which private residences preserved wealth and tradition for the Ottoman elite, who infamously avoided progressive industrialization by holding onto the imperial nostalgia of the Empire's agrarian romanticism and medieval heyday well into the empire's final century.

The conundrum of national direction in the young Turkish Republic was the seed of contemplation for the blind intellectual Cemil Meriç, who lost his eyesight by reading too much during his 14 years residing at the Fethi Paşa Plan Pavilion. Meriç worked as a French language instructor while writing his many books, including his most well-known, *Bu Ülke*, (from the Turkish for *This Country*), which analyzes the history of the Eastern and Western alliances, as with right and left politics in Turkish thought. When Meriç left the Fethi Paşa Plantation in 1960, the plantation itself was abandoned and neglected for two decades.

Nowadays, lovers and friends walk arm-in-arm on the plantation; under waterfalls, around pools, gardens and playgrounds and across fields and courts, as families play in the nourishing outdoors, observing the uniformed municipal workers as they take comfortable breaks on the steep, lush hills. Street traffic and crowded sidewalks are blissfully out of earshot under the shaded, earthen walkways that wind through the stunning arboreal biodiversity of oak, laurel, maple, mastic, linden, pine, chestnut, persimmon, ash and evergreen trees from around the globe. The plantation groves of the Fethi Paşa Plantation reinforce the local flavors of Üsküdar, as the district known to Turks as *Belde-i Tayyibe*, (The Beautiful Land), recalling its significance as the traditional resting stop for pilgrims on the road to Mecca.

August 9, 2017
Istanbul, Turkey

Naturalism

Democracy evolves like an endemic species. It is sustained in social environments where it has the space and time to grow. As a political ideology, it is the ideal of individual freedom. When democracy is cultivated by the people, its manifestations are tangible. Ecological preservation sites such as urban parks and national forests are essentially extensions of democracy. When natural conservation zones balance the needs of people with the vitality of local plants and animals, they foster the universal and indiscriminate right to life and liberty.

Parks are an integral link in the chain that binds city-dwellers together. People are ultimately united by the local lands on which they depend for communal wellbeing and the national good. Most importantly for modern societies, industrial urbanization has raised questions about long-term sustainability for future generations. When a park is maintained in an overburdened urban sphere like Istanbul, it is not only significant as an example of ecological justice. It is also a flagship development of social progress.

Making the central, downtown districts of major cities like Istanbul more green is a way of meeting the popular need for material independence. The pressure to exploit the commercial real estate market is released in a park. Natural spaces also foster social democracy as they allow people to assemble beyond the condensed, profit-driven infrastructure of the city. Despite underlying values, the history of Maçka Park prior to its rebranding as Democracy Park, is controversial.

In the 1970s, the park was neglected by city officials. It was overrun with gangs and the tragic tales of orphans who ran between them and the homeless who gathered there in increasing numbers. By the early 1990s, its streams had turned to sewage but the park had gained a secret reputation among the bold youth who called it Love Park on account of it being out of range of law enforcement. The legacy of homelessness is sometimes still seen as the steep hills to the north flatten toward Taksim Square. When the park became a symbol of Turkish democracy in 1993, its restoration included the opening of sports facilities, playgrounds and an impressive cable car stretching across the preserved valley.

Maçka Democracy Park is the Central Park of Istanbul. It is crowded with pedestrian commuters and day-trippers every day of the week. Along its many pathways, Istanbul locals converse over drinks and samovars of tea. They discuss the political globalization of populism while wearing the latest trends from the nearby fashion district of Nişantaşı, only a short walk from the columned, northernmost entranceway into the park.

On many weekends throughout the year, sound speakers blast from the outdoor concert venue in adjacent Küçükçiftlik Park as Maçka fills with the freewheeling ambiance of a music festival. And, more frequently, the danceable rhythms and strains of Middle Eastern music descend into the valley from the Arabesque Cafe situated in its northwestern highlands. Across the street from its southeastern entranceway, the proud fans of the Beşiktaş Gymnastics Club spill into Maçka, waving flags, burning fires, rattling throats with the pure love of competitive sport.

In May of this year, the city announced the building of an ecological bridge connecting Maçka Democracy Park to Gezi Park. It is still under construction, with signs visually depicting its completion standing beside piles of sand and orange tape. Despite passing its originally planned unveiling for June, the impetus to join parklands with a migratory, conservation corridor in an urbanized ecosystem is not unfounded. The efforts imply a conviction that democratic processes are not limited to politics, but that they are akin to the naturalist philosophies of free will and common reason.

