

Story 1887 (1985 Tape 4)

Narrators: Ahmet Uysal and
several unidentified
men

Location: Community pasture of
Yakamuskulklar village
(kaza unidentified),
Bolu Province

Date: January 26, 1985

Treasure-Hunting Narratives: A Colloquy¹

Ahmet Uysal: "I have heard that there are supposed to be many
treasures buried in this area. Someone once told me
that there was a map which showed where one of
these treasures was buried."²

¹Tales of buried treasure are almost ubiquitous, but one must wonder if any other land could have more than Turkey does. Known as a Crossroad of Empire, Turkey has been the center of more than a dozen civilizations and a score of cultures, and the number of peoples who have briefly or lengthily lived there over the past 6,000 years is a big factor here. As a succession of new invaders entered Turkey, earlier residents took measures to protect themselves and their wealth. Whether they fled elsewhere or remained at home, they often buried their money, jewels, and other valuables, planning to unearth them at a later and safer time for such recovery. Thus many of the purported underground hoards are said to be Hittite, Phrygian, Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Byzantine. Some treasures of such origins have actually been unearthed, and occasionally, however rarely, they are still being unearthed. Every such "find" triggers thousands of hopes, dreams, and fantasies of yet other buried treasures.

²Several of the contributions that Ahmet Uysal makes to this colloquy can be found in his earlier study: "Turkish Treasure Lore: Traditions and Practices," International Folklore Review, 3 (1983), 135-42.

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Villager:³ “It was said that that map was fastened to the back of a snake, but none of us here has ever seen it.”

Ahmet Uysal: “A snake is sometimes one of the symbols used to indicate where treasure is supposed to be buried. Are there other treasure symbols known around here?”

Villager: “We do not know about symbols. What are symbols?”

Ahmet Uysal: “Well, are there any signs or marks or words written about where treasure is buried?”

Villager: “There is a rock over there on the upper side of the village which is called ‘bath rock.’”

Ahmet Uysal: “Are there any markings on that rock?”

Villager: “Yes, there are. There is a larger rock alongside it, and after the treasure hunters had been digging there, the larger rock fell on ‘bath rock’ and drove it into the ground farther.”

Ahmet Uysal: “Then they have already dug beneath those two rocks to search for treasure?”

³Villager here refers to any discussant other than Ahmet Uysal. Judging from the voices on the tape, one concludes there were 6-8 villagers.

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Villager: “Yes, they searched all around that place. We have a yayla⁴ two kilometers farther up that hillside. A company came here to help us build a road up to that yayla, and with their equipment they moved the ‘bath rock’ aside. As I said, it settled farther into the ground. There was something written on that rock in a foreign language. We tried to find someone who could interpret what was said on that rock.”

Ahmet Uysal: “Can you still see writing on that rock?”

Villager: “Yes, some can still be seen.

Ahmet Uysal: “What other signs of treasure do they look for here? Do treasure hunters ever look for a set of stairs going down into the ground?”

Villager: “Over around Yığılca⁵ there is supposed to be a set of stairs leading down into the earth where gold is buried.”

⁴A yayla is a summer pasture on a mountainside. Since such a place is not continuously grazed, it offers much more grass than the overworked village pasture lot. Pasturage fees are low or nonexistent in such otherwise unused upland areas.

⁵A kaza town approximately 25 kilometers northwest of Bolu, capital of Bolu Province.

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Ahmet Uysal: “Another sign that treasure hunters look for is a picture of a mother hen with one chick. This is usually said to be carved into a rock.”

Villager: “Such a sign is searched for here in creek beds. It was seen by someone just once on this mountainside. Many others have looked for it, but it was never seen again.”

Ahmet Uysal: “There is another account of a hen with seven chicks, and still another which says she has nine chicks.”

Villager: “Oh! Oh! Oh! Most of us here have never seen even the hen with one chick!”

Ahmet Uysal: “What about the lame bear? Does anyone here know of a stone or metal statue of a lame bear which stands guard over a treasure deep down in the ground?”

Villager: “Yes, and for awhile there was an extensive search for a sighting of that bear around Aladağ Mountain.⁶ But after awhile the searchers lost hope of finding it. If you are a true treasure hunter, you will never give up hope.”

⁶Dağ means mountain, and many a peak in Turkic lands is called Aladağ.

