

Story 2115 (1988 Tape 16)

Narrator: Rağıp Güngör, 75

Location: Aydın, capital of
Aydın Province

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Şair¹ Eşref² Coins an Expression

Although Şair Eşref wrote many poems, they did not produce enough income for his needs. He decided that he should get a job of some kind. However, his poetry had offended so many prominent people in İzmir that no one in that city would employ him. He therefore went to Denizli and appealed there to the mufti,³ a good friend, for help in finding work.

The mufti appointed Şair Eşref kadı⁴ of the town of

¹The word şair means poet.

²Eşref lived during the first half of the 20th century. He was known for the sarcasm and blasphemy of many of his lines. Some of his couplets were so cherished that they were memorized and used by common people. As a result, numerous anecdotes sprang up about Şair Eşref.

³A mufti is an authority on Islamic theory and Muslim law.

⁴In pre-Republican times a kadı was a judge of Muslim canonical law. Although he was part of the Muslim establishment, the kadı was often pictured in folktales as being dishonest, especially in the matter of accepting bribes. There is no suggestion of bribery in this reputedly factual account.

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Acıpayam, a kaza of Denizli Province. Şair Eşref had nothing in his background or education that prepared him in any way for the office of kadı, but the mufti assigned him to that position anyway.

Şair Eşref worked as kadı of Acıpayam for several years, and then he was appointed kadı of Buldan, a kaza much closer to the capital of Denizli. For some reason Eşref did not like this transfer. He indicated his displeasure with this couplet:

Acıpayam's lawsuits grayed my hair;

What errors will I make in Buldan town?

Since then this couplet has been repeated by others. It is used especially by government workers informed that they are to be transferred to a new location.⁵

⁵Who can gainsay the narrator's statement about the circulation of this expression? It is not listed in Metin Yurtbaşı's Dictionary of Turkish Proverbs (1993), but every popular expression is not necessarily proverbial.