

Story 836 1974 Tape 19)

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of Erzincan Province

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Legends about Historic Structures of Tercan

There are some historic structures in Tercan which were built back in the Seljuk period. Among them are a caravanserai, a public bath, and a mausoleum. There was also a Seljuk mosque here, but I never saw it that I can remember, for it was destroyed when I was an infant. During the early days of World War I it was bombed by Armenians and completely destroyed. But there was such a historic mosque here once.

All around the inside of that caravanserai there were signs of the zodiac, fourteen or fifteen of them,¹ painted on the walls. Also within the high outer walls were two inns,² each with ten large rooms.³ In these inns were also dungeons.

¹ There are only twelve signs in the Zodiac.

² Livestock were herded within the courtyard, but human accommodations were provided in buildings constructed in the courtyard.

³ There were no individual rooms for singles or couples in most caravanserais. All of the people of a given caravan would usually be housed in one room.

Story

in which to hide ⁴

There is a bath, a public bath, next to the caravanserai. That bath is still in operation. May God bless the one who built it. It has now served the people here for almost a thousand years!

There is a mausoleum across the street from the bath. Mama Hatun had it built for herself. (Mama Hatun's name comes from Kuma Hatun. Kuma refers to the second of two or more wives that a man may have.⁵) Kuma Hatun had both the bath and the mausoleum built

in those times they often put money in the foundations of buildings. They did that believing that if the building ever fell down for lack of maintenance, the people there would find the money and use it to reconstruct the building. According to legend, it was because of the money that the Zodiac signs were placed on the walls of the caravanserai. Messages were placed beneath these signs, which were supposed to be things that the signs were saying. It was as if someone had asked, "Which one of you has the money?"

⁴The narrator speaks specifically of dungeons. It is difficult to know whether he simply misunderstands the purpose of dungeons or whether he is ineffectively suggesting something else.

⁵Hatun means lady. It follows any name it accompanies. It is a standard Turkish word, but it is now growing obsolete. It is apparently a synonym of Hanım, or possibly just a variant form of that word.

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The first one answered, "I don't have it! Such-and-such a one has it!"

Such-and-such a one said, "Not I It is this next one who has it."

"I don't have it!" said the next one. "That one over there has it."

That one over there denied having it and said, "It is the one who has a brain who has it." That is how the legend tells

During World War I the Russians occupied this part of Turkey. The Russians listened to the legend, too, and they were especially interested in the remark "It is the one who has a brain who has it."

Well, it would seem that the one who has a brain would also have money, naturally. One who doesn't have a brain would usually not have money. But the Russians did not think in that way. They concluded this: "That remark about who it is that has the money means one of two possible things. Perhaps it means simply that one who has a brain also has money. But perhaps it means that the money is at the top of the mausoleum of Kuma Hatun across the street." Around the mausoleum was a high wall, like that of a fortress, and on top of the building was a dome. The Russians tore down the topmost part of that dome.

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Before World War I this place had not been seriously damaged. My father was away during much of that war. When he returned, one of the first things that he noticed was that the upper part of the dome of the mausoleum had been torn down. There was a large earthenware pot standing nearby. It was the kind of pot that might have contained the money. I have seen that earthenware pot. It is still kept here.

Possibly they found the money in the dome in this way and that pot may have been the container for the money. They may have opened the dome, seen the jar, and taken the money from it. At least, that is the legend about what happened to the money.