

Story 887 1964 Tape 8)

Narrator: Cuma Yalçın, a Kurd

Location: Cavit village, Oğuz
Eli kaza, Gaziantep
Province

Date: 1964

Ibrahim Paşa¹ and Sultan Hâmit²

Once in the past, during the reign of Sultan Hâmit, there was an Ibrahim Paşa at Viranşehir³ in the Province of Mardin. This Ibrahim Paşa ruled between 2,000 and 4,000 people in that area. He was a desert commander who used to collect taxes in his territory for the sultan. He had his own troops, which he raised among the local people. The people under his jurisdiction were members of his own tribe, many of whom were Yezidis.⁴ He levied taxes at the rate of 1/8 of the production

¹A paşa today is a general. In earlier times he was a general who served as the military governor of a designated section of the country.

²At this point in the tale the reference could be to either Sultan Abdul Hâmit I or II, the first reigning from 1774 to 1789, the second from 1876 to 1909. It later becomes clear that it is Abdul Hâmit II.

³Viranşehir is not in Mardin but rather in Urfa Province thirty kilometers from the border of Mardin Province.

⁴Yezedis are latter-day survivors of Zoroastrianism, the faith which preceded Islam in Iran. It dates from the 6th or 7th century B.C.

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of the tribe, and he took most of these taxes, in the form of gold, to the treasury of the sultan. The rest he kept for himself. This paşa had certain criminal qualities. He was a great destroyer. He used the shield and sword as his weapons and he used them all too well among his people.

One day while he was visiting the sultan in Istanbul, Sultan Hâmit said to him, "If my enemies should try to depose me, I should like to have your support in retaining my throne. How many horsemen could you raise?"

"Somewhere around 5,000."

"Could you lead this force to Istanbul if I should send you a letter saying that I needed your help?"

"Of course I could."

Back in his own region Ibrahim Paşa reigned as he wished—hanging people, killing people in other ways, acting just as if he were the ruler of the land. He was a kind of feudal lord.

There was a man from that area who objected to the way that Ibrahim Paşa treated the people there. He was a Kurd named Hasan ^{63, 65-66} Ağa. This Hasan Ağa had a long petition written to the padişah. Taking that petition, he carried it to Istanbul himself, sometimes walking, sometimes traveling by cart, takır, takır.⁵ When he reached Istanbul, he went and stood before

⁵This is the onomatopoeic representation of the sound of hoofbeats.

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Sultan Hâmit's palace. Sentries noticed him there, for it was unusual to see a Kurd in Istanbul. He stood waiting outside the palace for two days before Sultan Hâmit, looking out the window, saw him there. The sultan realized that the man was one of his soldiers--that is, one of the Vıranşehir men. "Let us have that Kurd come into my presence so that we can find out he wants," said the sultan.

When the Kurd was admitted, he took the petition and handed it to the sultan. It was full of complaints against Ibrahim Paşa and the ruthless way in which he behaved. After reading through this petition, the sultan turned to this Kurd and said, "Welcome! I see that you have brought greetings to me from Ibrahim Paşa

When the Kurd heard this, he was surprised, but what could he do? Not being able either to read or write, he could not know for certain what message the petition gave. He simply said, "That is so," and departed for home.

This happened during World War I. Sultan Reşat⁶--he was either Abdul Hâmit's brother or cousin, I've forgotten which--and others wanted to depose Sultan Hâmit. They and others were also demanding more freedom.

As a result of the activities of those people opposed

⁶Mehmet V Reşat, brother of deposed Abdul Hâmit II, reigned from 1909-1918.

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to him, Sultan Hâmit felt the need for support from wherever he could get it. He sent a telegram to Ibrahim Paşa, saying, "I am in difficulty. Come to Istanbul and bring with you all of your horsemen."

While Ibrahim Paşa was at his afternoon prayers, he handed this wire by a messenger. After glancing at it, Ibrahim Paşa slipped it under the sheepskin on which he was praying.⁷

His wife, who was a very wise woman, was deeply upset. She had had a dream the night before in which she saw the center pole of their tent broken. At that time there were tribal tents with seven supporting poles.⁸ The most important pole was the center pole. After finishing his prayers, Ibrahim Paşa another look at the telegram and sighed deeply. Then his wife said, "Ibrahim, I had a dream last night, very bad dream, no matter how I interpreted it. I dreamed that the center pole of our tent had been broken. I do not like that telegram which you have just received. Pay no attention to its message, and do not obey any orders that it may contain. The breaking of the center pole means that something bad could happen to

⁷Nomadic people living in tents might not have the prayer rugs available to others, and so a piece of sheepskin would be a likely prayer base.

⁸The narrator is here describing the large domed tent of Turkish nomad chieftains known as an otağ. By the time of this tale the otağ had been in use for more than 1,000 years, as its appearance in the 10th-century Book of Dede Korkut testifies.

