

# ARTUN ÜNSAL

## When Milk Sleeps

### Turkey's Cheeses

Artun Ünsal was born in Istanbul in 1942. After graduating from Ankara Koleji (1961), he completed his higher education in Paris, France, where he graduated from Law Faculty in 1966, and Political Sciences Institute (Sciences-Po) in 1967. He then completed a doctorate in political sciences at Paris Law Faculty in 1970, after which he began his academic career at Ankara Hacettepe University, before joining the Political Sciences Faculty at Ankara University in 1975 upon completion of his military service. He resigned from the same university in 1982 while an associate professor, and began working as a reporter for the Ankara office of the *Hürriyet* newspaper, of which he was the Paris correspondent between 1986-1992. Ünsal, who then assumed the roles of Ankara correspondent for French newspaper *Le Monde* and Swiss newspaper *Journal de Genève* between 1972-1986, came back to academic life in 1994, when he was appointed as a professor at Istanbul Galatasaray University, until his retirement from the same institution's department of Political Sciences in 2009.

Aside from the numerous books and articles which he wrote, either in Turkish, French, or English on political sciences, Prof. Dr. Artun Ünsal also actively endeavoured to prevent Anatolia's cultural riches from falling into oblivion. The projects which he completed for this sake, by taking a photographer friend by his side and travelling to and fro across Turkey, include *Süt Uyuyunca - Türkiye Peynirleri* (1997; *When Milk Sleeps - Turkey's Cheeses*, YKY, 2024), *Ölmez Ağacın Peşinde - Türkiye'de Zeytin ve Zeytinyağı* (In Search of the Immortal Tree - Olives and Olive Oil in Turkey, YKY, 2000), *Nimet Geldi Ekine - Türkiye Ekmeklerinin Öyküsü* (YKY, 2001; published in its English translation under the title *Blessing the Grain*, YKY, 2022), *Silivri'm Kaymak! - Türkiye'nin Yoğurtları* (YKY, 2007; published in its English translation under the title *Double Cream Silivri! Turkey's Yogurts*, 2021, YKY), *Susamlı Halkanın Tılsımı - İstanbul'da Kara Fırından Simit Saraylarına Simit, Peynir ve Çayın Öyküsü* (The Magic of Sesame Seed Sprinkled Rings - The Story of Simit, Cheese and Tea in Istanbul from the Black Bakery to Simit Palaces, YKY, 2010 - Dünya Newspaper Best Gastronomy Book Award - 2010 ) and *Boğaz'ın Beş Efendisi - Lüfer, Palamut, Levrek, Tekir ve İstavrite Dair* (The Five Kings of the Bosphorus - On Bluefish, Bonito, Seabass, Mullet and Saurel, YKY, 2011). Ünsal also strove to emphasise the country's gastronomic culture, through such works as *Benim Lokantalarım* (My Restaurants of Choice, YKY, 1996), *İstanbul'un Lezzet Tarihi* (A History of Istanbul's Delicacies), written together with Beyhan Ünsal (NTV Publishing, 2011, new print Everest, 2021), *Nadide Bir Goncadır Enginar* (A Unique Flower Bud: Artichoke, İletişim Publishing, 2021) and *Ortaya Karışık* (Mixed Bag of Dishes, İletişim, 2022).

Those of his books which were published in France are the following: *Istanbul la Magnifique* (Istanbul the Magnificent, Ed. Robert Laffont, 1991), written together with Beyhan Ünsal, on Ottoman cuisine, *Chronique d'une Famille Anatolienne* (Chronicle of an Anatolian Family, Ed. L' Harmattan, 1989), a sociological research published in its Turkish translation under the title *Kâmil ile Meryem'e Dair* (AFA, 1991; YKY, 1996), and *La Vendetta* (Ed. L'Harmattan, 1990), published in its Turkish translation under the title *Anadolu'da Kan Davası* (YKY, 1995).