Democracy is part of a natural evolution toward a more human ecological system, despite what current urban trends suggest. Environmental integrity is possible for cities that strive to live in an ecosystem of equity between man and nature. The late British philosopher Alan Watts spoke of the Chinese concept of nature as being democratic. In the traditional school of thought that is indigenous to China, as he expounded, nothing in nature is forced to behave the way it does. And this freedom is the cornerstone of a living democracy.

August 13, 2017
Istanbul, Turkey

Workshop

Omerya is the name of a 400,000-strong Kurdish clan whose sons rule the street in anonymity wherever mussels are hawked throughout Turkey. Originally from Mardin, one man from the Omerya clan is often found with a jokester's grin outside his shop, *Yasin Gıda*, situated on the corner of two alleyways in the heart of Tarlabaşı, where so many condemned and abandoned buildings reflect the social condition of neighborhood residents — Syrian Roma known as the Dom, among Kurds, Arabs, Africans and others.

The shop stands in the shadow of a church cross, down the street from Arabic storefronts, and around the corner from a memorial museum for the Polish romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz, frequented by conspicuous Westerners. Talkative and friendly, the shopkeeper first took over the mussel business from a Roma friend in the 1970s, when, he says, the popular street-food still had taste.

Once a mussel street-hawker himself, the man behind *Yasin Gıda* has passed on four mussel stands to his nephews. "*Midye dolma!*" (stuffed mussels) they shout over the lemon-soaked platters to peckish passersby walking under the scaffolding and corrugated construction metal on Tarlabaşı Avenue, under the controversial urban renewal billboards of Taksim360, and finally, if they are lucky, to that world of difference on the window-shopping paradise of İstiklal Avenue, where most mussel-hawkers earn a hand-to-mouth income.

Beginning as young as 11 years old, until about 25 to 30, the street mussel hawkers are a tight circle, careful to remain nameless, as they are weary of constant government surveillance from undercover police in the guise of student researchers. And yet, walking through Tarlabaşı, it is not impossible to receive smiling and exuberant invitations from behind one of the many substandard street-level and basement doorways, splintered and half-open, with mussel shells strewn out in front. Within the underground work spaces female workers toil to open thousands of hardy seashells, later to be stuffed by other hands.

"Those women, they have a really heavy workload at home. They have to deal with children, with older ones, like their parents, or their mother or father-in-laws, they have to cook and take children to school and bring them back, and most of them

work at home, as well, like in mussels, for example, which is really, really tough work," says Ebru Ergün, who, for the past five-and-a-half years has worked as a psychologist at the Tarlabaşı Community Center located in a second-floor walk-up in the center of the neighborhood.

> Women demand workshops, because they want to produce something for their homes, for their own needs. So, when they demand it, and when we can find a volunteer, we open a workshop, but it's not for selling. They don't turn it into a business, at least not yet. Most women already have the knowledge, so they bring skills and crafts, but there is a moderator... It's not easy for them to find some leisure time to do some handicraft work. This place is a safe, quiet, calm environment, some kind of escape for them.

Due to financial challenges, the Tarlabaşı Community Center moved from a larger space to the more central, current address in the middle of the neighborhood at Zerdali Sokak No. 9, a humble outfit with a sign emblazoned with its name. in Turkish, *Tarlabaşı Toplum Merkezi*. Although the center has lost a number of professional staff and a host of workshops, the community apartment space remains a social haven for Kurdish-speaking children, and Syrian Roma, or Dom, among other minorities who now file into the heavy red iron door at street level above a *pide* flatbread restaurant and across from an open garage of firewood, an urban environ gritty with Anatolian village airs, as children stream about unaccompanied in skirts and hoodies over the wet pavement of midwinter Istanbul.

"Now everyone knows the center in this area. In eastern Turkey, even if we knew about women's health, we wouldn't have the courage [to go the hospital]. We need all types of workshops and courses. The children of Tarlabaşı are lacking [resources] in every way. They are in need, and they love it here at the center," says Remziye, a Kurdish woman from Urfa who moved to Tarlabaşı 14 years ago, where she has participated in multiple workshops, becoming semi-literate in Turkish, improving her sewing, and learning about her rights in women's health and empowerment, all while working as a daily assistant at the center for the last eight out of the 10 years that it has been open.

