

Mintzuri, Hagop. *İstanbul Anıları, 1897-1940*. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998, 160pp.

## ABSTRACT

### Memories of Istanbul 1897- 1940

#### *İstanbul Anıları 1897-1940*

The book was originally written in the Armenian dialect spoken in Turkey under the title *Değer Ur Yes Yeğer Yem*. It has twenty sections, which bring together real-life stories told by Mintzuri (Mndzuri). Fourteen of these sections relate to the imperial capital, Istanbul. This is where Mintzuri, as the child of an immigrant, lived with his father and grandfather between the years 1897 and 1906. He talks about Ortaköy, where they had a bakery and Rumelihisar and Galata where he spent his student years.

In the remaining six sections, he narrates his autobiography, talks about his village and gives a snapshot of the topics of his stories. These stories tell us how a health problem brought him to Istanbul for a few days in August 1914. Coincidences like the missing of the return boat and the start of the First World War stopped him from returning to his village. He also, lost sight of his wife and four children, who were forced to emigrate. Eventually, he ended up living in Istanbul until he died; a place he never really got used to.

Mintzuri was in fact a village writer and his book bearing the title ‘Memories of Istanbul’ resembles a documentary. Its protagonists are real and simple people, presented as they were:

bakers, broom-makers, vendors of fried liver. They come from various neighbourhoods in Istanbul: Turks, Armenians, Kurds, Alevis, Jews, Greeks, Croatians, Circassians, and Ethiopians. In short, he describes the people of old Istanbul with their eating and clothing habits, and their lifestyles. Every now and then, a palace eunuch, a pasha and even a sultan makes an appearance.

He defines himself as ‘a villager, an autodidact, a self-educated man’ and the stories entitled ‘Me’ and ‘Us’ reflect his unaffected personality, way of life and world views. Mintzuri was fluent in Turkish and Armenian, and followed French journals of the day to improve his French. He learned English when he was a student at Robert College. These languages allowed him access to world literature.

Mintzuri’s originality comes from the fact that he was a village writer, who wrote as he spoke.

While the original version ‘Memories of Istanbul’ has no notes on proper nouns, regional terms, plants and village names, the Turkish translation includes 149 explanatory footnotes, as well as photographs of old Istanbul.

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