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Ahmet Uysal: “If treasure hunters have never actually seen that bear, how do they know to look for it? Have they seen it in their dreams?”

Aged Villager: “We all search blindfolded, without any real evidence.

Young Villager: “Teacher,⁷ listen to what this old man has to say. Sir, please tell this teacher about a treasure spy connected with this area but whom you met while you were in military service.”

Aged Villager: “That is an old story that is worn out. Besides, the man is now dead and gone.”

[Although the aged villager here declines to tell his story about the detection of a treasure “spy,” it is told for him later in this colloquy by a younger villager.]

Ahmet Uysal: “Well, is there anyone in this area who claims to have a map showing where treasure is buried?”

⁷The villager here uses the Turkish word hoca. Today hoca designates a Muslim preacher and religious leader. In pre-Republican times a hoca was also a teacher, for then education was the responsibility of the clergy. Although teachers on all levels now are products of secular training institutions, they are still often referred to as hoca. This is more a sentimental gesture than an accurate labeling. Ahmet Uysal was a university professor throughout his long career, and so he was respectfully called hoca by his students and by rural people.

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Aged Villager: “No, there is not.”

Ahmet Uysal: “Is there anyone in this area who has a mechanical instrument of some kind that can detect treasure in the ground?”

Aged Villager: “If we had such an instrument, it would be much easier for us to search. However, such instruments are very expensive and very heavy.”

Ahmet Uysal: “I own such an instrument, but do not have it with me. I shall bring it with me the next time come here. It was brought to me from America.”⁸

Villager: “My teacher, are you serious about this instrument?”

Ahmet Uysal: “Yes, I am. There really are such instruments. There really are maps that are said to show where treasures are located. There are also supposed to be 366 symbols or signs indicating where you should dig for treasure. Some people search for what is called Manol treasure, and others search for Lefter treasure.”⁹

⁸This was taken to Ahmet Uysal by Warren Walker in 1970. It was loaned to the Bursa Treasure Hunting Society, of which Uysal was then honorary vice president.

⁹There was no further identification of these treasures.

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Aged Villager: “Not far from here there used to be a coffeehouse which treasure hunters frequented and where they talked about their searches. But the owner died, and after it had been empty for awhile, it was demolished. After that, the interest in treasure hunting declined.”

Ahmet Uysal: “Yes, I knew him before he died—about eight or ten years ago. Either he or one of his customers owned a white rooster and a muska¹⁰ in his search for treasure. He would tie the muska around the rooster’s neck. Yes, I remember that man. In fact, I recorded some of his comments. I have his voice on a tape.”

Young Villager: “Was he called Tatar¹¹ İsmail?”

¹⁰A muska is a prayer or religious statement or a passage from the Koran written on a piece of paper by a religious hoca, and it is sometimes breathed upon by him. It is then folded down to a very small triangle and wrapped in a piece of oilcloth. It supposedly has the potency to cure or protect the wearer, or it may have some other function, as here.

¹¹Tatars constituted one of the major Turkish tribes that came west out of Asia. They settled largely in the Crimea, just north of the Black Sea. After centuries of persecution by the Russians, many Tatars crossed the Black Sea to live in the northern provinces of Turkey. Bolu is such a province.

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Ahmet Uysal: “No. I am trying to remember. Was it Muharrem?”

Young Villager: “Teacher, was it a rooster that crowed—a live rooster?”

Ahmet Uysal: “Yes, it was a real, living white rooster—with two legs!”

Young Villager: “Why did he make the rooster wear a muska?”

Ahmet Uysal: “The owner of the rooster had a religious hoca write on a piece of paper a special prayer about treasure. He wrapped up this prayer carefully and used it as a good-luck charm. This man would sometimes hear a voice speaking to him in his dream. It would say, ‘Wake up! There is a treasure buried at such and such a place. Get up and go search for it.’ When this would happen—no matter whether it was midnight, or whether it was raining or snowing—he would kick his wife and shout, ‘Wake up, Wife!’ He would give his wife a shovel and pickaxe to carry, and he himself would take the rooster and the muska. They walked along until the man heard the voice inside him again, this time saying, ‘Stop here! We have arrived at the place we need to be.’ The man would then take the muska from his

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pocket and tie it around the rooster's neck. Then he would throw the rooster up into the air, and wherever the rooster landed, there he would begin digging. He told me that never did he come back emptyhanded after releasing the rooster under these circumstances.'

