Clever Peasant Girl Succeeds Incili Çavuş

Some time Incili Çavuş lived in the palace of the padişah. The padişah wanted to have him near at hand so that he could consult him whenever he needed to call upon the wisdom of Incili Çavuş. One day the padişah began to wonder if there was anyone in this world who was wiser than Incili. Calling Incili to him, the padişah said, "I want you to go and search for someone who is even wiser than you are, so that if you should die before I do, I can have that person to replace you. You are not a young man, you know."

"Yes, Your Majesty," said Incili Çavuş.

"You are returning from this search, I want you to do something else for me. Here is a lira. With this lira I want you to buy a ram. When you return, I want you to bring me a lamb dish made from the flesh of this ram, but I also want...

Incili Çavuş may well have been a real person, even though most of the tales told about him are clearly creations of the folk imagination. Those seeking historicity for this character often place him in the seventeenth century, either during the reign of Murat IV (1623-1640) or of Mahmut IV (1648-1687). He was a member of the famous and infamous Corps of Janissaries, an elite military organization. The name Incili Çavuş means Pearl Sergeant.
you to bring back both this lira and the live ram

"Yes, sir," said Incili.

Incili began at once to prepare for his journey in search of his own successor. The following morning he set out on this trip. One day as he was walking along, he met an old man who was going in the same direction. "Good morning, Father," he said. "Can we walk along together?"

"Yes, of course."

Along the way they came to a small river. Incili said "Father, why doesn't one of us become a bridge upon which the other can walk across this river?"

"How could this be done?" asked the old man. "Can a person instantly become a bridge? Let us each roll up his trousers and wade across the river by himself."

Incili Çavuş accepted this recommendation, and so both men rolled up their trousers and waded across the river. A short while after they had left the river, they came to a hill. Incili asked, "Father, why don't you tell us a story so that we can overcome the difficulty of climbing this hill?"

"Is it possible that a story could actually help us over this hill?"

"Of course it is, for as we listen, we forget the difficulty of the climb."

After climbing the hill, they entered a forest. As
they did so, Incili asked, "Father, do you think that there are any wild animals in this forest?"

"Of course there are."

"Then why doesn't one of us become two and two of us become four?"

"What kind of talk is that?" asked the old man. "How can one man possibly become two, and then those two men four?"

Incili Çavuş was not at all favorably impressed by the responses made by this old man to his various suggestions. He himself picked up a stout stick as they proceeded through the forest. Soon after they had emerged from the forest, came to a cemetery. There Incili asked, "Are all of the people in these graves dead, or do you suppose that some of them may be alive?"

"They are all dead, of course," said the old man. "Could there be any living people here?"

As they approached the village where the old man lived, they passed a barley field. "This barley field is mine," said the old man.

Incili asked, "Have you eaten any of it yet or are you going to eat it in the future?"

"This is a field, not something capable of being eaten!" said the old man.

When they entered the village itself, the old man said,
"This is where I live, and you must stay with me tonight as my guest.

They entered the old man's house and sat down. After a while the old man left the room, and while he was gone, a girl entered the room, placed a cup of coffee before Incili, and then started to leave. But, noticing that the girl was slightly lame, Incili spoke to her, "Isn't this chimney slanting--not quite straight?"

"Yes, the chimney is slanting, but it draws well\(^2\) anyway."

Incili Çavuş thought to himself, "There is something more admirable in this girl than there is in her father."

In another room the old man said to his daughter, "I met this strange man on my journey home today, and all along he kept asking me strange questions. He seems to be a very odd fellow!"

"No, Father. I think that he may be a very intelligent man."

"Well, when we came to a little river, he said, 'Let one of us become a bridge and the other walk across on it.' Is such a thing possible?"

"Yes, in a way it is, Father. He probably meant, 'You

\(^2\)An old-fashioned expression to indicate that a chimney does its job of carrying off smoke."
are an old man, and I shall roll up my trousers and carry you across

then when we came to a hill, he said, 'Tell a story so that we shall find the climb easier.'"

"That could be quite accurate. If you listened to a tale while climbing a hill, you could become so taken with the actions of the characters in the story that you would not think of the strain of climbing.

"When we came to a forest inhabited by wild animals, he said, 'One should become two, and thus two should become four.' What kind of talk is that?"

"Ah, he must have meant, 'Let each of us take a stick in his hand to defend himself against the animals, for a man with a stick in his hands is like two men.'"

"Then when we came to a cemetery, he said, 'Are all these graves filled with dead people or do some of them contain living people?' What a ridiculous thing to ask!"