*Levyer
Signature*

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Ibrahim Paşa replied, saying, "The Arabs to the south have revolted, and I must go down there to suppress that revolt." He did not tell her that he intended to go to Istanbul. He then sent orders throughout the tribe for all men to arm and report at once to his headquarters.

Upon receiving these orders, all of his men took their swords and shields, their bows and arrows,⁹ and reported to Ibrahim Paşa, "We are ready, my Paşa!"

Ibrahim Paşa said, "I shall march in front, and you will follow me in good military order. Every five men will have a corporal assigned to them. Take along tents and food, and we shall proceed straight to Aleppo."¹⁰ He intended to go from Aleppo to Damascus to Beirut, and from there take ship for Istanbul. They prepared to leave, all marshalled under captains, sergeants, and corporals.

They set out on horseback, and along the way they stopped at the camp of a tribal chief named Şerif Yasin, who fed them. By the end of the second day, they reached the outer edge of the kaza of Aleppo, and there Şeyh Hâilil Ağa fed them. He gave

⁹The Turkish military forces of World War I had modern military equipment, including artillery and even a few planes. They had been sophisticated in artillery even before the first siege of Vienna in 1529. The weaponry listed here is an anachronism.

¹⁰During World War I there was a revolt of Arabs to the South, and Aleppo, now in Syria, was a very important Turkish base attempting to cope with the uprising.

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the horses barley to eat and ayran¹¹ to drink. He was present in person when all this was done, wearing a big fur coat. He provided a lamb for every ten soldiers.¹²

The commander, Ibrahim Paşa, asked Şeyh Hâlil Ağa, "From what tribe are you descended?"

"I am from the Drahi-Ağa tribe. From what tribe do you come?"

"I am from the Kara-Keçili¹³ tribe--a Türkmen tribe.¹⁴

¹¹Ayran is a mixture of yoğurt (English, yoghurt) and water, a common cold drink in Turkey. The narrator may mean that the men were given ayran--it is really incredible that it would be given to horses or that there could possibly be enough to feed 5,000 horses!--but the text says the horses were fed barley and ayran.

¹²It was customary in Ottoman times for local leaders to provide food for Turkish military units passing through their area. The father of the father-in-law of Ahmet Uysal was such a Türkmen leader in the Aleppo area during the time of this tale. A favorite family legend recounts this leader's going through the camp of an Ottoman regiment turning their cooking cauldrons upside down and saying, "When you are in this area, I provide your food!" Obviously pride was one motive for this custom.

¹³Kara-Keçili means Black Goat.

¹⁴The twenty-four tribes of "Western" Turks who moved out of Central Asia into the Middle East, establishing the Seljuk and Ottoman Empires, were the Oğuz (Oghuz) Turks. After their conversion to Islam they were called Türkmenler (English, Turkomans). Those in present-day Turkey became sedentary at an early date; those in other parts of the Middle East often remained nomadic or semi-nomadic into the twentieth century.

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Ah, we are enemies, but even so, I have never seen anyone else in your tribe produce such a good meal. You are also great fighters. You are strong in food, strong in fighting."

Aleppo was now not very far away--only a distance of nine hours' traveling. They reached that city on the following day where they were quartered in a large castle. They went on then to Damascus, the governor of which was a supporter of Sultan Reşat--just as now we have conflict between the Democrat and Republican parties.¹⁶ The governor said to Ibrahim Paşa, "Can you keep a secret? If so, I shall tell you something."

"Yes, I shall keep secret what you tell me."

"Look here, even though you have 5,000 horsemen, you a paşa from Kurdistan. Sultan Hâmit does not trust you but fears you. His calling you to Istanbul is a trick through which he can have you captured and executed. They will kill you and imprison your forces." (This was not true. It was just a wile of the Governor of Damascus.)

When Ibrahim Paşa heard this, he asked, "Is that a fact?"

"Yes."

Taking leave of the governor, Ibrahim Paşa went to the barracks where his troops were quartered and gave these orders: "You will go immediately to the armory of Damascus

¹⁶At the time this tale was taped, the Democrat Party had been outlawed following a military coup. Its successor was the Justice Party, which, as everyone knew, was made up of former Democrats.

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and plunder it. Take with you from there all of the good weapons, leaving only the broken or poorly made ones." After they had completed this plunder, they were ordered to plunder the marketplace of Damascus, too

When the Governor of Damascus learned of this, he sent a telegram to Istanbul, saying, "Bz-z-z, bz-z-z, bz-z-z-z! Your most reliable commander, Ibrahim Paşa, has plundered all of Damascus. He was on his way to help you, but now he has changed his mind and returned."

When Sultan Hâmit received this telegram, he replied, "His [Ibrahim's] head belongs to the state, and his property may be plundered at will. Pursue him!"

There then followed intensive fighting between the troops of the Governor of Damascus and those of Ibrahim Paşa. In this fighting Ibrahim Paşa was shot and killed. It was not long after this that Sultan Hâmit was deposed¹⁷ and Sultan Reşat was established on the throne. Personal freedom was then declared.

¹⁷He was deposed in 1909.