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Story 2203 (Collected by Ahmet Uysal and transcribed from tape of Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi) Narrator: Yusuf Mustafaoğlu
Location: Çelikgürü village, Biga kaza, Çanakkale Province
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The Fox as Judge

Once there was and once there wasn't, a long time ago,¹ a fire broke out in a forest far from here. Trying to escape the flames, a snake climbed up a tree which had not yet begun to burn. But after a short while, that tree also began to burn, and when that happened, the snake began to scream. At that same time Moses was picking his way carefully through that burning forest, and he heard the cries of snake. Moses had a magic staff which could be stretched out to any distance he wished. Moses extended that rod to the snake, and that poor creature slithered down that staff to safety.

A few days later the ungrateful snake encountered Moses again. He said to Moses, "I am going to eat you."

"Why?" asked Moses. "Did I not just recently save your life?"

"My Creator controls both my life and my death. You

¹This is the beginning of a formulaic opening for many Turkish folktales. It often continues as a nonsensical jingle. Such an introductory passage is called a tekerleme.

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had no right to save my life, and as punishment for your action, I am going to devour you."

"In that case," answered Moses, "let us go and get the opinions of three judges about this matter. If they find your decision acceptable, then you may go ahead and eat

The snake agreed with this proposal, and the two of them searched for someone to serve as judge. The first creature they encountered was an ox. Moses asked the ox, "Would you be willing to serve as a judge to settle a conflict between this snake and me?"

"Yes, I would," answered the ox.

"I saved the life of this snake. Instead of being grateful to me, this snake condemned me for interfering with the will of God. He wishes to eat me as punishment for my sin. What is your opinion about this matter?"

"Are you not a member of the unjust race of Adam? Your race has burdened me with heavy loads and made my body ache. I should applaud his eating you!"

They continued on their way and soon met a horse. Moses said, "Oh, horse, would you be willing to serve as judge to settle a conflict between this snake and me?"

"Yes, I would."

"I saved the life of this snake. Instead of being grateful to me, this snake condemned me for interfering with

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will of God. He wishes to eat me as punishment for my sin. What is your opinion about this matter?"

"Are you not a human being? Haven't your people ridden me mercilessly until my back was sore and my legs exhausted? As far as I am concerned, the snake would deserve praise for eating you!"

Shortly after this, the contenders came upon a fox. Moses asked the fox, "Would you be willing to serve as a judge to settle a conflict between this snake and me?"

"Yes, I would."

"I saved the life of this snake. Instead of being grateful to me, this snake condemned me for interfering with the will of God. He wishes to eat me as punishment for my sin. What is your opinion about this matter?"

The fox responded, "I cannot consider evidence from two contenders at the same time. Why don't you stand some distance apart so that I can speak privately with each of you?" The snake moved into a corner of the room, uncoiled itself, and waited for its turn to testify.

The fox then winked at Moses and said, "Now that the snake is stretched out and helpless, strike his neck sharply with your staff." Moses followed this advice and killed the snake. Since then foxes have always been con-

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sidered very wise. Judges wear gowns with red collars,
but they should instead have their collars lined with
fox fur.