His research studies in the fields of politics and sociology include *Siyaset ve Anayasa Mahkemesi* (Politics and the Constitutional Court, Ankara University, SBF Publ., 1980), *Kent ve Siyasal Şiddet* (City and Political Violence, Ankara University, SBF Publ., 1982), written together with Ruşen Keleş, *Umuttan Yalnızlığa: Türkiye İşçi Partisi Tarihi - 1961-1971* (From Hope to Loneliness - A History of the Turkish Workers' Party - 1961-1971, Tarih Vakfı Publishing, 2004; second print Kırmızı Kedi Publishing, 2020); *Tribün Cemaatinin Öfkesi - Ticarileşen Türkiye Futbolunda Şiddet* (The Tribunes Folk's Wrath - Violence in Commercialised Turkish Football, İletişim Publ., 2005), and *İktidarların Sofrası - Yemek, Siyaset ve Simgesellik* (The Rulers' Table - Food, Politics and Symbolism, Everest Publishing, 2020 - Dünya Newspaper Best Gastronomy Book of the Year Award - 2020).

Ünsal also published collections of essays, such as *Bezgin Martı ve Çılgın Kelebek* (The Weary Seagull and the Frenzied Butetrfly, YKY, 2009) and *Tel Dolaptaki Karpuz* (The Watermelon in the Meat Safe, YKY, 2014), a patchwork of his personal memories. As for *Boğaz'ın İnsanları* (Bosphorus Figures), an account of the unique life stories of his interesting friends and acquaintances, it was published by Kırmızı Kedi Publishing in 2021. The latest work by Ünsal, who lived for an extended period in Çengelköy, on the shore of the Bosphorus, is *Aşk Olsun O Kayıklara! İstanbul'da "Kürek Devri"ne Dair* (These Row Boats Deserve our Love! On the "Rowing Age" in Istanbul, Everest, 2023), where he portrays the historical rowboats and their steerers, the heart and soul of traditional seafaring in Istanbul.

Ünsal, who also wrote weekly restaurant reviews between 1992-2012, first for the *Hürriyet*, and later for the *Posta* newspapers, gave numerous conferences on Ottoman-Turkish cuisine in the USA, Japan, Australia, Argentina and Belgium. During the 1990s, he presented Turkey's restaurants and dishes in such programmes as "Sense of Taste" and "Life Style", respectively broadcast by TRT Istanbul and NTV. He also directed and presented the documentaries "The Story of the Liquid Gold" and "When Milk Sleeps", again broadcast by NTV. Lastly, he hosted the programmes "Breaking the Fast with Artun Ünsal" and "My Restaurants of Choice", aired by TV24.

Deeply convinced that protecting and preserving Turkey's local cultural riches and unique products carry the highest importance, especially in the current globalised world, Artun Ünsal never ceases to travel across Anatolia with the same, unabated passion, in the pursuit of this goal.

**Baptiste Gacoin** Paris-born translator and former film editor. Gacoin's published translations include significant sections of *The Seventh Continent*, the 16<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial guidebook (İKSV, 2019), *Talks on Memory and Art*, a compilation of essays by prominent academicians (Aslı Zengin, Erden Kosova, Nora Tataryan, Tanıl Bora, Turgut Tarhanlı, and Zeynep Günsür Yüceil to name but a few), based on an online archive centred on the notion of collective memory, garnered by Hafıza Merkezi (published online, February 2022), and *Possibilities of Healing, Ways of Whispering*, the catalogue of the joint exhibition of Sena Başöz and Noor Abuarafeh's works held at Yapı Kredi Culture and Arts (YKY, 2023). Gacoin is also a regular translation collaborator of Arter, the contemporary art museum created by the Vehbi Koç Foundation.

Gacoin lives in Istanbul, and finds peace of mind hiking, climbing and practising tai-chi whenever he finds the time.

