

A MEMENTO FOR ISTANBUL

Ahmet Ümit was born in Gaziantep in 1960. He studied Public Administration at Marmara University and Political Science at the Institute for the Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow between 1985 and 1986. His first publication was a book of poems entitled *Sokağın Zulası* ('The Streets' Stash'), released in 1989. His first book of short stories, *Çıplak Ayaklıydı Gece* ('The Night was Barefoot'), was published in 1992. This was followed by *Bir Ses Böler Geceyi* ('A Sound Shatters the Night') in 1994, *Agatha'nın Anahtarı* ('Agatha's Key') in 1999 and *Şeytan Ayrıntıda Gizlidir* ('The Devil is in the Details') in 2002. *Masal Masal İçinde* ('A Tale Within A Tale') and *Olmayan Ülke* ('The Non-Existent Country'), published in 1995 and 2008 respectively, were collections of short stories for both children and adults and represented a new style and direction for the author. His first novel *Sis ve Gece* ('Fog and Night', 1996) is considered a masterpiece of crime fiction, and was followed by the novels *Kar Kokusu* ('The Scent of Snow', 1998), *Patatasana* ('Patasana', 2000) and *Kukla* ('The Puppet', 2002). These were followed by *Ninatta'nın Bileziği* ('Ninatta's Bracelet'), *İnsan Rubunun Haritası* ('A Map of the Human Soul'), *Aşk Köpekliktir* ('Love is Madness'), *Beyoğlu Rapsodisi* ('A Beyoğlu Rhapsody'), *Kavim* ('The Flock'), *Bab-ı Esrar* ('The Dervish Gate'), *İstanbul Hatırası* ('A Memento for Istanbul'), *Sultanı Öldürmek* ('To Kill a Sultan'), *Beyoğlu'nun En Güzel Abisi* ('When Pera Trees Whisper'), *Elveda Güzel Vatanım* ('Farewell, My Beautiful Homeland'), *Kırlangıç Çığlığı* ('The Cry of the Swallow') and *Aşkımız Eski Bir Roman* ('Our Love is an Old Novel'). Graphic novels of many of his works have also been published: *Başkomiser Nevzat: Çiçekçinin Ölümü* ('Chief Inspector Nevzat: The Death of the Flower Seller') and *Başkomiser Nevzat: Tapınak Fahişeleri* ('Chief Inspector Nevzat: The Temple Prostitutes') in collaboration with İsmail Gülgeç, *Başkomiser Nevzat: Davulcu Davut'u Kim Öldürdü* ('Chief Inspector Nevzat: Who Killed Davut the Drummer') in collaboration with Aptülika (Abdülkadir Elçioğlu) and *Elveda Güzel Vatanım* ('Farewell, My Beautiful Homeland'), in collaboration with Bartu Bölükbaşı. Translated into 32 languages, his works have reached a global audience.

The novel *Sis ve Gece* ('Fog and Night') was made into a feature film directed by Turgut Yasarlar, whilst the film of the novel *Bir Ses Böler Geceyi* ('A Sound Shatters the Night') was directed by Ersan Arsever. The screenplay of the docu-drama of *Elveda Güzel Vatanım* ('Farewell, My Beautiful Homeland'), written by Ahmet Ümit himself, was made into a film by Cengiz Özkarakbekir. His stories have also been made into TV serials by Uğur Yücel (*Karanlıkta Koşanlar* – 'Running in the Dark') and Cevdet Mercan (*Şeytan Ayrıntıda Gizlidir* ('The Devil is in the Details')). A theatrical production of *Aşk Köpekliktir* ('Love is Madness') was staged by the Akla Kara Theatre in Istanbul, whilst the opera of *Ninatta'nın Bileziği* ('Ninatta's Bracelet') was performed by the Istanbul State Opera and Ballet Company. Theatrical productions of *Masal Masal İçinde* ('A Tale Within A Tale') have also been staged by the Istanbul State Theatre.

Ahmet Ümit has also produced a TV programme entitled *Yaşadığın Şehir* ('The City You Inhabit') that aims to promote multiculturalism and respect for different cultures, to raise awareness about historic cities and urban living and to emphasise the need for heightened civic values.

Ahmet Ümit's social media accounts:

www.x.com/baskomisernevezat
www.instagram.com/baskomisernevezat
www.facebook.com/yazarahmetumit
www.youtube.com/ahmetumityazar

Rakesh Jobanputra was born in London in 1974 and graduated from the University of Birmingham and the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. He has translated a number of works of Turkish literature into English. He currently lives in Istanbul and teaches at Boğaziçi University.