Young Villager: "He was lying!"

Ahmet Uysal: "No, no! He was not lying. He was from Bolu."

Young Villager: "He was lying!"

Ahmet Uysal: "I have his account of all this on tape, but I do not have the tape with me."

Aged Villager: "I have heard of using a rooster in this way, but I cannot remember anything about that particular man."

Ahmet Uysal: "He lived here in Bolu Province."

Aged Villager: "Treasure hunters often come here to talk with me."

Ahmet Uysal: "I am sure that you must have known this man, but I cannot remember his name for sure."

Villager: "Was his name actually Muharrem?"

Ahmet Uysal: "Possibly."

Aged Villager: "No, it could not possibly have been Muharrem. Muharrem owned the coffeehouse where treasure

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hunters gathered and talked, but Muharrem himself did no treasure hunting. Now I am beginning to remember. Could it have been Servet?"

Ahmet Uysal: "Yes, I believe it was Servet, and I guess that it was Servet that I taped."

Villager: "Some time ago he applied to the government. He took out of the earth some golden objects, including some golden snakes."

Aged Villager: "This Servet had some difficulty with getting permission to dig where he wanted to dig. He wanted to dig on a certain hill, but the government gave him permission to dig only on the plains below the hill. But he also dug on that hill and other hills surrounding the plain, and there was no action taken against him until after he had uncovered treasure. The government agents said to him, 'You had no right to excavate in the hills. The map you received with your digging permit showed clearly where you would be allowed to dig.'

Ahmet Uysal: "Was he punished for that?"

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Aged Villager: “No, but he was not allowed to keep any of the treasure he had taken from the hills.”¹²

Ahmet Uysal: “Among the things that he unearthed, was there any actual money or were there only valuable objects?”

Aged Villager: “Yes, there were gold coins and other money.

Ahmet Uysal: “I have heard it said that there are supposed to be deposits of money in the earth around here which are owned by jinns.”¹³

Aged Villager: “That is not so.”

Ahmet Uysal: “In some places people have reported that jinns were guarding treasure. The jinns put upon them a curse which caused their faces, especially their noses and mouths, to be distorted.”

¹²The Turkish government tries to control digging for treasure for two reasons: (1) It wishes to protect sites of great archaeological value, and (2) it wishes to take 50% of what diggers may find. A permit to dig for treasure requires that the digger pay the wages of two agents of the federal government for as long a time as the digging continues. Most treasure hunters could not possibly afford to do this, and so 90% of treasure hunting is done illegally by night.

¹³The word jinn suggests two very different kinds of supernatural creatures. The first is the huge supernatural being who comes forth from a bottle or appears in response to some signal, such as the rubbing of a magic lamp or ring. This creature then proceeds to give the caller supernatural or magic aid to achieve what he wishes. The other kind of jinn is never seen. It is a spiritual force referred to in some Sufi beliefs and in other mystical systems.

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Aged Villager: “I have never heard of such a thing, but there was a strange thing that was involved in a big digging project over at Üsküb village.¹⁴ I was unable to join in the group of men doing that because I had some work here that had to be done. They asked the [religious] hoca of that village to say some prayers before the morning call to prayer that would prevent the government agents from arriving at the place on the plain where the digging was to be done.¹⁵ But the hoca did not influence those government men, who arrived at that place before 9 o’clock. It was there that they came upon a large flat rock that covered a treasure.”

Villager: “Teacher, are you really the assistant leader of the treasure-hunting club?”

¹⁴Without knowing the kaza of a given village, we cannot locate the site of such a settlement.

¹⁵After denying knowledge of jinns’ protecting buried treasure, the Aged Villager immediately mentions a hoca involved in a digging effort. In treasure lore a hoca is often employed to neutralize the power of jinns. The informant’s sudden introduction of a hoca into the colloquy may possibly suggest that he had indeed heard accounts of treasure-guarding jinns but declined to acknowledge it.

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Ahmet Uysal: “They asked me to accept that position, and I agreed to do so. That was five or six years ago, however, and the club is no longer active.”

Villager: “There is supposed to be a great amount of gold buried in Bolu Province. A man who had a permit to dig near here brought in a bulldozer and did extensive digging but found nothing. It did not surprise anyone, for things like that happen from year to year in this area.”

