

Story 835 1974 Tape 19)

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Location: Tercan, a kaza town in
Erzincan Province

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The Bridge Built by Mama Hatun

This is a story which I heard from my grandfather. There is a bridge here that dates from Akkoyunlu times.¹ It was built according to specifications given by Mama Hatun.²

When she had decided where she wanted the bridge and how she wanted it built, she invited the construction supervisors to her palace for dinner in order to explain to them just exactly what she wanted done. She was talking with these men when one of the slave girls serving dinner tipped over a lamp and spilled the oil from it. This angered Mama Hatun.

The construction supervisors all looked at each other. They said to each other, "If this woman becomes so angry over the spilling of a little oil, how will we ever be able to

¹The Akkoyunlar (White Rams) Turkish tribe founded one of the several short-lived dynasties in Turkey and Iran in the period between the fall of the Seljuk Empire in the mid-thirteenth century and the consolidation of the Ottoman Empire.

²In Tale 836 the narrator explains that Mama derives from kuma, a standard Turkish word meaning a fellow wife in a polygamous household--hence probably a second or third wife here. Hatun is also a standard Turkish word, though now almost obsolete. It means lady, and it follows whatever name it appears with. It is apparently a synonym of hanım, or possibly a variant form of that word.

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please her in the building of a large bridge?" Mama Hatun overheard this remark

In the morning Mama Hatun said to these construction supervisors, "Let us go to the site where I want the bridge built." According to my grandfather's account, she secretly took along a small bag of gold with her when she went. They all went to the bridge site

When they reached the place, she said, "I'll show you now where I want each of the columns supporting the bridge placed. After their men had dug the holes for the foundations of these columns, she secretly put twenty or thirty pieces of gold in the footing for each column. She did this so that if the bridge ever had to be rebuilt, there would be money found in the foundation to finance that reconstruction

Although the work proceeded well that first day, the men were still concerned about the way in which Mama Hatun had reacted to the slave girl's spilling of oil from a lamp the night before. Mama Hatun noticed how ill at ease they seemed to be, and so she asked them, "Why is it that you seem disturbed and upset today?" When they told her the cause of their anxiety, she said, "You do not understand that situation. That was the second time that that particular slave girl had humiliated me in the presence of strangers by tipping over a lamp and spilling oil. Such a mess is a reflection upon my

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honor.

Reassured somewhat by this explanation, the workmen resumed construction the next day and soon had the bridge completed.

Dr. Ahmet Uysal: Then there really is money buried in the columns?

Durmaz: It is more underneath the columns than inside of them. She hid the money there when she was telling them where to place the columns.

Uysal: Has anyone ever tried to get that gold?

Durmaz: Not as far as I know