Artun Ünsal's books published by YKY:

- Anadolu'da Kan Davası (1995)  
Kâmil ile Meryem'e Dair (1997)  
Benim Lokantalarım (1996)  
Süt Uyuyunca – Türkiye'nin Peynirleri (1997)  
Ölmez Ağacın Peşinde – Türkiye'de Zeytin ve Zeytinyağı (2000)  
Nimet Geldi Ekine – Türkiye'nin Ekmeklerinin Öyküsü (2001)  
'Silivrim Kaymak!' – Türkiye'nin Yoğurtları (2007)  
Bezgin Martı ve Çılgın Kelebek (2009)  
Susamlı Halkanın Tılsımı – İstanbul'da Kara Fırından Simit Saraylarına Simit,  
Peynir ve Çayın Türküsü (2010)  
Boğaz's Beş Efendisi – Lüfer, Palamut, Levrek, Tekir ve İstavrite Dair (2011)  
Tel Dolaptaki Karpuz (2014)  
Double Cream Silivri! – Turkey's Yogurts (2021)  
Blessing the Grain – Turkey's Breads (2022)  
In Search of the Immortal Tree – Olives and Olive Oil in Turkey (2023)  
When Milk Sleeps – Turkey's Cheeses (2024)

**ARTUN ÜNSAL**

# **When Milk Sleeps**

**Turkey's Cheeses**

Photography

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**YAPI KREDİ YAYINLARI**

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# Introduction

As far as countries famous for the profuseness of their cheese varieties are concerned, France, Italy, Switzerland, The Netherlands, England or America generally spring to mind first. For some reason, Turkey is rarely cited in this respect. Yet, the nomadic Oghuz Turks, and in the latter's wake, the Seljuks, and eventually the Ottomans, whose territories spanned a vast area stretching all the way from the Central Asian steppes to Iran, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, the Balkans, Egypt, and from the Arabian Peninsula to the Maghreb, all maintained both an ancient and deep connection with cheese. Furthermore, the interactions between their own traditional dairy products and the cultures of the various peoples whom they came in contact with along their way across different climates and geographic areas, eventually resulted in a magnificent medley of variegated cheeses.

The protagonist of *Les Aristocrates*, the novel penned by French author Michel de Saint-Pierre, does touch upon the diversity of Turkish cheese varieties, yet his appreciation of them is rather poor:

“I assure you, there exist many cheeses in Turkey, but neither do they flow, nor melt, nor smell; these cheeses are without a soul!”

In fact, Michel de Saint-Pierre was altogether too quick to dismiss Turkish cheeses, we ought to say. Although our cheeses may not be as widely acclaimed on the international stage as the renowned French varieties, as they mature, they, too, develop such characteristics as flowing, melting, and even producing powerful aromas. *Kaşar* cheese possesses a plain milky scent, *kirlibanım* a sour aroma, *dil* (literally meaning “tongue”, used to refer to a common variety of string cheese) cheese is quick to melt, while *mihalç* exudes delicate droplets of oil. As for the fragrance released by our herbed cheeses, it is simply beyond compare... In essence, as is the case in many respects, discovering the proper “soul” of cheeses requires tasting, patience, and care...

As it occurs, in his novel *Mr. Palomar*, Italo Calvino, a literary luminary from another celebrated cheese country, Italy, states the following: “Behind every cheese there is a pasture of a different green under a different sky...”

Calvino's appraisal provides both a broader and considerably more grounded perspective. Obviously indeed, Turkish cheeses are the outcomes of pastures of a distinct green, distinct plains, mountains, plateaus, specific climatic conditions, the milk produced by different breeds of cows, sheep, goats, and buffaloes, harvested and processed by different people, through unique techniques and methods, in short, the upshot of unique conditions and circumstances. Cheeses translate the wealth and width of a distinct culture, extending from producers to connoisseurs. Just as there can be no humans deprived of a soul, there can be no such thing as a soulless cheese either. Let us recall Clifton Fadiman's maxim, "Cheese is milk's leap toward immortality." The author might be going a tad too far of course, for cheeses do perish, but the metaphor remains remarkably elegant. Cheese is indeed the plain and calm transformation, with all its naturalness, of milk into an extraordinary creation.

In the West, almost all graceful books with fine bindings and appealing images on cheeses and cheesemaking sing praises of the French, English, Italian, Dutch, Swiss, and even American and Australian cheeses, whereas Middle Eastern ones, on the other hand, are mentioned but begrudgingly, as though an afterthought it would seem: perhaps a trace of *kurut* here, a spoonful of white cheese there, some goat cheese, a hint of *tulum*, and at best a speck of *kaşar* or *mihalıç* cheese by way of conclusion. Even *feta*, the now iconic cheese of the Greeks, who by far outreach us in terms of international promotion skills, is in most cases only deemed worthy of a second-class status. Yet, a simple tryout would suffice for Westerners to discover that Anatolia's *tulum* and herbed cheeses may be enjoyed alongside good wine just as delightfully as any given *camembert*.