Ahmet Uysal: “I am not personally involved in treasure hunting. I am actually hunting treasure hunters. I like to hear them talk about their treasure-hunting experiences. That is how I learned about the 366 signs for buried treasure.”

Villager: “Yes, you have told us something about such signs. Are there others that you know?”

Ahmet Uysal: “There is one sign that is in the form of a man’s hand with a cross on the thumb. Another sign is a mother hen with some chicks.”

Another Villager: “Some people around here have seen the mother hen with her chicks.”

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Ahmet Uysal: “Sometimes it is thought that there are several signs close to each other, and they appear in given order. So, when you come upon one of those signs, you know what to look for next.”

Aged Villager: “Even if we were to see the mother hen and her chicks, it might not help us much in this area, because the stones shift, and the ownership of the land which contains them sometimes changes. Some time ago an infidel¹⁶ came here searching for a certain 20-dönüm¹⁷ parcel of land. But by the time he got here, that tract of land had been divided and sold to two or three other people.”

Ahmet Uysal: “Was there not an infidel settlement somewhere near here?”

Villager: “Teacher, there was a community of infidels here, mostly Armenians and Greeks. Many of them were killed and their homes burned down. Other people claimed the property afterwards. Now there is only one poor man living in that village in a small cabin.

¹⁶Any non-Muslim.

¹⁷A dönüm is a land measure said to be equivalent to ¼ acre.

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When the infidels were fleeing in their horse-drawn carriages, fifty or sixty of these people passed through here every day.¹⁸ One day several years later while that poor man was sitting on his porch, he saw an automobile approaching. After the car stopped before his cabin, an old man and his wife climbed out of it. They knew Turkish, and they said, ‘Selamünaleyküm.

“‘Aleykümselam,’¹⁹ answered the poor man. ‘Welcome to you! For whom are you looking? Please come into my house and have a glass of tea with me.’

“The old man and his wife responded, ‘We have come to visit our motherland.

¹⁸This is probably a reference to the early 1920s, the period of a massive Greek invasion, the War for Independence, the defeat of the invaders, and their “scorched-earth” retreat. This was followed in 1923 by an exchange of minority groups between Turkey and Greece. Throughout that time there was constant ethnic conflict, persecution, and displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.

¹⁹Traditional exchange between Muslims, especially those not well acquainted. The two expressions mean May peace be unto you and May peace be unto you too. Having lived in Turkey, the infidels understood and used this declaration of peaceful intention.

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“After the strangers had been given tea and crackers, the old woman asked the poor man, ‘My son, what is your financial situation?’

“‘Could it be much worse than this?’ asked the poor man. ‘With just one rug to put beneath me and but one blanket to put over me, my financial condition is not at all good.’

“‘Do you drink water from this well alongside your house?’

“‘Yes, do.

“‘I dug that well at the time we were forced to flee,’ said the old man. ‘At the bottom of that well is a white rock under which I buried our gold. In return for your hospitality I am giving that gold to you.

“‘What he said turned out to be true. The poor man dug that gold out of the bottom of the well and became very rich. He invested much of it in a trucking business, for which he bought a number of 10-wheel and 20-wheel trucks.’”

Ahmet Uysal:

“Is that really the way it happened? Where was that village?”

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Villager: “You talk about treasure signs such as the hen and chicks. I don’t believe in such things, for they are all misleading.”

Aged Villager: “He says that but believes something else. He has some maps which contain many such signs.”

Another Villager: “Forest rangers have reported two signs on rocks on a nearby mountain. On one stone is carved the picture of a horse holding one hoof up in the air. On another rock is a picture of a snake with its tail cut off.”

Ahmet Uysal: “Many treasure hunters also search for a certain iron gate beneath the surface of the earth. Behind that gate stands a metal bear weighing seventy kilograms. In the ground in front of that bear is a spring. If you step on that spring, it will release the bear, allowing it to fall forward and strike you. So, if you should ever come upon that gate, do not walk straight ahead through it but enter one side of it carefully so that you do not step on the spring.”

Villager: “There are rumors that when the Greeks left this area in haste, they buried gold in creek beds. Do you have any maps that indicate that?”

