

BELIEFS AND PRACTICES REGARDING HIDDEN TREASURE IN TURKEY*

AHMET EDİP UYSAL**

Asia Minor, with a history going back at least ten-thousand years, a land of countless buried civilizations and proud cities with impressive monuments, has been for centuries a hunting ground of treasure-seekers as well as archaeologists. In spite of the extensive plundering of Turkey's archæological wealth by Europeans, and the smuggling out of the country of her priceless works of art revealed by hasty and haphazardly carried out excavations in the 19th century, there are still many sites, tombs and buried cities to be explored. There are currently close to a hundred archæological excavations in progress in Turkey.

Parallel to this extensive digging at the official, academic and respectable level, we have in Turkey a far more extensive activity of digging at the unofficial, unacademic and unrespectable folk level, an activity, which has of late reached almost epidemic proportions. I once described this folk activity as "Folk Archæology" in the presence of some academic archæologists, who took it as an insult on their sacred subject and were furious. One of them corrected me saying that what I was talking about was "the lunatic fringe of Archæology" and added that treasure folk continuously tore the pages of their book, i.e., the underground strata and layers of culture down below, and as such they were their greatest enemies.

No matter what we may call it, and whether archæologists like it or not, there has always been a deep folk interest in buried treasure in Turkey. It is illegal in Turkey to dig for treasure without a permit from the Department of Antiquities, but the bureaucratic formalities involved in obtaining a permit to dig are so complicated and frust-

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** Professor of English Language and Literature, Dean, Faculty of Education, Middle East Technical University; founder of the Archive of Turkish Folk Narrative, Ankara.

rating that, hundreds of thousands of treasure hunters — humorously called “night workers” because to evade the law they operate during night— dig the ground indiscriminately. Many illegal diggers of treasure are caught and prosecuted, but apparently a great majority of them are not bothered by the authorities at all.

As in most other countries, there are two types of treasure hunters in Turkey: the urban and the rural. It is with the latter group of treasure hunters, i.e., the real folk treasure hunters of Turkey that I have been concerned in my study. It is to this group that the majority of treasure hunters in Turkey belong. The rural treasure hunter in Turkey is often a very naive and gullible man. He is inclined to believe in the most far-fetched rumors and stories of hidden treasure; he is imaginative and romantic; he is fond of exaggerating; he enjoys talking about and listening to fantastic stories of hidden treasure.

I have often listened to many stories and descriptions of treasure by rural practitioners of the art of treasure hunting in villages all over Turkey, and in the Treasure Hunting Societies of Istanbul and Bursa, the only two societies of this kind in Turkey, which have a total membership of about a thousand.*

The traces of the mediaval lore of rhabdomancy, divination by numerology and the use of the divining rod are still found in Turkey. Some learned books on clairvoyance, fortune telling and the esoteric aspects of treasure hunting, books written in old Turkish, are still very much in demand at second-hand booksellers. They are chiefly looked for by older people who can read the Arabic script, and by sophisticated practitioners among whom are the hodjas, i.e., the Moslem priests who have gained questionable reputation in their community for having supernatural powers in calling and controlling demons and in deciphering the secret messages in inscriptions. *Esraru'l-huruf*, *Kenzu'l-havas*, *Futuhu'l-gayb* and *Kenzu'l-menam* are only a few of these works. The unsophisticated peasant treasure hunter cannot of course read and understand these profound works of mediaval learning, but he often consults some “deep hodja”, who is well versed in these esoteric subjects. He explains to him his problem

* These Societies have lately been closed down by the authorities as they failed to meet the requirements of the new Societies' Act.

and then asks him to find out what his "black covered book" says about it.

A land of many ancient civilizations, where countless ancient monuments and immense ruined cities of the ancient world are still standing or lying buried, Asia Minor abounds in ancient symbols, signs and inscriptions of all kinds. They are everywhere, carved on walls, marble slabs, pedestals and even on the surfaces of natural rocks. The rural treasure hunters' curiosity is continuously aroused by these, and he believes that they are related with buried treasure and they are instructions in code about the location of such treasure. They copy these and show them to learned hodjas for interpretation, who charge considerably high fees for such consultation; they may even demand 50 % share in the treasure.

