

Story 1955 (1972 Tape 2)

Narrator: Hasan Hüseyin Cilev

Location: Karacabey, kaza town
of Bursa Province

Date: 1972

Behlül Dane¹ as Marriage Counselor

When Harun Reşit² was padishah, a man came to him to ask for advice. This man said to Harun Reşit, “My sultan, I want to get married. There are three women who would accept me as husband. One is a widow; one is a divorcée, and the third is a maiden. Which one should I choose?”

Harun Reşit answered, “Go and find Behlül Dane and ask him that question.”

At that moment Behlül Dane was wandering aimlessly around the streets of Bagdad on his donkey. When the man seeking a wife finally located Behlül Dane, he asked him the same question he had

¹Although some scholars claim that Behlül Dane was a real person, others feel that his historicity is dubious. He was supposedly the mad half brother of the caliph Harun Reşit, though no one has ever documented this. In many tales about him, Behlül Dane’s alleged madness was a “cover” beneath which he could voice with impunity his satirical comments about moral flaws of wealthy and powerful people, including even the caliph himself. Playing with children in the streets was one of the madcap antics of this divinely inspired fool.

²Not literally either padishah or sultan, Harun Reşit was probably the most powerful of the Abbasid caliphs. Certainly he was the most colorful, a fact testified to by the many tales told about him, including several in The Arabian Nights. He was at the peak of his reign around 800.

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asked Harun Reşit. He said, “Behlül, I wish to get married. There are three women who would be willing to accept me as husband. One of these is a widow; one is a divorcée; and the third is a maiden. Which of these should I choose as my bride?”

Behlül Dane answered,

If you marry the widow, she will be the knowing one.

If you marry the divorcée, shall be the knowing one.

If you marry the maiden, you will be the knowing one.