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Ahmet Uysal: “No, I do not. The maps that I have seen so far were almost all for places in Bursa Province.”

Villager: “You said that you had a machine that could detect metal in the ground. From what distance can it detect metal?”

Ahmet Uysal: “My machine can detect metal up to two meters beneath the surface of the ground.”

Villager: “If your machine can find metal that deep in the ground, you should be able to discover quite a bit of money.”

Ahmet Uysal: “I let the treasure-hunting club borrow that machine. They kept it for a year. When I heard that they had lowered it into a well, I asked them to send it back to me.”

Villager: “How did they use it?”

Ahmet Uysal: “They were searching for two deposits of gold near the village of Üçtepeler. There were 550 members in that club. Some of them were fanatical treasure hunters, and some others belonged to the club just to be involved in interesting adventures.”

Villager: “Well, it is that way here too. Some hunt for treasure in the way people enjoy a game. Others

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become almost crazy hunting gold, and they become so foolish about it that they will believe any rumor they may hear about treasure—even about whole carriage loads of treasure.’

Ahmet Uysal:

“In Bursa there was a man who said to me, ‘My teacher, at the edge of Uludağ²⁰ there is a marble tomb. This burial place is filled with gold, but that tomb is located seven meters beneath the surface of the earth.’ When I asked him how he knew this, he answered, ‘I saw it in a dream.’ He really believed in the existence of that treasure. He also said to me, ‘If I could strike that tomb with my pickaxe and succeed in knocking a hole in that tomb, gold would pour out of it for twenty-four hours.’ That shows how naive some treasure hunters can be.”

Villager:

“When I was a child, around 1930 or 1932, there was a man from our village who served in the army in Thrace.²¹ This man was a sergeant, but when he

²⁰Just outside the city of Bursa stands Uludağ (Great Mountain), one of Turkey’s best-known mountains. It has a famous ski slope and good hotels for tourists.

²¹The region known as Thrace is owned partly by Turkey, partly by Greece. The border between the two parts is often the scene of confrontation and minor skirmishes. The commander seems to have

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was captured by the infidels, he was made a cook. I was a child then, and that man was about eighteen years old. The foreign commander had once lived in Turkey, and one day he invited this Turkish captive to his home. The commander and his wife welcomed that young man. While they were drinking tea together, the commander asked, 'Where are you from?'

"'I am from Bolu Province.'

"After they had drunk some more tea, the commander asked, 'Do you know a village called Merkeşler in Bolu Province?'

"Even though the Turk was a native of that very village, he did not admit it. He said, 'I have heard of that village, but it is located at the opposite end of Bolu Province from where I live.

"The commander said, 'Over there on the western edge of Merkeşler, there is a very large hazelnut bush. I once buried some gold beneath that bush. I was then a bandit, and my companions and I robbed many people. During those times I killed

been a member of the Greek minority living in Turkey before the exchange of populations.

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many people. I murdered even some of my own companions, because I feared that they might betray me and turn me over to the authorities. If you could find that gold and all the rest that I buried at various places, you would be rich enough to buy most of the province of Bolu.'

"When the Turkish soldier heard this account of buried gold, he lost no time in making plans to find some of that treasure. After escaping from the infidels, he returned to his village and dug under the large hazelnut bush on the western edge of that settlement. There he found quite a large amount of gold buried in a goat's skin."

Another Villager: "Teacher, wouldn't that goat skin have decayed in the soil?"

Ahmet Uysal: "Yes, it seems that it would have decayed."

Narrator of Account: "But it had not decayed!"

Aged Villager: "Some infidels have special ways of tanning leather so that it will not decay for a long time. Or the skin may simply have been well salted."

Ahmet Uysal: "Yes, that might have preserved it."

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Another Villager: “Something quite similar to that happened to another man of Merkeşler village. While he was visiting in Denizli Province, he met an infidel who told him, ‘I buried three bags of gold in three different graves in your village. Go to the cemetery in your village and dig beneath the large walnut tree that grows there.’ The Merkeşli man did that, but all he found buried beneath the walnut tree were the skulls of three Muslims. He returned at once to Denizli to find the infidel who had told him about gold buried in a grave.

“But friends of his in Denizli said to him, ‘That infidel has disappeared. How can you expect to find him?’”

Aged Villager: “I suppose that might have happened. It could be true.”