

Story 1001 (1975 Tape 1) Narrator: İbrahim Aydın, 78

Location: Aksu village,
Bozüyük kaza,
Bilecik Province

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Incili Çavuş¹ as Hoca²

A Turkish hoca who had lived in Europe for some time returned to İstanbul where he challenged other hocas to a contest in knowledge of İslam. Not a single hoca he challenged was able to answer the questions that he asked. After this had continued for some time, the padışah was so embarrassed that he asked Incili Çavuş to do something about it.

Incili Çavuş removed his uniform and put on a gown and a turban.³ Taking a book under his arm, he went to the hoca from Europe and challenged him.

Incili Çavuş / Pearl Sergeant⁷ was supposedly a member of the Corps of Janissaries, the best-trained but eventually the most notorious body of troops in the Ottoman Empire. An elite palace guard, they were so indulged and privileged that they came in time to tyrannize all İstanbul, the Sultan included. While others are obsequious before the sultan, Incili is often daring and bold.

² A hoca is a Moslem priest.

³ These two garments symbolize the clerical profession.

Story 1001

"Shall you or I ask the first question?" İncili asked.

"You ask your question first, and I shall answer it," said the other

"All right," said İncili. "Here is my question."
"Huyletin zir zir etin,
Huynihu çağrı ha?"⁴

The hoca from Europe opened up his book and tried to find an answer to this question, but he was unable to find any reference to it. He asked to have the question repeated.

Knowing that his opponent could not answer question, İncili Cavus repeated it, this time saying it very loudly: "Huyletin zir zir etin,
Huynihu çağrı ha?"

Again the hoca from Europe searched his book for an answer and again he found nothing. "I do not know," he finally said.

"Throw him into the sea!" exclaimed İncili.

⁴Although most of these words are Turkish, mean nothing here.

Story 1001

come here to examine Turkish hocas but he himself knows nothing!"

After the hoca had left, the padışah asked İncili Çavuş, "What was the meaning of that question you asked?"

"Well, the other day I was walking through a wooded area when I came upon some gypsies playing drums and zurnas. Huyletim means drum, and zir zir means zurna. So my question had to do with drums zurnas." ⁵

The zurna is a primitive double-reed wind instrument. Drums and zurnas are played at various traditional celebrations and festive occasions. At rural weddings and at circumcision ceremonies they are played many hours per day for several days. More often than not, gypsies are the musicians. Whether İncili or the narrator is trying to represent Gypsy language here or whether the language of İncili's question is all a spoof, we do not know for certain.

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