"He may have meant, 'Let us pray for the souls of those here--not so much for the ordinary people but for the saints that may be entombed here who live in their tombs.'"³

³There is a belief in several different religions that holy people do not decompose after death. Stories are told--there are several in ATON--about tombs opened years after their occupants were placed there, and when these tombs are those of saints, the bodies are almost always perfectly preserved and lifelike. --The implication here seems to be that the living dead are more potent than the dead dead and thus should be placated more by passersby.
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"And finally when we came to my barley field, this man asked, 'Have you eaten any of it yet or are you going to eat it in the future?' Such foolish talk! How can one eat a field?"

"Well, Father, haven't we eaten it? We bought seeds from our neighbor, and before planting time we ate about half of that barley. When we harvest our crop, we shall return part of it to our neighbor and eat part of it. Of course we have both eaten it and shall later eat it too." 4

When the old man returned to the room where his guest was sitting, Incili Çavuş asked him, "Father, who was the girl with whom you were just talking?"

"That was my daughter."

"Will you please call her and permit me to talk with her?" When the girl reentered the room, Incili said to her: "I have a very difficult problem to solve. If you will give me the benefit of your thought on this matter, I shall be very grateful to you. Before I left the palace of the padişah, he handed me a lira and gave me the following orders: 'On your

4Symbolic language of this kind actually exists in Turkey, though it may well be used with greater frequency in folktales than in real life. A related secret language is that produced by the special arrangement of commonplace objects: flowers in a vase, candy on a platter. In the early 18th century Mary Wortley Montague, whose husband was the British ambassador to the Ottoman court, observed and wrote letters about the latter type of covert communication.
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way home you are to buy a ram with this lira. When you arrive here at the palace, I want you to give me a lamb dish made with the flesh of that ram, and at the same time I want you to return my lira and bring me the living ram you bought.' How can all that be done?"

"That is very easy," said the girl. "At such-and-such a village you can buy a ram for one lira. Buy a ram at that village and take it to the next village along the same road. There you will find people who will shear the wool from the ram and make two small carpets from that wool. When the carpets are ready, you will give one back to the carpet makers as pay for their work, and you will sell the other carpet for a lira. Thus you will have the lira to return to the padişah. When you get home, you will castrate the ram and roast the testicles. These you will then serve to the padişah at the time that you present him with the ram and return his lira."

Incili Çavuş did exactly as he had been directed by the girl. He went to such-and-such a village and bought a ram for one lira. Taking it to the next village, he had it sheared, and from its wool he had two small carpets made. Of these he returned to the carpet makers as pay for their work, and the other carpet he sold for a lira. Placing this lira in his sash, he returned to the palace, where he cas-
trated the ram and roasted its testicles. He then went to the padişah's dining room and placed the roasted meat before the padişah, saying, "Your Majesty, here is a meat dish made from the flesh of this living ram, and here is the lira which you gave me to buy the ram.

"How did you manage to achieve this?" the padişah asked. When Incili Çavuş explained the whole procedure, step by step, the padişah asked, "Who told you how to do this?"

"I learned this from the daughter of an old man living in such-and-such a place."

"Go back to that same place and ask that old man to give me his daughter in marriage."

"Yes, sir." Taking a bag of gold that the padişah gave him, Incili returned to the home of the old man and his daughter. When he presented the bag of gold to the girl, he said, "This is from the padişah, who wishes to marry you."

The girl emptied the bag of gold onto the floor and then put it into the bag again, saying, "Take this back to the padişah and say, 'What sort of creature is this? It has neither tongue nor mouth, neither eyes nor ears."

Incili Çavuş returned to the palace and reported to the padişah what had happened: "Your Majesty, she poured the gold onto the floor and then put it all back into the bag again. She then told me to bring it back to you and say,
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'What sort of creature is this? It has neither tongue nor mouth, neither eyes nor ears.'"

When the padişah heard this, he sent two men to the girl's home to bring her to the palace to be executed. But when she was turned over the the hangman, he faltered was such a beautiful girl that he could not bring himself to hang her. She said to him, "Tell the padişah to call me into his presence and listen to my side of this matter."^5

"All right," said the hangman.

When the padişah had the girl called into his presence, he asked her, "Why didn't you accept the gift I sent to you? And what did you mean by what you said?"

"Since you had decided to take me as your wife, what was the use of sending me a whole bag of gold? Since you were sending it as an engagement present, you could have sent a necklace with three or five^6 pieces of gold in it."

When the padişah heard this response, he was very pleased with it and decided to pardon the girl and marry her anyway. The wedding ceremonies for the marriage of the couple began, but before they were completed, a foreign

^5The actual expression used here by the narrator is take my evidence. For some reason Turkish folktale narrators like this legalistic figure of speech.

