

Story 1085 (1976 Tape 28)

Narrator: Ali Çiftçi

Location: Çıkırıkçı village,
Sarıkaya kaza, Yozgat
Province

Date: December 31, 1976

Behlül Dane¹ as Merchant

Behlül Dane was the half-brother of Harun Reşit. They lived together for a while, and during that period, Behlül went to his brother and said, "Several merchants from this city are going to İstanbul to buy goods. Give me some money so that I can accompany them and also buy some goods there." Harun Reşit gave him a good quantity of money.

In İstanbul the merchants bought various kinds of goods and had them loaded on a camel caravan for the return trip. Behlül Dane bought wheat and threw it all into the sea. When it was time for him to go, he took his pouch in his hands and jumped into the sea. There he shouted, "O friends, friends who ate the wheat that I delivered to you, come now and pay me for that wheat." The people of the sea² brought

¹Behlül Dane is largely a legendary figure in the Moslem past of the Abbassid Period. Whether there is any historicity to this figure is questionable, though until the 18th century there was a grave at Baghdad that was supposedly his. He was said to be the mad half-brother of Harun Reşit (Haroun al-Raschid), greatest of the Abbassid caliphs, who flourished around 800. There was method in his "madness," for his antic behavior was a "cover" for his role as critic and satirist of worldliness of the powerful and wealthy--notably the caliph himself. At times he was, like the Jewish schlemihl, a saintly fool.

²Fish.

Story 1085

such jewels as diamonds and emeralds and put them in the pouch ³

When he arrived back in Baghdad, Behlül Dane went to the palace and spread the contents of his pouch upon a carpet. Harun Reşit saw upon the carpet gold, pearls, diamonds, and other priceless jewels. Selecting a small portion of the most valuable of these, he took them to a money changer in order to convert them into cash. But the jewels were so valuable that the money changers could not pay him what they were worth.

Some time later the merchants announced that they were going to Syria to buy goods there. Going again to Harun Reşit, Behlül Dane said, "Brother, give me some money so that I can go to Syria with the merchants and buy more goods."

In Syria the merchants bought several kinds of goods and loaded them on camels for the return trip. Behlül, on the other hand, bought several trees. Heaping them up, he burned these trees to ashes. Then he filled his pouch with these ashes.

³Behlül had contact with the spiritual world, and he had the power to communicate with and command the assistance of the creatures and forces of nature.

Story 1085

Harun Reşit was eagerly awaiting the return of his brother. When Behlül arrived back at the palace, Harun Reşit greeted him and held out a golden bowl to him. When Behlül Dane emptied the contents of his pouch into the bowl, Harun Reşit looked at the ashes and asked, "What is this?"

Behlül Dane answered, "Brother, it will only be ashes that will close your eyes to the lure of wealth."⁴

⁴Ashes here, as in many other contexts, symbolize death.