> The construction development project has affected the neighborhood badly. After demolitions, people move. There is always dust and smoke in the neighborhood, though it's a little better now because it rains in winter.

The effective and productive social activism at Tarlabaşı Community Center is mirrored in like-minded organizations led by optimistic, young entrepreneurs in Şişli. After the closing and resurrection of the Bomonti beer factory into a sleek complex of small businesses and social innovators (Bomontiada), a new generation is creating a nexus of novel enterprise in Şişli at such centers as ATÖLYE, a collaborative project house where creative thinkers and trendy startups meet over toolkits of social change.

"We do a documentary series [called MERCEK], which started about a year and a half ago in Beyoğlu, working with craftsmen on product development. We realized that the average age of the craftsman in Istanbul is late-50s and there is no second generation. The whole purpose is to enable the craftsmen to continue their legacy," says Kerem Alper, co-founder and CEO of ATÖLYE, originally from Ankara, raised in Istanbul and university-educated in the U.S.

The documentary of which he is most proud focused on the 45-year-old Galata atelier where Artin Aharon, a lower middle-class Armenian-Turk who crafts metal on a non-electric wood lathe. "In 2014, I came back together with my co-founder Engine [Ayaz]. Bomontiada found us. They know how to do entertainment really well, but what would be missing was this community element. The goal for 2017 is to really start having a more meaningful and deeper impact on the city."

In a little over a year since opening at Bomontiada (the first ATÖLYE test center was in Çukurcuma, Beyoğlu and was known as Beta Space), many initiatives at ATÖLYE are bridging the economic diversity of Istanbul through creative workshopping, such as in a project called Teacher's Network, that brings together a hundred teachers from across Turkey and Istanbul, from Tarlabaşı to Beykoz to Gaziosmanpaşa, to explore challenges in education, and to collaborate on solutions. One promising ATÖLYE venture led by by fashion designer Ece Altunmaral, links education and fashion for social change.

"Fashion is the most harmful industry after oil, to the environment, so we decided to launch a fashion company called REFLECT. Everything we produce is a 100 percent sustainable and with every purchase we make we also transfer some support, both physical and money-wise, to the NGOs that we have partnered with," says, Ece Altunmaral, a London-educated, lifelong resident of Istanbul and former

financial consultant who changed careers to collaborate with AÇEV (Mother-Child Education Foundation) in Esenler and Small Projects Istanbul (SPI) in Fatih.

> We have chosen the social cause: Education. We wanted to show support to different neighborhoods in Istanbul, because in Istanbul there are so many financial gaps between the people and their lifestyles. We do art workshops with them [at SPI]. The outputs of the art workshop become our designs. We print them, or use embroidery, different techniques, on T-shirts, bags, socks. We have a collection right now. For every purchase we also transfer money to those NGOs, to that specific group of kids, actually.

December 30, 2016
Istanbul, Turkey

Trees

Before stone monuments came to be, natural wonders were the settings for the grand storytelling of folkloric customs and beliefs. Large, ancient trees were among those natural wonders, bearing witness to human dramas from their aloof perspectives. Turkish society continues to admire the longevity and grandness of the plane tree for its natural ability to place local cultures and extended communities alike in an ecological relationship with the passage of time, providing a direct link to a universal source of creation.

From the plane tree that took root in 1548 alongside Mihrimah Sultan Mosque under the artful hands of the preeminent Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan to its brethren lining the Asian shorefront avenue of Paşalimanı, the trees continue to flourish near the pier in Üsküdar, extending northward to Çengelköy and to the Black Sea beyond. The great double row of thick spotted trunks and rich bright-green leaves reach skyward, sheltering the way for the cool, traditional respites of many well-shaded cafes.

The opulent arched gateway to Dolmabahçe Palace stares with unrivaled pretense from across the Bosphorus at the pier in Üsküdar like an affront to the humility of the fishermen, boatmen, commuters, florists and salesmen of all kinds who hawk and haul all day at the dock. A few steps away, the neighborhood begins to envelop people, resident and visitors alike, in an Ottoman plane tree grove. Symbolically cultivated at every mosque in deference to Osman, first in the Ottoman dynasty, the tree is a universal and binding element of Turkish society, from Topkapı Palace to the poet's cafe. And yet, its roots are said to go even deeper than Osman's dream.

Turkic myths and folklore recall a prehistoric reverence for trees as heirs to the cosmic concept of the "world tree," the place where spiritual meets material. According to the legend, the world began from the root of the world tree, and at its base beneath its protecting limbs, people seek and sometimes find the divine nature of themselves and the world.

