

Story #621 (1963, Tape #5)

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Cingözoğlu and His Avşar Companions

This story goes back to the days when the Avşar tribe¹ was engaged in raiding, to the days of marauding. The route of the caravans that went back and forth between Istanbul and Baghdad passed very close to where we are now. You can still see traces of the road.

6-8 Well, once the Avşar leader Cingözoğlu waited in ambush near an inn—which is still standing, by a dry stream called Kuruçay. They were waiting to capture a caravan. When the caravan came along, and the caravan driver recognized Cingözoğlu as an Avşar, he said to him, "You may capture this caravan, but it is too big for you to get away with. This caravan belongs to Abdurrahman Pasha."² When he was told that this caravan was owned by Abdurrahman Pasha and that he should release the captured men, Cingözoğlu said, "What if these men do belong

¹The Avşars were among the original twenty-four oğuz (Turkoman) that settled in Asia Minor, now Turkey. They remained nomadic much longer than most of the tribes, and to this day [1983] many of them are still semi-nomadic, living in a village only during the winter but moving their flocks to yaylas during the spring, summer and early fall seasons. Once the great majority of Turks in Asia Minor became sedentary, the Avşars posed a serious problem, for nomadic values and life-style are very different from sedentary values and life-style. The Ottoman government moved Avşar groups to new locations several times, once to make room for the Circassians, who had been converted to Islam in the 17th century and who fled into Turkey in the 1860 to escape Russian conquest. Considering themselves a wronged people

²An Ottoman military governor

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to Abdurrahman Pasha? If he is Abdurrahman, well, I am Cingözoğlu." And so he took the whole caravan and departed. After destroying the caravan, plundering goods and animals, Cingözoğlu took his family and his band and moved to the Kozan region in Adana Province. They lived there for some time, and then they moved up to Maraş.

Abdurrahman Pasha had been receiving reports that some tribe had settled near Maraş. He sent some of his men to determine who they were. When these men reached the tents of Cingözoğlu, they said, "Selâmüneleyküm," "Aleyküm selâm,"³ Cingözoğlu replied.

After some small talk, the visitors asked, "What is your trade? Where do you come from?"

"Well, I am Cingözoğlu of the Avşar tribe."

After hearing this, Abdurrahman Pasha's men soon took leave and returned to their pasha. They reported to him, "It is Cingözoğlu of the Avşar tribe who has settled at that place near Maraş."

"Go at once and arrest that man and bring him to me," said Abdurrahman Pasha. He knew, of course, who it was who had sacked and plundered his caravan. Cingözoğlu's wife had been afraid of this, and just as soon as the pasha's men had ended their visit to the Avşar tents, she went to Cingözoğlu and asked, "Why did you tell them that you are Cingözoğlu? You know that you once robbed his caravan, and now you have come right into his lap. They will come and arrest you in the

³The traditional Moslem exchange between strangers: "Peace be unto you," and "The same peace be unto you."

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morning, and your family will be "eaten" by mosquitoes."⁴

"Well," said Cingözoğlu, "let the pasha do as he knows best."

In the morning troops arrived and said, "Cingözoğlu, come along with us. Pasha wants you." So, he went with them.

When they arrived at his camp, Abdurrahman Pasha said, "Oh, Cingözoğlu, come over here. Why did you rob my caravan so effectively and now fall so easily into my hands? Why is it that you came and settled so close to us?"

"Efendi, what else could I do? When the son gets hungry, he first comes to eat his father's food. What could we have done? Should we have starved before living upon your goods?"

"Such excuses will not save you, Cingözoğlu." But it so happened that the pasha had wanted to communicate with the Avşar tribe, for there was an Avşar girl that he wanted.⁵ He continued speaking to Cingözoğlu, "I have an order for you, and you must carry it out. If you do not, I shall kill you. We are going to start a song. I shall sing the first part of each line, and then you must complete the line. If you fail to do this, I shall kill you."

Singing Contest

*Truly
Strong*

"Very well."

The pasha sang, "Two flamingoes began to sing. . ."

Cingözoğlu added, "Why do you add to my sorrow? In the morning

⁴"Eaten" here literally, but it means "preyed upon" by little men, not men of the heroic type like the Avşars.

⁵We are not certain about the accuracy of this sentence. Mechanical troubles in the taping had resulted in a tape speed about halfway between 3.75 i.p.s. and 7.5 i.p.s. The sentence was, therefore, very difficult to transcribe precisely.

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they will have migrated."

This went on and on and on, the pasha giving the first part of the verse and Cingözoğlu completing it. When Cingözoğlu had thus been able to complete all these lines, Abdurrahman Pasha said, "Well done, Cingözoğlu. You have saved yourself. How do you feel now?" And then the pasha told his men to give to Cingözoğlu whatever he wanted to eat.⁶

At a time when the Circassians had come into Turkey from Caucasia and had been settled [by the Ottoman government] in the Pinarbaşı area and were often at war with the Avşars, there were three Circassians who had gone to the Adana region to work. One of these Circassians belonged to the Kabartay tribe, ^{- of Circassians} one to the Abaza tribe, ^{- of Circassians} and the third to the Hatika tribe. ^{7 - of Circassians} An Avşar man saw these three Circassians coming along the road, and he hid himself in the bushes at the side of the road to allow them to pass. When the three Circassians came abreast of where the Avşar was hiding, the one from the Hatika tribe said, "I can deal with a whole army single-handed." The one from the Abaza tribe said, "I can deal with two whole armies single-handed. And the one from the Kabartay tribe said, "I can handle three whole armies single-handed."

⁶There is clearly a break in the narrative here. What follows is a type of episode that is very common in Avşar folk literature: a scene which shows the Avşars as much more brave or manly than their worst enemies in the nineteenth century, the Circassians.

⁷There are clearly items of historicity in most Avşar stories. There are three divisions of Circassians: the Kabarda, those of the Karachay area, and the Adyge tribe.

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The Avşar listened to all of this and decided to see if these Circassians were really as bold as they claimed to be. He stretched forth the stick he was carrying and said, "Surrender! Don't move!"

The Circassians fled at once. There was a well nearby, and the Hatika Circassian hid himself in that well. The Abaza Circassian climbed up a tall poplar tree. And the Kabartay Circassian hid himself beneath a donkey.

Then the Avşar went to the well, he looked down and saw the Circassian hidden there. He said, "What are you doing down there? Come out!"

The Circassian said, "I am a frog who has been living in this well for forty years."

The Avşar then looked up into the poplar tree. He called, "What are you doing up there? Come down!"

The Circassian answered, "I am a crow who has lived in this poplar tree for forty years."

When the Avşar looked beneath the donkey, that Circassian said, "I am the foal⁸ of this donkey, and I have been so for forty years."

The Avşar noticed that this was "uncle donkey," ^{as euphemism for male donkey} and he asked, "How can you be the foal of a male donkey?"

"Well, my mother died, and I have been cared for by my father."

At that moment, the foal started braying, the crow started crowing, and the frog started croaking.

⁸ Eşek (donkey) is an abusive or, at best, indelicate word in Turkish, and one always precedes it apologetically with "Excuse me," lest any listener take offense at it or interpret it as applicable to himself. The same is true of the word sipa (donkey foal).