Sadly, among Turks, especially a significant proportion of urbanites, probably due to the convenience brought about by habit, and perhaps to a certain lack of curiosity, the impression that only white cheese, *lor*, *çökelek*, *kaşar* and *tulum*, and maybe a bit of *dil* string cheese are consumed in our country prevails. Yet, in reality, our regional cheeses too are remarkably diverse! What's more, many of them, such as the herbed cheeses which stem from Van, for instance, are regularly supplied in supermarkets and grocery stores across the country's major cities. Besides, renowned Western cheeses such as *gouda*, *camembert*, *crème* (processed), *cheddar*, *philadelphia*, *mozzarella*, and *kraft*, are now produced in Turkey as well. Briefly put, both cheese production and consumption are currently thriving in our country.

*When Milk Sleeps* considers our many cheese varieties first and foremost as a component of our cultural wealth. In essence, this book constitutes an initial step in an endeavour to establish a comprehensive catalogue of our cheeses, encompassing both those easily available on the market and those produced in limited quantities, remaining relatively unknown on a national scale. In other words, the conscious preference which presided over this book consisted in focusing on our cheese culture rather than on the technology the latter involves. On the other hand, as the first study of its kind in this field, it undoubtedly has certain significant shortcomings.

Still, we sincerely hope that *When Milk Sleeps* will help disclose just how rich our country is in terms of cheese varieties, comprising products obtained from such distinct types of milk as cow's, sheep's, and goat, through unique production techniques specific to every region, and boasting a considerably wide range of achieved characteristics and flavours.

Cheeses are a cultural occurrence. Just as “every valiant fellow has his own unique way of eating yoghurt”, as the saying goes, so cheese consumption habits, too, greatly vary from country to country. Europeans might be puzzled by our indulging in white cheese at breakfast, or along with melon as a dinner starter. As a matter of fact, aren't the proverbial words of an anonymous Frenchman enough to reflect how profoundly this country's cheese culture differs from ours? “I would much rather have cheese without dinner than dinner without cheese...”

As is the case in countless other nations, Turkish people, too, resort to incorporating cheese into their salads, dishes, pastries, and desserts in order to enrich their flavours. We strongly believe that the various recipes highlighted across the pages of this book will provide further evidence of the remarkable creativity of our traditional cuisine, deeply enamored with cheese.

By giving me a push forward, in effect “convincing” me to jump into the water, both Ömer Kayalıoğlu and Enis Batur played an instrumental role in my undertaking the task of creating an introductory reference book on Turkish cheeses, whose main emphasis would be these products' cultural significance rather than technical aspects. The work which came out as a result, achieving further depth thanks to the photographs of Necdet Kaygın and Sinan Göksel, who both accompanied me on my travels across Turkey's many cheese yielding regions, could never have materialised if



it weren't for the precious support of my dear friends, literature expert Prof. Dr. Günay Kut and historian Turgut Kut, who enabled me to access ancient texts, or the wholehearted inhabitants of the many regions across the country who provided me with the recipes for some traditional cheeses that are currently falling into oblivion, the management and editorial staff of Yapı Kredi Publications, and Mehmet Ulusel, who designed both the cover and interior of this book.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to Prof. Dr. Tümer Uraz, a faculty member at the Dairy Technology Department of Ankara University's Faculty of Agriculture, for his generosity in imparting his vast knowledge to me, and his valuable contributions and warm support throughout the fulfilment of this study. Finally, I could not fail to mention the invaluable assistance of Birsal Görgülü, production manager at Yörsan and a genuine cheese enthusiast. On the other hand, I must add that I alone bear full responsibility for any flaw that this book may contain.