Traditionally, the Altai people believed people were the descendants of a sacred tree. Nowadays, the flag of the Chuvash Republic in Russia is emblazoned with the tree of life, as is the 5 kuruş Turkish coin since 2009. In the early 1940s, a

publication appeared called *Çınaraltı* (Under the Plane Tree), forwarding the nationalist ideology of pan-Turkism to unite every nation with Turkic roots.

The movement gained momentum, especially during the first decade of the 20th century with the founding of the Republic of Turkey.While the plane tree is often hallowed among Turkic people, its reputation is bolstered by its special Ottoman legacy. Along the shoreline Paşalimanı Avenue in Üsküdar, many plane trees are historic monuments, reinforcing and sometimes compromising the roads with their wide girth and staggering height. Many new saplings now also grow from the avenue as part of a public works effort during the "Year of the Plane Tree" in 2016.

Past the Ottoman-era tobacco warehouse now housing the Istanbul State Opera and Ballet and just after the entrance to Fethipaşa Forest, a reliable arboreal refuge from inner-city havoc, a magnificent plane tree stands at the corner of Paşalimanı and Tahtalı Street. Its mere presence is a living symbol of past centuries, demonstrating the integral role history plays on the present and in contemporary life. That tree marks the place where Kuzguncuk district begins. In the core of the neighborhood, another plane tree stands at the open-air waterfront cafe known as the Çınaraltı Cafe at the entrance to the mainline İcadiye Avenue, itself lined with the majestic trees.

From the waterfront cafe to İcadiye Avenue's ascending valley between the Nakkaş Hill and Fethipaşa Forest, the inhabitants of Kuzguncuk decorate the local plane trees with colorful yarn, reminiscent of the Turkic and Islamic traditions, like *Hıdrellez*, that celebrate trees for their spiritual powers. For centuries, Turkic Central Asian communities all the way to western China and eastern Russia have used the shed bark as a remedy for infertility and disease. Among contemporaries, people in Kuzguncuk, as well as in the Emirgan and Çengelköy districts in Istanbul, sit under plane trees to converse. It is a place to air the gamut of human concerns, interests, curiosities, insights, controversies and inspirations. With a lifespan of more than 1,000 years, the trees feel like an eternal fixture. What is said in its shade has the potential to transcend human definition and reach an ageless source of continuity.

That is what poet Can Yücel found while writing at the Çınaraltı Cafe in Kuzguncuk. In fact, he frequented the place so often that the neighborhood

establishment is now named after him. The cafe has since transformed into a flagship nexus of literary culture and national history. Under his many portraits, intellectuals and artists contemplate the eccentric wordsmith, commemorate his death anniversary and ruminate on his verse as they walk up İcadiye to a street on Nakkaş Hill, also named after him, close to the medieval Jewish cemetery. Under the plane tree, new traditions of poetry and storytelling surface like the fish of the Bosphorus. Likewise, common talk becomes political and questions are raised high above the minarets and towers of the urban establishment. The cafe under the plane tree, known in Turkish as the *Çınaraltı*, is a place of transformation, where humanity and nature converse and debate.

With the passage of time, the shorefront cafe in Kuzguncuk and even the monumental plane tree have started to show the telltale signs of age, spurring people to speak of Byzantine times when the neighborhood, then known as Hrisokeramos, was famed for its golden tiled roofs. They are reminded of how Kuzguncuk itself was named "Little Raven" after the saint, Kuzgun Baba, who lived during the time of Sultan Mehmet II. They contemplate the lives of the diverse Ottoman citizens who met beneath the plane tree to wash and drink from the local fountain dated back to 1792. For the locals who still gather at the many vibrant cafes in Kuzguncuk, nostalgia is irresistible while imagining İcadiye Avenue before it was paved, when it ran with a full stream cultivating an impressive grove of plane trees.

People sit and sip the days and nights away by the shorefront plane tree of Kuzguncuk with the Bosphorus at their side. They ponder and speak to each other like those before them. They reflect on the minaret of Kuzguncuk Mosque, listen to the bells of the Surp Krikor Lusavoriç Armenian Church and watch as the Jews of Beth Yaakov Synagogue stroll down the avenue on Saturdays to greet their Greek Orthodox neighbors; all right across the street from Çınaraltı Cafe.

July 21, 2017
Istanbul, Turkey