

Story 1400 (1989 Tape 6)

Narrator: Memduh Derin, 59
graduate of a
technical school

Location: Konya, Konya Province

Date: May 1989

Tahip Ağa¹-Dead or Alive?

One day Tahip Ağa attended a funeral. In the old days the coffin² was not carried to the cemetery by a hearse but by friends of the dead person. Four men placed the coffin on their shoulders, one on each corner, and carried it from the home of the dead person to the cemetery. If the distance was very great, the four pallbearers would be relieved by four other pallbearers after a while. Sometimes they might have to change pallbearers two or three times.

Tahip Ağa was selected to be one of the pallbearers at the funeral I am telling you about. The people in the funeral procession decided to play a trick on him. When the time came to relieve the first four pallbearers, only three of them were

¹An 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.

²The word coffin here probably has a different meaning

Story 1400

actually replaced. No one replaced Tahip Ağa. The pallbearers were replaced a second and a third time, but no one replaced Tahip Ağa. He carried one corner of the coffin for the entire trip to the cemetery. By the time he reached the cemetery Tahip Ağa was completely exhausted. Turning to the corpse in the coffin, he said, "You scoundrel! Are you the dead one or am I?"

from what it would have in another culture. Most Moslems are not buried in coffins; the shrouded body is placed directly into the earth. Behind the mosque of each village, however, is a lidless wooden box in which the corpse is transported to the cemetery; it is then returned to the mosque for the next funeral. Most of these are not carried on shoulders. Most of them have a handle on each corner. As a result of these handles, the coffin is often referred to as "the four-armed one."