Also by Ahmet Ümit in YKY:

Aşkımız Eski Bir Roman (2019)
Kırlangıç Çılgılığı (2019)
Sokağın Zulası (2019)
Masal Masal İçinde (2019)
Kavim (2019)
İstanbul Hatırası (2019)
Sis ve Gece (2019)
Patasana (2019)
Bab-ı Esrar (2019)
Olmayan Ülke (2019)
Sultanı Öldürmek (2019)
Beyoğlu Rapsodisi (2019)
Agatha'nın Anahtarı (2019)
Beyoğlu'nun En Güzel Abisi (2019)
Şeytan Ayrıntıda Gizlidir (2019)
Ninatta'nın Bileziği (2019)
Kar Kokusu (2019)
Çıplak Ayaklıydı Gece (2019)
Kukla (2019)
Bir Ses Böler Geceyi (2019)
İnsan Ruhunun Haritası (2020)
Elveda Güzel Vatanım (2020)
Aşk Köpekliktir (2020)
Kayıp Tanrılar Ülkesi (2021)
Sis ve Gece - 25 Yaşında (özel baskı, 2021)
Bir Aşk Masalı (2022)
The Land of Lost Gods (2023)
Kar Kokusu - 25 yaşında (özel baskı, 2023)
Yırtıcı Kuşlar Zamanı (2024)
A Memento for Istanbul (2026)

Comics:

Başkomser Nevzat 1 - Çiçekçinin Ölümü (2021)
Başkomser Nevzat 2 - Tapınak Fahişeleri (2021)
Başkomser Nevzat 3 - Davulcu Davut'u Kim Öldürdü? (2021)

AHMET ÜMİT

A Memento for Istanbul

Translated by
Rakesh Jobanputra



YAPI KREDİ YAYINLARI

*“Sana dün bir tepeden baktım aziz İstanbul...”**

Yahya Kemal

* “It was only yesterday that I gazed upon you from on high, glorious İstanbul...”

Byzantium
King Byzas' Fabled City

The Deity was looking at the King. It was the rite of celebration, the day of thanks, the moment of reckoning; a time for reverence. This land, thrusting proudly into the sea like an eagle's head, had been granted to them as a gift by the Deity. The wind had filled their sails with an unstoppable force; the lush soils had brought forth harvests of delights; the bountiful sea had given them its most succulent delicacies. Their God, the Deity, had protected them from strife and from suffering, and now it was their turn to perform their duties. The King was to perform what was required from him; he was to fulfil his oaths. He grasped his immense sword.

The Deity was looking at the King. The ceremonial area was covered in a pale blue light and the scent of the sea permeated the surroundings. The King felt a damp chill on his brow, a chill also felt by the young bull being held on the dais, sending ripples of foreboding throughout its huge body. The four soldiers struggling to hold the bull in place and the seer standing a few paces behind also felt tremors of apprehension. The King, however, stood firm against the spine-tingling chill and the ominous caress of the wind. He raised his sword and approached the Deity.

The Deity was looking at the King. The King raised his head in salute and fixed his eyes on the trident in the Deity's hand, on that terrible weapon capable of sending the entire kingdom to the bottom of the sea with a single stroke. The reverence in his heart soon turned to fear, and he averted his gaze. For a moment, everything came to a standstill; the wind coming in from the sea, the bull, whose black hide had been rising and falling with barely concealed wrath, the soldiers holding the bull in place. A sinister silence surrounded them for a moment. If he was to wait any

longer; the Deity would be enraged and the silence would become an everlasting curse. There could be no more delays; it had to begin immediately.

“Salutations to you, Poseidon,” exclaimed the King, his voice full of awe. “Salutations to you, Lord of the Horses, Master of the Seas, Shaker of the Earth. Salutations to you, Son of Kronos and Rhea, Brother of Zeus and Hades. Salutations to You, Greatest of the Immortals, Eternal Lord amongst the Giants. To You we do present a thousand supplications!

“To You, who never abandoned us. To You, who, since we left the land of Megara, has never once forsaken us, who has guarded our fate and never shown us His wrath, who upon our ships has never unleashed His storms and who has never raised His terrible trident over our heads. To You, who has calmed the seas and made them merciful and fruitful.

“Salutations to you, Most Magnificent of the Gods, Supreme Ruler of the Seas, and Protector of the People of Megara. With Your grace, we have laid claim to this rich land, surrounded on three sides by this bountiful sea. With Your grace, we have founded this city, this city which rises like a testament to Your Brilliance from the bowels of the earth. With Your grace, we thrive, on land and at sea. We implore You, as the One who loves us as His own children, who has shown us mercy and has protected us, to accept this, our sacrifice, a mark of our loyalty and obedience. We humbly implore You to protect us, to watch over us and to have mercy on us. Grant us, obtain for us, the mercy of the other gods. Your power and Your clemency are without bounds...”

The Deity’s grim gaze remained set on Byzas, the young king of this fledgling kingdom, as though the words the young leader had just uttered had been in vain. The King, unperturbed by the Deity’s indifference, fell to his knees and with utmost respect, bowed his head and presented his salutations. He then arose and, with the determination of a warrior facing his adversary, approached the bull being restrained by the four soldiers. The sunlight gleamed off the King’s sword and entered the bull’s field of vision, as though the sun itself wished to alert the creature to

its impending doom. The animal, already restless at being bound, began to squirm against the ropes, desperate to escape this arena infused with the scent of the sea, from these ropes, from the glimmer of the sword striking its eyes. It struggled to shake off its captors and release itself from its binds but the soldiers clasped the ropes tightly and held firm.