The use of the divining rod, the hazel twig, copper wires for finding hidden treasure is, of course, very widespread in Turkey. The use of metal detectors is a technique almost entirely unknown to the rural practitioner. He has, of course, heard of them, but he believes they cost a fortune.

The following are some common treasure hunting methods used by rural practitioners:

Flying the White Cock : the treasure hunter and his white cock both fast during the day. At about midnight the white cock, still fasting, and carrying an amulet round its neck, is thrown up, and the point it lands on the ground is dug for treasure.

Gathering of the Jins (or demons) : the hodja draws a circle on the ground, and he and his treasure hunting client sit in it. The hodja tells his client that a shadow will appear and start turning round and round, outside the circle. This is the demon in possession of the treasure. Then he tells his client that he will try to stop the demon, and the point he stops on shows the direction in which the treasure lies. Sometimes he cannot stop the demon, because it turns out to be a vicious infidel one. He explains to his client that he has control only over goodnatured Moslem demons. In such a case there is nothing to be done except running away. He and his client run as fast as they can. Several peasants I interviewed have had this frightening experience, and they told me that, bricks, tiles and hundreds of broken plates were being thrown at them from behind while they were trying to escape. One treasure hunter confessed to me that when they were

safely out of danger, he stopped and gave the hodja a good dressing down!

No doubt visual and sound hallucinations brought about by suggestion are at work in such cases, and the high degree of suggestibility often found in the treasure hunter lends itself easily to the successful employment of this method.

Self induced hallucinatory phenomena, such as seeing a dazzling treasure full of gold and precious stones through a hole in the ground, and not being able to find the site the next day are quite common among the experiences of rural treasure hunters. They are projections of hidden wishes coming to the surface in a trancelike state and a kind of dream wishfulfilment.

Burying a Lark's Egg in the Ground: a lark's egg is buried after being inscribed with a prayer in Arabic. If it disappears in two days, there is treasure underneath; if found intact there is no treasure.

The Eye of the Black Cat: after being extracted and dried, the eye of the black cat is believed to show hidden treasure.

The Use of Treasure Maps and Signs: the use of treasure maps, tracing treasure signs and interpreting dreams of treasure are, of course, among the most common methods used by treasure hunters of Turkey. Maps of all kinds, some drawn very crudely, and some drawn very ingeniously are bought and sold in treasure circles. They are almost invariably fake, but apparently they are good enough to satisfy the naive peasants, because, they buy them at unbelievably high prices, hoping that some day they will possess the treasure shown in the map.

The following incident should illustrate how gullible the rural treasure hunter is, and how easily his imagination is stimulated:

One day last year five peasants from the Yozgat province visited me in my office in Ankara University. They had heard that I was an authority on treasure maps. They told me that there was a cave near their village, and on the walls of this cave there was the figure of a fish in high relief; it was their belief that, that fish was the sign of an immense treasure hidden under the floor of the cave. They wanted to know my opinion of it. I tried to explain to them that the sign of fish was very common in Turkey and that it is often either an astrological symbol or a symbol of fertility. They did not think much

of this explanation, and held the view that it was a treasure sign. As further evidence one of them took out of his pocket a carefully folded chart wrapped in plastic. When it was spread on my desk it did not take me long to see what it was. It was a chart printed in color, and showing how the human digestive system functioned. It showed the internal organs of man as if they were some kind of a factory. On the margins there were numerous explanatory notes in Chinese. Obviously it was printed in China. The man in the chart was sitting at a table on which there was a large plate with a fish in it. The man was taking a piece of this fish to his mouth. "Well, what do you think of this?" asked my visitor. I told him that it was a Chinese chart showing how food was digested in the human body. My visitor objected strongly. It was nothing of the sort; it was a map of the treasure hidden in the cave with the fish figure near their village. The complicated passage ways, secret traps and tunnels leading to the treasure room were all on the chart. I told these peasants that they would never be able to discover any treasure at all by means of that chart, and I asked them whether they would kindly leave it with me for a few hours so that I can show it to my students, without mentioning where the treasure cave was located. In fact I wanted to take a picture of the chart for my archive. But my visitors became very suspicious of me. They thought they had already revealed too much of their secrets, and therefore, they carefully rolled their valuable treasure map, and walked out of my room. Well, I thought this was gullibility to the *nth* degree.

