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#### FOR THE RECORD

AT THE CROSSROADS OF EUROPE AND ASIA, ISTANBUL IN THE 1950s, '60s, AND '70s WAS ALSO A CITY IN THE MIDST OF A PROFOUND TRANSFORMATION FROM TRADITION TO MODERNITY. A REMARKABLE NEW BOOK OF ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPHS BY ARA GÜLER CAPTURES TURKEY'S CULTURAL CAPITAL AS IT WAS THEN—ULTIMATELY REVEALING HOW LITTLE ITS SOUL HAS CHANGED

A FEZ OF THE HEART **Opposite:** Sufi whirlers at the old Galata Mevlevihanesi dervish hall in Beyoglu, 1958.



# ARA

ARA GÜLER IS PERHAPS AS CLOSE AS A PHOTOGRAPHER CAN COME TO BEING A LIVING NATIONAL TREASURE. BORN IN Istanbul's Galatasaray neighborhood in 1928 to a family of Armenian descent, he began his career as a photojournalist in the early 1950s, and before the decade's close was contributing to such international magazines as *Life*, *Paris Match*, and *Stern*. At the urging of his friend Henri Cartier-Bresson—then among the world's most acclaimed photojournalists—he joined the Paris-based Magnum Photos agency, and was soon traveling the world on assignment. But it is Güler's pictures of his hometown, shot mostly in melancholic black and white on a Leica camera, that he is best known for—a body of work that has earned him the nickname “the Eye of Istanbul.”

In the newest collection of his archival photography, *Istanbul* (Editions Didier Millet; [edmbooks.com.sg](http://edmbooks.com.sg); US\$38), images taken during the 1950s through '70s present an evocative portrait of a city where the past is inexorably giving way to modernity. Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk, Turkey's best-known writer abroad, says in his introduction to the 184-page hardbound volume that “Güler's photographs are sublime poetic testaments, showing us every aspect of this city—its people and its views, the power of its past and the contingencies of the present ... It was from these photographs that I learned how to look at Istanbul and to recognize its essence.”

Güler's Istanbul is not entirely indistinguishable from the city of today. The great Ottoman monuments still dominate the skyline. The stone facades along Istiklal Avenue remain much as they were a century ago. And traffic still flows across the Golden Horn via the Galata Bridge, though the cars are no longer the chrome-bumpered American imports captured by Güler's lens.

Yet in *Istanbul*, we see a city that now lives largely in memory alone. Güler describes himself as a “visual historian,” and his photographs are an invaluable record of life in Turkey's cultural capital. They show us a world of horse carts clattering down cobbled streets; of smoke-belching ferries on the Bosphorus; of rickety trams and crumbling mansions; and of ramshackle neighborhoods inhabited by ordinary people—at work, at prayer, at rest in darkly lit coffeehouses—whose somber, careworn faces convey more about the spirit of the city than any postcard vision of the Hagia Sophia or Blue Mosque can. Indeed, expressing his connection with Istanbul through its residents is part of the alchemy of Güler's work. To quote Pamuk again, “The value of these photographs resides not in their period charm, but in the many glimpses they offer into the city's soul.” —DAVID TSE



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HORN OF PLENTY Opposite, from top: Fishermen on the southern bank of the Golden Horn in Eminönü, 1959; a tram crossing the Galata Bridge as it looked in 1956, four decades before being replaced by its current incarnation.



SPAN OF TIME Above: The view from the Galata Bridge in 1955, with the Süleymaniye Mosque in the background. Opposite: Feeding pigeons in Beyazıt Square, an ancient plaza originally laid out during the Roman period.