The Deity was looking at King Byzas. Byzas approached the bull. Picking up the King's scent, the animal struggled as its rage began to mount; the soldiers fought to keep it in place. The seer began his incantations, his outstretched hands holding out goblets ready to receive the blood of the sacrifice. Before unsheathing his sword to perform the sacrifice, Byzas paused and gazed at the creature in reverence. The creature stared back at the king in anticipation, as though it sensed what was to come. The king, in the knowledge that neither the Deity nor the sacrifice were to be kept waiting, grasped the hilt of his broad sword and took a step towards the bull. He placed the blade under the creature's head and sliced open its throat. As its blood gushed forth into the seer's bowl, the bull remained motionless for a split second before staggering back in pain. It tried to throw itself forward and release itself from the restraints but was held back by the sturdy arms of the soldiers until, the last reserves of its strength exhausted, it fell onto its trembling knees and, with a holler, collapsed onto its side. The Deity was looking at the King. The sovereign, swayed either by the power of the blood staining his apparel or by some ancient impulse, was now staring not at the Deity but at the beast he had just slain. The bull's eyes were no longer filled with rage; they wore an expression of bewilderment, of anguish. Unrepentant, the King felt the cool serenity of a man who had performed his duty; and yet, somehow, he could not stop staring into the eyes of his sacrifice as they quickly faded away into lifelessness.

The Crescent and the Star

The victim's eyes were staring at Atatürk. He was around fifty years old. His arms were stretched out above his head, and his hands were tied together with nylon cords, the palms joined together as if in prayer. The feet pointed towards the sea and the long, neat, greying hair was splayed out on the marble base of the monument; the beige shirt and the collar of his brown leather jacket were stained with flecks of blood. The thin, grizzly beard obstructed a clearer view of the deep slash to the throat which, I presumed, was most probably the cause of death. Even though I was no stranger to such sights, I still felt queasy looking at the corpse. Maybe it was because it was the break of day or simply age; I don't know. I turned away and looked instead at the sea, the deep blue's texture and depth changing by the second with the onset of morning.

Two battered old ferries, those long-suffering sea hands, passed by, leaving lines of foam on the gently bobbing blue. A pale light and gentle breeze suffused Sarayburnu, a sweet accompaniment to the scent of the sea filling the air; behind me, the trees lining the asphalt avenue leading up to the palace were beginning to come into flower. I was taken back to the old days, the good old days, to the Istanbul of my childhood, to those patchy images, those distant voices, those scenes from now hazy memories... But try as I might to revive them, they'd lost their former clarity.

I suddenly felt someone's eyes on me. Lifting my head, we came face to face as he sized me up in the fading moon-

light. Fading, yet it felt as though it was increasing in luminosity with each passing moment. I felt a cold chill course through my bones. I tore my eyes away from the moon and lifted up my coat collar.

“So what do you think – just a freak coincidence?”

The voice sent a tiny echo around the plaza and then disappeared into the gently rippling sea. It was Ali, staring at the bronze statue of Atatürk. The question wasn’t directed to either of us in particular but it was Zeynep who replied.

“What do you mean ‘coincidence’?”

She seemed anxious, as though she had overlooked an important detail. Ali pointed to the statue with his walkie-talkie, crackling noisily in the morning air.

“The victim being left here in front of the statue.” He turned and looked at me. “What do you say, boss? Was it left here purely by chance?”

I had no idea. I walked up to examine the statue. Dressed in civilian attire, hands on his hips, Mustafa Kemal was staring out at the sea, absorbed in some deep thought. Seeing I had no ready solution, Zeynep spoke up. “Do you mean to say it was a sacrifice to Atatürk?”

“Why not?” Ali’s voice was calm, as though he was discussing some everyday affair. “We have enough lunatics in the country as it is.”

He wasn’t wrong, but I had yet to hear of a person, a human being, being sacrificed to Mustafa Kemal.

“I doubt it,” muttered Zeynep as she began re-examining the body. “I reckon it is purely coincidental. If the victim was going to be a sacrifice, he would have been killed here.” She pointed to the marble base beneath the victim’s head. “Look. No bloodstains. He was brought here after he’d been killed. I don’t think this has anything to do with Atatürk.”

“I’m not so sure,” said Ali, his voice drowned out by the sound of a passing ferry’s horn. The sound, reminiscent of the mournful bellow of a wild beast from ancient times, quickly faded away. “There’s something here,” said Zeynep,

trying to prize something out of the victim's bound hands. "Something metallic... Hold on, here, I think I've got it."

We stared at the object she held between her thumb and forefinger.

"It's a coin," she said, in wonder. "Looks like an antique." Ali examined the engravings on the surface.

"Some inscriptions on the edges, some shape or symbol in the centre... What the hell is this?"

There was no way I could make any of it out without my glasses if our own hawk-eyed Ali was having such difficulty. I reached into my jacket pocket for my glasses but there was no need as Zeynep had already begun to decipher the symbols.

"Isn't this a star? And this, this looks like a moon..." She turned and looked at me in astonishment. "It's a crescent moon, Chief. With a star in the middle." She paused, and then, in a strangely subdued voice, whispered, "Just like our flag."