

Story 1674 (Tape erased on
field trip)

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gardener

Location: Gökçedere village,
Yalova kaza,
Kocaeli Province
(sometimes called
İzmit Province)

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The Traveling Bektasi¹

One day during the Ramazan² a Bektasi was caught eating during the fasting hours. He was seized and taken before a kadı³ to be tried.

"O man!" said the kadı. "Why do you eat during the hours of the fast?"

¹Member of a dervish order of that same name, founded by Hacı Bektaş Veli (d. 1516). The Bektasi dervishes are often said to be Shi'ite more than Sunnite. Thus their religious position is equivocal in predominantly Sunnite Turkey. Throughout their history they have often been deeply involved in Turkish politics. They had a serious setback in 1826 when the Janissary Corps, with which they were allied, was destroyed. Along with other dervish orders, they were outlawed during the Kemalist Reforms of the 1920s. It was estimated that there were still 30,000 Bektasis in Turkey in 1950.

As a folk type the Bektasi is cynical in attitude and frequently irreverent in behavior. The Bektasi often drinks alcohol, refuses to fast, scoffs at orthodox Moslem clergymen, and is critical of the Deity. Despite his outrageousness, he is enjoyed, perhaps even admired secretly, by Turkish audiences.

²The ninth month in the Moslem year, Ramazán (Ramadan) is a holy time during which the faithful fast from sunrise to sunset, lead an ascetic existence, and contemplate the spiritual.

³A judge of Moslem canonical law in pre-Republican times.

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"I eat because I am a traveler."⁴

"You have lived here for forty years, and I have never seen you travel once in all that time."

"Is there evidence that I shall live for another day in this world? All my life I have been traveling toward the other world."

⁴People in certain conditions or situations were excused from fasting during Ramazan: pregnant women, children, those who were ill, and those who were traveling.