A full description of the beliefs of the people of Turkey regarding treasure is naturally beyond the scope of this paper. I can, however, mention some of the typically outstanding ones, which are probably peculiar to Turkey.

There is the belief among the treasure hunters of Turkey that exactly 74 tons of gold is lying buried in the soil of Asia Minor. This gold was stolen from the treasury of the Ottoman Sultans by such infidel bandits as Manol, Lefter, Pop Martin, Katirdji Yani, Volchan Voyvoda, and the Moslem Emin Agha, the chief treasurer of the Sultan. These bandits buried their plunder in 366 different places marking each with appropriate signs for future recovery. Emin Agha, the Turkish bandit is supposed to have hidden his plunder, which consists of 40 mule loads of gold, in the basement of a watermill called

after his name. Completely buried under mud after floods, this mill is being searched all over the mountains of the Black Sea region. I have met treasure hunters who can draw the complicated plan of the Emin Agha Watermill with a chalk on the floors of coffee houses. They usually finish the job in half an hour. It is what I call complexity of the highest degree!

The 74 tons of gold from the Sultan's treasury is still lying buried. The secret signs and instructions in code for its ultimate recovery are in some ancient manuscripts in the Vatican Library, where only a few monks have access to them. In fact a long but silent conflict has been going on for centuries between Christianity and Islam over the possession of this gold. Excavations, which are being carried out in Turkey by European and American universities have the secret aim of finding this gold. Space flights, moon landings and underground nuclear tests all pursue the same end. The American radar stations and air bases in Turkey are established for the same purpose.

On the other hand, I discovered that among the members of the Treasure Hunters Society in Bursa there are three Armenian priests, who hope they will go to the Vatican Library some day, and find out the treasure secrets of Asia Minor, and pass them on to their Turkish compatriots, thus rendering a patriotic service.

It is believed that the buried gold in Asia Minor is enough to solve all the financial problems of the country, and even to close the big deficit in the national budget. So vast is the gold buried in the soil of Turkey that, when it is recovered, it would be enough to shoe all the horses in the country with golden shoes! A peasant once assured me that, if a marble sarcophagus, only one of the 366 treasures in the country, is accidentally hit and broken by a pick axe, gold coins would rush out of it non stop for 24 hours!

The treasure hunters of Turkey are so convinced of the presence of unlimited gold in the ground that, they just cannot understand why the Turkish Government is not cooperating with them to recover it. Some even believe that the Government is in some sort of secret alliance with the infidels over this gold issue.

I recently met a man, who virtually spent all his life tracing the 366 treasure signs on the Karadağ Mountain range along the southern shores of the Sea of Marmora, an area which is called the VIIth

Treasure Region in Turkey by some more knowledgeable practitioners. It is supposed to be the richest of the treasure regions of the country. The man swears by the name of Allah that he explored the entire VIIth region step by step, and traced every single treasure sign in the 366 Treasure Complex, and that the richest hoard is located at a point near the village of Tophisar in the district of Karacabey. His application to dig the place was turned down by the authorities, because the site he wanted to dig happened to be an ancient mound with the ruin of a Roman temple on it. He failed to see why the authorities were so fussy about it all, because he was going to dig just a small hole there, and leave the rest of the area to the vain and unprofitable excavations of the archaeologists. I do not know what happened afterwards, but he probably went and dug the place one night without a permit.

Once a peasant from eastern Turkey wrote me about a huge rock containing an immense treasure somewhere inside. This rock had a soft spot and when pressed with finger it moaned, and when pressed a little more it cried, and when pressed harder it bled. He asked me how to go about opening this treasure, which he believed was possessed.

A widespread treasure belief in Turkey is that of money being hidden in the walls or columns of mosques and other public buildings by their builders to be used for repair work in the future. As a result of this belief considerable destruction is sometimes known to have been caused to public buildings in Turkey.

