

Story 1679 (1962 Tape erased on field trip) Narrator: Kemal Taşcıoğlu, gardener

Location: Gökçedere village, Yalova kaza, Kocaeli Province (sometimes called İzmit Province)

Date: May 1962

The Kadı¹ and the Forty Witnesses

Once a rich ağa² decided to take a case to court. Wanting badly to win this case, the ağa sent a large tray of baklava³ to the kadı. There were forty pieces of baklava on the tray, and beneath each piece was a gold coin.

The kadı's clerk took the tray of baklava from the

¹A judge of Moslem canonical law in pre-Republican Turkey. Anecdotes about them frequently concern their vulnerability to bribery.

²An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

³A favorite pastry in Turkey, made with many layers of extremely thin dough. After the pastry has been baked, honey is poured into the bottom of the pan. The honey then rises into the pastry by wicking action.

Story 1679

servant of the ağa and carried it upstairs to the kadı. On the way up, the clerk was so tempted by the delicious aroma of the pastry that he could not resist eating a piece of it. Of course, he discovered the gold piece beneath the pastry, and he put this in his pocket. In all, he ate four pieces of baklava and pocketed the four coins placed beneath them.

The next day was the hearing for the ağa's case, and the judge summoned the witnesses for both sides. When he saw no witnesses for the ağa, he asked, "Ağa, where are your witnesses?"

"Efendi,⁴ I sent forty witnesses to you yesterday to be examined.

"Ah, yes, I remember now," said the kadı, "but you are mistaken about the number. There were only thirty-six.

The clerk, who had been listening to this conversation realized that his theft had been discovered. He said, "I beg your pardon, kadı efendi, but the other four witnesses were too old and feeble to climb the stairs. I took their evidence downstairs, and I shall account to you for them afterwards."

⁴A mild honorific, comparable to Sir, it usually follows a first name: Hasan Efendi. At one time it was used to show respect to distinguished people, but it has become so devaluated in the twentieth century that it now is used only for servants and children.