

Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers

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Pişmiş, Paris Marie

Born Istanbul, (Turkey), 1911

Died Mexico City, Mexico, August 1, 1999

Paris Pişmiş was the first formally trained astronomer in Mexico. She was born into an Armenian family living in Istanbul, Turkey. In defiance of her parents' wishes and native tradition, she became one of the first women in Turkey to attend Istanbul University, earning her Ph.D. in mathematics in 1937, under the supervision of Professors Erwin Freundlich, who was then in Istanbul as a refugee from Nazi persecution, and Richard von Mises. Pişmiş worked as a research assistant at the Istanbul University Observatory from 1935 to 1937

Before World War II, Pişmiş traveled to the United States to pursue postdoctoral studies. She worked as an assistant astronomer at the Harvard College Observatory (1938–1942). There, she met astronomers Harlow Shapley, Bart Bok, Sergei Gaposkin, Cecilia Payne Gaposkin, and Donald Menzel. Pişmiş also met Félix Recillas, a Mexican mathematician and astronomy student, who became her husband in 1942. In that year, she moved with him to Mexico and joined the staff of the newly created Tonantzintla Observatory in Puebla, where she worked alongside Guillermo Haro, who became the observatory's director. Pişmiş began teaching astronomy to students of physics and mathematics. Her two children, Elsa and Sevín Recillas, who also became scientists, were born during that time.

After visiting appointments at Princeton University and Yerkes Observatory, Pişmiş moved to Mexico City in 1948 and joined the Tacubaya National Observatory, part of the National Autonomous University of Mexico [UNAM], which is now the Institute of Astronomy. She spent most of her time on research, teaching, and advising students. At UNAM, Pişmiş taught formal courses in astronomy and transmitted her passion for scientific research to many students (e.g., Arcadio Poveda, Eugenio Mendoza, Enrique Chavira, and others).

Pişmiş was also a restless traveler and was engaged with different groups doing astronomical research all over the world. She was always interested in new ideas and new techniques. She was invited to lecture at many scientific institutions and universities, traveling to Istanbul, Heidelberg, Ankara, Byurakan, the Canary Islands, Paris, Buenos Aires, and so forth

Pişmiş made significant contributions to observational and theoretical astronomy. She discovered 20 open stellar clusters and three globular clusters that are named for her. She was among the first to study the kinematic behavior of the gas associated with hot young stars, introducing the Fabry-Perot interferometric technique to Mexico. Pişmiş studied the effects of interstellar absorption on the observed distribution of star clusters. She performed the first photometric observations of young stellar clusters carried out in Mexico. She also worked theoretically to explain the origins of spiral structures in galaxies and the observed galactic velocity fields. Toward the end of her life, Pişmiş became interested in the morphology and

kinematics of the so-called mildly active galactic nuclei. Her scientific output totaled more than 100 research articles

Another of Pişmiş's major contributions was to foster the publication of Mexican astronomical journals. She was a member of the editorial board of the *Revista Mexicana de Astronomía y Astrofísica* from its foundation in 1974 until her death. She was editor of the *Boletín de los Observatorios de Tonantzintla y Tacubaya* from 1966 to 1973. Pişmiş was likewise editor of the proceedings of the International Astronomical Union Colloquium 33 (*Observational Parameters and Dynamical Evolution of Multiple Stars*) in 1975. She supervised the edition of three volumes of the *Astrophotometric Catalogue of Tacubaya* (1966).

Pişmiş was a member of the International Astronomical Union and was appointed Mexico's representative to that organization. She was a member of the Royal Astronomical Society, the American Astronomical Society, and the Academia Mexicana de Ciencias. She received a science teaching award from UNAM, plus honorary doctorates from the same institution and from the Instituto de

Astrofísica, Óptica y Electrónica. Paris's former student, Deborah Dultzin, wrote:

Listening to her lectures, learning to observe with her, and later on, being initiated into the wonderful world of scientific research by her, was an inspiring experience. She spoke about a scientist's life as something wonderful for a woman, and one could see that she really enjoyed it

Pişmiş was interested not only in science, but also in all aspects of culture. Fluent in several languages, she loved literature, painted, played the flute and piano, and was also a good singer and dancer. She inspired admiration in all those who knew her and was a

role model for women in science all over Mexico and beyond. In collaboration with her grandson, Gabriel Cruz-González, Pişmiş prepared an autobiography, *Reminiscences in the Life of Paris Pişmiş: A Woman Astronomer* (1998).

Nidia Irene Morrell

Selected References

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