

OBITUARY



PARIS PIŞMIŞ
1911 – 1999

Paris Pişmiş was born in Istanbul, Turkey, the daughter of an Armenian family of great prestige in its community. Her father's great-grandfather had been the Minister of Finance, and her mother was a niece of the head of the Armenian Church.

Overcoming tradition, Paris became one of the first women to attend the university in her country, enrolling at the Faculty of Sciences in Istanbul. In 1937 she obtained a Ph.D. in Mathematics as a student of Profs. Erwin Finley-Freundlich and R. Von Mises. While a student, she worked as an interpreter and a research assistant to Prof. Freundlich at the Istanbul University Observatory.

Before the beginning of the war, she traveled with a scholarship to the United States to become an assistant astronomer at Harvard College Observatory (1939–1942); she was paid 50 cents an hour, was hired for 30 hours per week, and the rest of the time she was able to work on her own projects. In 1942 Paris married

Félix Recillas, a Mexican astronomy student, with whom she traveled to Mexico to join the recently founded Observatorio Astrofísico de Tonantzintla in Puebla, where she worked until 1946. In 1948 she moved to Mexico City to join the Observatorio Astronómico Nacional at Tacubaya, which was part of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, (UNAM). From there on, she continued working at UNAM, in what is now known as the Instituto de Astronomía. Although there was already an astronomical tradition in Mexico, and there had been several professional astronomers, she was the first formally trained astronomer in the country.

Since the beginning of her career she was interested in teaching, and lectured in Mathematics and Astronomy in different institutions in Istanbul. Very soon after her arrival to Mexico, Paris started informal Astronomy courses for the observatory students. Later in Mexico City, she was able to pursue this activity. In 1955 she started teaching formal astronomy courses for the first time at the University of Mexico, and for many years was a major driving force in the formation of new astronomers. Paris was tutor to several undergraduate students: Arcadio Poveda, Eugenio Mendoza, Enrique Chavira, Eduardo Schmitter, Deborah Dultzin, Alfonso Serrano, Alejandro Ruelas, and Marco Moreno, among others.

Along her more than 50 years of professional activity, Paris published more than one hundred and twenty research articles in different topics of astrophysics, concentrating mainly on problems of galactic structure. She carried out some of the first photometric observations of young stellar clusters and discovered 20 open stellar clusters and 3 globular clusters, studying the effects of interstellar absorption within stellar associations on the observed stellar distribution. Paris was also concerned with possible explanations of the origin and development of spiral structure of galaxies and worked in search of an explanation of the waves of the rotation curves of galaxies based in the concept of different stellar populations. In 1972 she introduced Fabry-Perot interferometry in Mexico for studies of the velocity field of galactic emission nebulae. With this technique and with data obtained at the Observatorio Astronómico Nacional at Tonantzintla and San Pedro Mártir, she studied several nebulae. She also became interested in the morphology and kinematics of mildly active nuclei of galaxies.

Paris was very active in the edition of different astronomical publications. She supervised three volumes of the Astrophotometric Catalogue of Tacubaya (1966) and was editor of IAU Colloquium 33 on Observational Parameters and Dynamical Evolution of Multiple Stars (1975). However, her main contribution was towards the publication of the Mexican astronomical journals: acting as editor of the Boletín de los Observatorios de Tonantzintla y Tacubaya (1966–1973), and of the Revista Mexicana de Astronomía y Astrofísica (from its foundation in 1974).

Paris Pişmiş was a member of different professional organizations, namely the International Astronomical Union (she was the Mexican representative to this organization from 1971), the Royal Astronomical Society, the American Astronomical Society, Academia Mexicana de Ciencias, and Sociedad Mexicana de Física. In all of them she was very active and communicative and we all had the experience, while traveling in other countries, of being asked on how was Paris doing.

Her work was highly appreciated by her colleagues and her contributions were recognized by UNAM, where she became Astronomer Emeritus, was granted an Honoris Causa degree, and the Science Teaching Prize, as well as by the Instituto de Astrofísica, Óptica y Electrónica, where she was granted an Honoris Causa degree.

Her interests were varied; throughout her life she was very devoted to music and painting, as well as to literature. She was fluent in several languages: Armenian, Turkish, English, French, Spanish, and German. One of her distinguishing features was her continued interest in science and on different cultural endeavors.

Paris was always interested in the new scientific ideas and techniques. She was always keen on following all the astrophysical developments; for this she was an avid traveler, and became connected with the different astronomical groups, and followed closely their scientific development. She never missed the seminars at the Instituto de Astronomía; rain or shine Paris was always seating in the first row.

Her influence on her colleagues was noticeable. She was very generous with all those that surrounded her, especially the younger students. She was always very polite and friendly, but rigorous; altogether a very fine example of professionalism to try to follow. The Instituto de Astronomía was indeed marked by her presence for more than 50 years; we are now 80 astronomers in all fields of interests and of them 25% are women. We all recognize that Paris Pişmiş played a very effective role model for women astronomers in Mexico.

She is survived by her daughter and son —Elsa and Sevin— her grandchildren —Claudia, Gabriel, Sonia, and Alina— and her great grandchildren —Coral, Hugo, Diego, David, and Natalia.

We will all miss her deeply.

Silvia Torres-Peimbert