

Story 1435 (1971 Tape 7)

Narrator: Mustafa Yanıç

Location: Karakaya village
Silifke kaza,
İçel Province

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Hunting for Turkish Treasure

I had an old friend who came from Eskişehir. While he was in the military police he once overheard a conversation being carried on by a Christian, a Turk, and a Circassian.¹ The Christian said, "That treasure should be near Silifke. The first of the many signs that lead to it is the silhouette of a woman, like a flat statue, carved into the surface of a large rock. My father-in-law saw that flat statue once." The Christian then gave the other two men 400 liras for traveling expenses to go and search for that treasure.

That was the first that my friend heard about that particular treasure, but it was not the last that he heard about it. He began to collect all of the information that he could find about it. One day he arrived at my house and said

¹The Circassians were a widespread people north of the Black Sea and the Caucasus Mountains. Christianized in the 6th century, they converted to Islam in the 17th century when they came under the influence of the Ottoman Empire. When their homeland was conquered by Russia in the 19th century, many of them moved into Turkey in the 1860s.

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"Çörek,² I have a map³ here that will lead us to the treasure I told you about."

We had a piece of paper that indicated that the treasure was in a stream or alongside a stream. We went first to Gilamaç Creek⁴, and we searched that stream all night, crossing back and forth across its waters three times. We came across many signs, but we could not make much sense out of any of them. This discouraged me very much, and I asked my friend, "What do you know about this treasure that we are searching for? Does it really exist?"

He then told me all the information that he had collected about the treasure. He said, "This treasure is made up of Turkish money from a long while ago--from the time of Sultan Mahmut.⁵ Mahmut arranged to receive from Russia forty men so well educated that they would be able to become important government officials. After examining these forty educated men, he liked them so much that he gave his daughter in marriage

²Apparently a nickname, for çörek literally means a round ringlike pastry.

³The narrator uses here the word ihтира, meaning invention, but the context and the later mention of a piece of paper indicate that it is a map.

⁴Apparently too small to be shown on anything but local maps.

⁵Peasant narrators often have only the vaguest notions about history. There were six different Ottoman Sultans named Mahmut.

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to one of them. He made another Keeper of the Treasury. A third, who was named Ali Bey, he made his Minister of Foreign Affairs. Many of the other thirty-seven were sent to Baghdad, for at that time Baghdad was still the wealthiest city in the Ottoman Empire, and much of the money to maintain the Ottoman government came from there. Once while these agents of the sultan were returning from Baghdad with a caravan of gold, they pilfered a large amount of it and buried it in a stream. One branch of that stream is Gilamaç Creek, which we just searched, and the other branch is called Keçi Deresi, which runs into Sarı Göl.⁶ It flows past Pambukçu Hill.

"Meanwhile, the educated son-in-law of the sultan died. When they took his body to the tenesir,⁷ however, it was discovered that he had not been circumcised. They called his widow to the tenesir and asked her, 'What do you have to say about this?' Starting to cry, the woman answered, 'I knew about this; I realized it immediately after we were married. However, I felt that I could not report it, for if I did, people would have started saying, "Oh, the daughter of Sultan Mahmut is married to an infidel!" That was why I could not speak about it

⁶Keçi Deresi=Goat Creek; Sarı Göl=Yellow Lake.

⁷The marble slab in the courtyard of a mosque upon which the body of a dead person is placed for the ritual ablution it receives before burial.

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"When this news became generally known, the Keeper of the Treasury was called and examined. When it was discovered that he too was uncircumcised, he was immediately beheaded by executioners. Ali Bey, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, escaped before he could be summoned for examination

"The treasure we are seeking was part of the money brought from Baghdad in a caravan of forty mules. Its value was more than a million liras.⁸ The smallest coins in that treasure were yellow gold liras. They buried it in the stream

On a map that was brought to Turkey four years ago, Black Hasan Bridge was shown, and Ali Bey village was also shown. For a while everybody was searching for this treasure. All of the money in it is Turkish money,⁹ and it was all gold.

/Ahmet Uysal: "Is it near Silifke?"

Narrator: "They say that it is, but Silifke is so spread out that it takes thirty-six hours to walk around it. It takes eight hours to walk the length of the stream whose source is at Göktepe. The search for this treasure has become very confused

⁸The Turkish lira today (1992) has been devaluated almost to worthlessness, for it takes 6,000 liras to equal one U.S. dollar, but in earlier times, the lira was a very valuable monetary domination.

⁹This is an important distinction, for most treasures buried in Turkey are thought to be in the currencies of the dozens of groups that occupied Turkey, briefly or at length, and then had to flee from the invasions of new conquerors. Departing in great haste, they supposedly buried their wealth with the intention of returning to recover it at a later and more peaceful time. Turkish treasure hunters dream of buried caches of Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and Armenian gold.

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friend gave me a copy of the map and said, 'Ask your friends and acquaintances about this map and see if you can get any additional information.' --But, as I said, it is all very confused and confusing. There are supposed to be 366 signs along the route to this treasure, but only 66 are pertinent; the other 300 signs were made rocks and buildings and walls for some other purposes.¹⁰

"There is another often said to be very deep underground. There is a lame bear made of gold guarding the room, and it is very heavy. Its lame leg is propped up with a large golden containing 300 pieces of gold. You may take gold pieces out of the bowl, but if you try to

¹⁰Probably 98 percent of the "information" about buried treasure in Turkey is imaginative, fictitious, or deliberately fraudulent. Adding to the chaos and confusion of the subject are the great numbers of "signs," symbols, and markings that become involved in treasure lore. A country with 5,000 years of history inevitably has countless marks left on rocks and walls, most of which probably have nothing whatsoever to do with buried treasure, but they are often thought to have significance by fanatical treasure hunters. Some of the markings discussed by such fanatics have never actually been seen on physical rocks or walls; they may simply have been mentioned in treasure tales or they may have been seen in dreams!

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pull out the bowl, it will allow the bear to fall forward and crush you. The gold body of the bear is so large and heavy that a truck would be required to haul it away.¹¹

"I asked everybody I met for more details about the map which my friend had copied for me, but I never got another single bit of evidence. I finally gave the map to a bus driver and asked him to seek more information, but I have not seen him again since that time."

Ahmet Uysal: "What was it like? Was it a large map?"¹²

Narrator: "Yes."⁷

¹¹This golden-bear motif appears in tales about widely separated "treasures."

¹²What are supposedly maps leading to buried treasure could be a whole section of treasure lore. Most of them are apparently fraudulent creations sold to the gullible. Some are not of Turkish origin but come into Turkey from abroad--most often from Greece. They are supposedly maps made by Greeks who fled Turkey during the wartimes or were deported during the Exchange of Populations between Turkey and Greece after the devastating Greek invasion of the 1920s, which the Turks refer to as "The War of Independence." Fleeing Greeks of substance supposedly buried their wealth in Turkey with the intention of returning for it at a later and more peaceful time.