

Story 998 (1975 Tape 1) Narrator: İbrahim Aydın, 78

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Bozüyük kaza,
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What Bekri Mustafa¹ Whispered to the Corpses

Bekri Mustafa once became muezzin² at Aya Sofya Mosque³ in İstanbul. Whenever there were funeral services at that mosque, Bekri Mustafa was seen to go to the corpse and whisper something in its ear.

hocas⁴ and 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 İstanbul 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 (hocas) 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 whisper 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

⁵This 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.