**Artun Ünsal**

Photograph on the previous page: Artun Ünsal archive



# Foreword to the Expanded and Revised Edition

Striving to present to your attention the following revised, expanded and updated edition of *When Milk Sleeps*, a pioneering work at the time of its initial release in the field of Turkish cheese studies, after a hiatus of approximately thirty years, has been a tremendously exciting task and a source of tremendous pride. Throughout the years that followed its original publication, I have had the gratifying privilege to witness the dedication of a new generation of researchers and authors, such as Nilhan Aras, Berrin B. Onur, and Neşe A. Biber, who have undertaken long-term studies on Turkish cheeses, ensuring that these cultural assets, stemming from the cradle of civilisations that are Anatolian lands, are not forsaken, and receive the attention they deserve. I am confident that this growing radius of interest will only keep expanding in the years to come. Moreover, it appears quite clear that the efforts made by such industrious academics as Ufuk Kamber, Songül Çakmakçı, Mehmet Ali Salık, Asya Çetinkaya and many more yet, following in the footsteps of their professors Ekrem R. İzmen, Rauf Cemil Adam, Zühtü Yöney, Tümer Uraz, Ahmet Kurt and Cenap Tekinşen, will even further bolster this tidal wave of curiosity by achieving important steps towards completing the exhaustive inventory of Turkish cheeses, and scientifically identifying their properties so as to procure geographical origin registration. It is now up to cheese producers, experts and aficionados to pick up the slack: the National Milk Council still falls short of meeting everything that is expected of it. Traditional cheese producers must give precedence to the formation of cooperatives, and combine forces under both regional and national bodies. The establishment of a National Cheese Council, a National Cheese Foundation, as well as a National Cheese Academy in order to educate qualified and broad-minded masters must also be kept

Photograph on the previous page: Artun Ünsal archive

high on the agenda. Lastly, the long-awaited *Turkish Cheese Encyclopædia* must be speedily readied and published...

The expeditions across Anatolia I subsequently went on for the purpose of my research on Turkish yoghurt, the results of which I published in 2007 in the book bearing the title *Double Cream Silivri!*, inevitably led me to come across novel cheese varieties, which I had never seen or tasted before. Doubtlessly, new cheeses would also await me on the journeys I undertook for the production of TV documentary and Ramadan fast-breaking programmes, which have been incorporated into this new edition as well. Naturally, it was not within my reach to travel to each and every corner of the land; in such cases, I have at times wholeheartedly included in the list certain unique cheese varieties which caught my attention across newly published sources I found to be entirely reliable. That said, I ought to stress that my aim is not to provide an exhaustive inventory of our traditional cheeses, but merely to underscore their significance, each of them being a vital manifestation of our cultural wealth. To safeguard, to the extent of my abilities, our traditional cheeses against the threat of oblivion, help preserve their uniqueness, enhance their visibility and ensure the sustainability of their production in the face of the relentless global assault of industrial cheeses devoid of either character or diversity. Rather than resorting to mere brags, along the lines of “Behold, we, who possess such a huddle of cheeses, where do we fail to measure up to Europe?”, a more sensible approach would be to strive to highlight only the most praiseworthy examples among the vast array of our many traditional cheeses. For underneath each and every one of them lies a distinct geographical and climatic configuration, along with the distinct herbs, flowers, fauna, mounds, plains, and pastures it gave birth to, and beyond, the unique display of ingenuity, lifestyle, and customs - in one word, the culture of the people who inhabit each of these stretches of land. Thus, in time, every cheese attains its own inimitable identity, personality, and distinct set of properties. Accordingly, it is essential to foreground the historical, cultural, and socio-economic context that underpins our traditional cheeses as well; especially when considering how we live in an area where settled agriculture and animal husbandry, and therefore milk and dairy production, materialised as early as in prehistoric times...

The inexorable transformation of cheesemaking – once merely an indispensable rural practice intended to extend the shelf life of milk, before

it blossomed into forming a veritable craft – into an industrialised sector needs spark no commotion in us: our traditional cheeses still thrive, and so do the brave and sedulous Anatolian and Thracian women who produce them, in the very same way they learned from their foremothers. To them, and to all the women living upon these fair and fertile lands, whom they embody, I dedicate this new edition of my book.

**Artun Ünsal**  
Çengelköy, March 2024