^6Turks use the expression three or five to mean a few. Here five is the pertinent number. Girls are given engagement necklaces with gold medallions. Called besbirlik, this medallion or large coin is made of five gold coins melted down.
power declared war against the country. Because of this, they could not consummate their marriage. The padişah said to his wife, "I have ordered a general mobilization for a war that may keep me away for three or five years. But when I return, I shall expect to find both you and my mare pregnant. Furthermore, I shall expect the contents of this chest I am giving you to be gone but its seal must remain intact.

Marshalling his troops, the padişah led them into position against the enemy and awaited the coming battle. After he had gone off to war, his wife declared a mobilization of her own, calling up all women of certain ages in the land. After having them uniformed and equipped, she led them to a position on the front lines close to the padişah's forces. When the padişah saw them arriving, he supposed that the government of Iran had come to his assistance.

Riding at the head of her troops, the girl wore an officer's uniform. After her troops had settled into position, the girl, still dressed as an officer, rode off to visit her husband, who thought she was the ruler of Iran. After they had sat together in his tent and talked for a while, the girl suggested that they play chess. She then added, "If you beat me at chess, I shall find a woman for you, but if I beat you, then you will find a woman for me." The padişah agreed to this, and they began to play chess. But
the girl deliberately allowed the padişah to win, and she then said, "I shall go back to my tent and send you a woman at once." Returning to her tent, she exchanged her uniform for female clothes and made up her face in feminine fashion. She then went on foot and under the cover of darkness to the padişah's tent and slept with him that night. In the morning she arose early, said farewell, and left.

On the following day she went again, clad in her uniform, to visit the padişah. After they had talked for a while, she said, "Let us play chess again"

"All right," said the padişah, "but what shall we play for tonight?"

She said, "I have a mare. If I beat you at chess, then your stallion will provide stud services for my mare. If you win, I shall give you another stallion"

"Very well," said the padişah.

They began to play, but the game did not last very long. The girl quickly defeated the padişah this time. After having her mare serviced by the padişah's stallion, she returned to her own army.

A few days later the girl again visited the padişah and again they decided to pass the time by playing chess. The stakes were different this time. The girl said, "If I beat you at chess, you will let me take your royal seal and..."
keep it for forty-eight hours. If you should win, then you may take my royal seal and keep it for the same length of time."

"Very well," said the padişah.

Again the girl won the game and, as agreed upon, she took the royal seal of the padişah and departed. Mounting her horse, she rode day and night without stopping. When she arrived home, she unlocked the chest, breaking the seal as she did so, and emptied out the contents. Then she closed it, locked it, and sealed it again with the padişah's seal—just as it had been before. That accomplished, she rode to her army again and returned the seal to the padişah within the prescribed time.

As their fate would have it, however, the war never took place. It was canceled even before it began. The troops prepared to break camp and depart for home. Before they left the field, the girl rode over to the padişah's tent and said, "We must now part, but I shall remain ready to help you if you should be threatened again." She then led her army home by forced marches, demobilized her female troops and said to them in parting, "May God render your husbands victorious!"

The larger army of the padişah moved more slowly. It was some time before he could bring it back to its headquarters
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arrange to have it properly paid and demobilized. When of this had been completed, he at last returned to the palace to resume his life there.

Upon entering his palace, the first thing that the padişah did was to examine the chest that he had left with his wife. It was now empty, but the seal was still intact. He then went and observed his wife closely and detected that her abdomen had begun to swell. Going next to the stable, he able to determine that his mare was also pregnant. Going to his wife then, he said, "I may still have you executed unless I am satisfied with the way in which you fulfilled my departing commands. How did you achieve these results?"

She then told him how she managed to do it. "Do you remember that Iranian padişah who came to assist you with his army? Well, it was I, and the army was a female army made up of women of your own country. When you played chess for a woman, it was I who came to your tent at night and slept with you. When you played for a horse if you won but the servicing of a mare by your stallion if you lost, it was I who beat you and had my mare (really yours, now in the stable) serviced. When you played for the possession of the opponent's seal, it was I who played with you, defeated you, and took your personal seal for forty-eight hours. During that time I
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galloped here to the palace, removed the contents of the chest, and then resealed it with your seal. When the war was canceled, I brought my female army back hastily by ordering forced marches and discharged all my troops before your return. This is how it was all done."

"Is that really so?" asked the padişah, amazed at her story.

"Yes, it is."

When the padişah realized the truth of all this, he was very pleased. Their marriage was completed, and they began living as husband and wife most happily. The only problem that the padişah had was trying to determine whether to retain Incili Çavuş as his adviser at the palace or whether to retire him now that he had found a successor even wiser than himself.