

Story #322 Tape #10, Summer 1970) Narrator: Huseyn Kılıç Arslan,
teacher at Akça Bey
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Ümmü Kemal versus the Padishah

A padishah once had a hoca hanged because he misinterpreted a passage in the Koran while he was preaching in the mosque. The hoca made a complaint against the padishah before Allah, and His Reverence the Caliph Ali¹ appeared and slapped the padishah very hard on the back, just between the shoulder blades. No one could straighten out the padishah's back after that, and it ached him terribly. The padishah went here and he went there for help, but no one could provide the remedy.

There was at that time a saint named Ümmü Kemal² living in the Province of Bolu.³ The padishah was told that this saint was the only one who could cure him. He therefore sent gendarmes

¹ Here Caliph Ali, most important of Mohammed's immediate successors, acts in the capacity of one of God's angels sent on missions to earth, such as Israfel or Gabriel. This is an unusual role for Ali.

² Ümmü here means illiterate; it is spelled in several ways, Ümmü and Ümmî being common spellings.

³ As becomes clear just below, the place in Bolu is the village of Tekke, where Ümmü Kemal is buried. Tekke is the monastery of a dervish or school of dervishes, and the village apparently took its name from a religious order there.

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and policemen⁴ to Ümmü Kemal, but the saint refused to go to the padishah. Finally the padishah decided that he would go to Ümmü Kemal.

At the time the padishah was approaching the saint's village, Ümmü Kemal was saying his prayers. He took his sheepskin prayer rug and spread it on the surface of the lake,⁵ where it floated. He then climbed on the rug and started to pray. The padishah was amazed when he saw this.

The padishah had taken with him a company of soldiers. They placed one of the soldiers in a coffin, as if he were dead, and they pretended that they were going to hold ^{Funeral} burial ceremonies for this dead soldier. The person in the coffin, however, was alive.

The padishah's group reached the village of Tekke where they held the mock funeral ceremony. They invited Ümmü Kemal to conduct the funeral services.

When the padishah reached the village, Ümmü Kemal told the villagers, "Don't ever take any of the money that the padishah will throw about on the ground." But the people of that village have always been known to be very greedy, and they have no scruples at all about demanding money even from strangers. Whenever I [the narrator of the tale] go to that village they even ask me for money, just as they do from everyone else. Ümmü Kemal put a curse on the people of that village. A native of that village

⁴ Gendarmes and policemen are, obviously, anachronisms in this tale.

⁵ Although not mentioned in the narration here, the lake is the Reşadiyeh Lake.

would demand money even if he had the government treasury at his disposal. I have gone there three times, and the people have always begged from me. Both the wise and the foolish worship money there.⁶

The coffin was set down and he came to conduct the service. "Are we going to conduct this service for a dead man or for a live man?" Ümmü Kemal asked.

They said to him, "Is there any sense in asking such a question? Can a funeral service be conducted for a live man?"

After the service was completed, the people there opened the coffin and found that the man was indeed dead.

[What follows is another incident in the life of Ümmü Kemal, which the narrator added, simply by way of information about the saint, not as a separate tale.]

Ümmü Kemal used to travel to Mecca every morning and attend the morning prayer service there.⁷ One morning after he returned, he lay prone, with his face on the ground, weeping. His son came to him and said, "Father, you have never done this before. What has happened to you?"

⁶These are interpolated comments of the narrator. Whether or not they should somehow have been integrated into the story, we do not know. Perhaps a variant will be found in which this material is more functional artistically.

⁷This is a common belief about saints, the belief that they can transport themselves anywhere at great speed. Mecca is a great way from this part of Turkey, and the pilgrimage in older times required several weeks. This practice of traveling daily to Mecca for prayers is told in connection with Üftade of Bursa.

Son," he answered, "I had a friend in such-and-such a village with whom I used to pray every morning at Mecca. It was his will that when he failed I should go to his village for his funeral, for it would be a sign that he was dead. He did not appear at Mecca this morning, and so I went to his village and attended his funeral. But when I arrived I saw that he was on the tenesir⁸ in the form of a donkey. How will I appear on the tenesir?"⁹

His son said, "Father, when you two were together, you did not touch your forehead to the ground at Mecca, but I pushed your head down to the ground. If you feel your neck, you will see I mean.

Ümmü Kemal felt his neck and discovered that what his son had said was true. He was greatly relieved by this discovery.¹⁰

⁸The tenesir is the table upon which the corpse is given a ritual bathing before being wrapped in cloth for burial. In villages it is part of the village property, kept, along with the community coffin, in a small room outside the mosque. In towns and cities it is the property of the undertaker.

⁹At the time of this ritual ablution and just before burial, the dead person is examined by spirits to determine his fitness for the eternal life. He is quizzed on points of Moslem faith. Probably someone's appearance as a donkey, or something other than his normal self, is not seen by ordinary mortals but only by immortals and saints, holy men with power to see beyond this world.

¹⁰This episode does not, without some further explanation, make any sense. Who is the son that he would know more than the celebrated saint? Why should a holy man have failed to carry out the proper form in praying? What mark or sign is there on his neck that has meaning here? Are there data omitted in our translation