What Bekri Mustafa Whispered to the Corpses

Bekri Mustafa once became muezzin at Aya Sofya Mosque in Istanbul. Whenever there were funeral services at that mosque, Bekri Mustafa was seen to go to the corpse and whisper something in its ear. Other religious officials at Aya Sofya became very curious about this practice of his, they were afraid to ask him about it. Bekri Mustafa

1Bekri Mustafa was supposedly a ne'er-do-well alcoholic in the time of Sultan Murat IV (reigned 1623-1640), though actually his historicity is extremely dubious. Rake and bully-boy, he is featured in many anecdotes. He is a folktale character who has become a name for drinking, until now any drunk might be referred to as Bekri Mustafa.

2The muezzin is the mosque official who, from the minaret, calls the faithful to prayers.

3For almost 1,000 years the largest cathedral in Christendom, the Church of Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) was converted into a mosque upon the Turkish capture of Istanbul in 1453. Aya Sofya is the Turkish equivalent of Hagia Sophia. Today it is a museum.

4A hoca is a Moslem priest; in pre-Republican Turkey he was also a teacher.
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a favorite of the padişah, and if they angered Bekri, he could have them removed from their jobs.

One day, however, the curiosity of one of the hocaşos overcame his fear, and he asked Bekri, "Friend, what is it you say to each of the corpses that passes through this mosque? Please tell us so we can whis-
the same thing to them."

"No, I shall not tell you what I whisper to them," said Bekri in embarrassment.

"Yes--come on, our Muezzin! Tell us!"

Finally Bekri agreed to tell them what he said to the dead. "This is what I tell them: 'If they ask in the other world how things are getting along down here, just tell them that Bekri Mustafa has become muezzin of Aya Sofya Mosque. From that single fact they will be able to understand the state of affairs in this world!'"\(^5\)

\(^5\)This is a favorite tale on the theme of degeneration inevitably brought by the passage of time. A longer tale on the same theme is ATON No. 76.