

Story 1321 (1985 Tape 4)

Narrator: Kebiret Akdoğan

Location: Fındıcak mahalle of  
Yakamusaluklar  
village, /kaza not  
identified/,  
Bolu Province

At the tomb of local  
saint Karaca Ahmet

Date: January 26, 1985

Saint Karaca Ahmet of Yakamusaluklar Village--II

Here lies, as you already know, the body of a dede.<sup>1</sup>

That dede once owned the property upon which his tomb now stands, and this property is involved in one of the best-known stories about him. He used to cultivate this land, but he do with the help of only one ox, a dark ox. When he was ready to plow or do other work in his field, the dede called upon a wild deer to come and serve as the teammate of his ox. He called that deer his ox, and the deer behaved like an ox. When he arrived at this field from his home in the village, Karaca Ahmet used to say, "O my ox!" As soon as he said that, the deer would come down from the mountain to be yoked with the real ox. Every evening he said, "All right, my ox!" and released the deer from the yoke

While this was going on, the villagers of that ancient

<sup>1</sup>Dede, literally, means grandfather or old man. By extension, however, it may also mean dervish (monklike religious ascetic), often pictured as being old and whitebearded. Many a

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*Jealousy*

time became very curious about the farm work of this dede. They were also very jealous of his ability to accomplish more with his one ox than they could do with teams or even double teams of oxen. They said among themselves, "He has plowed, harrowed, and sown his field already, and he has done all of this with only one ox. We work with as many as two or three or even four yoke of oxen, and yet we are not finished with our spring planting. How can this man manage to do what he does?" When they discovered that it was a very unusual deer made it possible for him to accomplish so much, they shot that deer--tock, tock!

When Karaca Ahmet discovered what the villagers had done, he put a curse on them. He said, "I have requested Allah to prevent your village from growing beyond seven households." For a long time there were only seven houses in this village. More recently there were eleven houses, and now there are fourteen or fifteen, but there are really no more than seven families, for about half of those fourteen or fifteen houses are unoccupied. They are empty.

/Ahmet Uysal: "Lady,<sup>2</sup> I have been told that the older

dervish and other religious mystic is referred to as a dede in Turkish folktales.

<sup>2</sup>The word used here is hanım, which may mean lady or

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residents of this village do not eat fish. Do you eat fish?"

Kebiret Akdoğan: "For a long while I did not, but I do now

Ahmet Uysal: "How was that?"<sup>7</sup>

Throughout my early life I did not eat fish at all. But when I went to Germany<sup>3</sup> I was forced to eat fish in order to survive. I could not eat their pork in Germany, and so I found it necessary to eat fish. After I returned from Germany, I continued to eat fish, and I still do.

/Ahmet Uysal: "Why was it that people in this village did not eat fish?

Kebiret Akdoğan: "It was because of an order given to them by the dede buried here."<sup>7</sup>

Once this dede was performing his prayer service on a prayer rug that was floating on the water. While he was praying, some fish on the surface of the water swam before him and for a moment blocked his gaze toward Mecca and in that way violated the purity of his prayer.

/Ahmet Uysal: "Did that incident take place on the sea?"

Kebiret Akdoğan: "No, it happened on a lake here which is called My Dede Lake.

which may simply be a term of respect for an older woman.

<sup>3</sup>The family of this woman was among the great many laborers who went to Germany to work between 1960 and 1990.

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Unidentified villager in audience: "No! It took place at sea.

Where is there a lake around here?"

Kebiret Akdoğan: "Yes, there was such a lake, but its size now is much smaller than it was in earlier times.

Same unidentified villager "This holy man was coming home across the sea, but he stopped to pray before he got here."

Second unidentified villager: "Yes, he was on his way here from Mecca, but he did not reach land before it was time for the morning prayer service. At exactly the time required for the service, he spread his rug on the sea, stood upon the rug, and said, 'Allahu ekber.'<sup>4</sup> It was then, according to our elders, that the fish passed in front of him. He later said, Let all of my descendants avoid eating fish. Any of them who eat fish will be denied any of my intercession with Allah in their behalf.'"

<sup>4</sup>"God is great, the only one." This is always the first utterance in the Moslem prayer service.

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Kebiret Akdoğan: "That is not the way the account was given to me. In Our Dede Lake there were once plenty of fish, as well as frogs and turtles. That lake still exists, and in the hot weather of summer farm animals often lie in the shallow water along its edge. Where would our holy man have found the sea around here? I do not know which account is correct, but there has been a book written about this saint, and that may have the correct information."

Ahmet Uysal: "I shall ask Salih Zelir<sup>5</sup> about that book."

Kebiret Akdoğan: "The water of this village is important for its medicinal qualities."

Ahmet Uysal: "Tell us about that."<sup>7</sup>

My maternal aunt used to treat people with this water when they came to the saint's tomb because of some illness (It was this woman's branch of the family that inherited this property, and it is they who own it at present.) But after my aunt had been treating the ill here for some time, she left the village to be married. When she returned, she was

<sup>5</sup>Unidentified person but obviously known to those involved in the discussion.

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considered almost a stranger, and so I was asked to do the work which she had formerly done. Later, when that aunt was about to die, she transferred her spells and healing power to me. Just before she died, she said to me, 'I transfer of my skill to you.'<sup>6</sup>

I am especially effective in curing skin diseases. If someone has pimples and rash from erysipelas,<sup>7</sup> I can give relief to that person. As my aunt used to do, I recite prayers, put local water on the person's skin, and blow upon it.<sup>8</sup> I also lay a knife on the swollen places and pretend to be cutting off the skin there.<sup>9</sup> I did not really choose to do this work, but I was given that work, and when people come here with illness, I am obligated to cure them.

<sup>6</sup>Literally, the aunt said, "I transfer all my hand to you."

<sup>7</sup>The Turkish word used for this disease by the narrator is bezeleme, apparently a local dialect word.

<sup>8</sup>Blowing upon a person or object in order to modify it in some way is an ancient practice common in Turkey. Sometimes religious faith healers blow prayers toward a patient. "Blowers" were considered by many to be quacks or exploiters of the gullible. As a result, one of the reform bills guided through the parliament by Atatürk during the reform years of the 1920s and 1930s strictly prohibited the practice of "blowing."

<sup>9</sup>This is clearly sympathetic magic of the homeopathic kind.