I once heard an interesting story about how such money was hidden in the walls of a mosque in Antalya, and how it was years later recovered. Here is the story:

“A poor Turkish cobbler by the name of Dikiji Murat dreamed one night of a cobbler in Egypt, who was supposed to have a large sum of money that actually belonged to him. He, therefore, went to Egypt, and walking in the street one day, he met the man that he had seen in his dream. The man was eating grapes. The cobbler from Turkey brought the matter up. He said to him “I am Dikiji Murat from Antalya, Turkey. I understand you have some money belonging to me.” The cobbler of Egypt offered the Turkish cobbler some grapes and said “Are you out of your mind, man? I was once told in my dream that there was gold in such and such part of such and such

a house, but I din't bother going there. Apparently you have come all this way to eat some of my grapes." Murat returned to Antalya disappointed, but when he dug beneath the floor of his room he found three pots of gold there! He gave half of this gold to the Sultan of Turkey, who made him a Pasha in return, and with the other half he built what is now called the Murat Pasha Mosque in Antalya. In one of the walls of the mosque he put money to be used for the repair work on the building in years to come. To safeguard this money he put various signs and inscriptions to mislead treasure hunters. For example, he put on each of the thick columns supporting the main dome the inscription "It is not in me, but in the one opposite me.", so that nobody was able to discover the money for many centuries, until in this century, when a governor of Antalya was trying to raise money to embellish the city, an old man said he knew where Dikiji Murat's repair money was hidden. The governor allowed him to dig the money out of the foundations of the mosque. It is said that with this money the present city park was built."

I heard the above story from a photographer in Antalya, and he seemed as if he had entirely believed in it himself.

A very widespread belief in Turkey is that many rich people have become rich only after striking hidden treasure. In almost every town people would, when asked, count the names of people who struck gold. Some of them stayed in their homes, but some left the town as they did not want any body to know that they had found treasure.

The people of my own village, Doğla near Karacabey, Bursa, believe in the reality of the phenomenon called "the Gold Shower" or "the winnowing of gold", which they swear by the name of Allah, occurs once a year during night upon a field called *Altın Tarla* (Golden Field), half a mile from the village. They believe that a large cauldron with seven handles and figures of fish and boar on its sides, and filled with what is called *Takyanoz Altınları* (Takyanoz Gold) is buried somewhere deep under that field. It is further believed that the gold down there is possessed, and female demons throw it up the air once a year to air it lest it might get mouldy and rusty. I interviewed three men who swore by both Allah and Mohammed that they had seen the Gold Shower with their naked eyes several years before and they were able to describe it in minute detail. Millions of glit-

tering gold coins rose up about 300 feet and came down again, and that this up and down motion went on for some time. It was all dazzling brilliance. One added "You are supposed to throw your hat in the shower, and run away without looking back, for 40 paces, and if one coin gets under your hat and lands on the ground, then the demons protecting the treasure abandon all the gold on the field. You can then go and help yourself. Similar phenomena are also described in some other villages widely apart from one another. It is most likely that these phenomena are, like will-o-the-wisp or swamp gas, caused by some kind of phosphorous exhalation from the ground. Such phenomena are sometimes observed over ancient burial grounds.

A treasure hunter in Tarsus, in Southern Turkey, claimed in 1968 that he had sufficient evidence about the existence of what he called Cleopatra's Treasure being buried underneath a mulberry tree in somebody's garden in the town. His evidence was as follows: 1) he had seen the treasure in his dream; 2) he had some maps of the treasure; 3) the mulberry tree which yielded white berries normally started yielding red berries all of a sudden in January 1968. The tree had sprouted leaves a week prior to that, and shed all its leaves a week later. Adding to this weighty evidence, the historical evidence that the city of Tarsus had been completely destroyed by earthquake and buried under debris together with its 400,000 citizens about two thousand years ago, the Tarsus treasure hunter was able to convince the authorities about the seriousness of his claim, and was duly issued a permit to dig the Cleopatra's Treasure out. The centuries old mulberry tree was removed and a 42 feet deep hole was dug where it stood, but there was no sign of any treasure. The project was abandoned in disappointment.

In a country like Turkey, which has been a bridge between Asia and Europe since time immemorial, a land which is a melting pot of many different peoples, and a scene of many natural and human devastations, there is, no doubt, much buried gold, but it is not so much as treasure hunters think. People really buried their money for protection until almost 50 years ago, when there were only a few banks in the country. Occasionally, Byzantine and Ottoman gold coins are found when old buildings are being demolished and their foundations dug. Some years ago 500 Byzantine coins were found in an earthen pot in the foundations of an old building in Istanbul.

Once lightning struck a rock pillar near Bursa on the slopes of the Uludağ, and thousands of silver coins, which were hidden in a hollow within the rock, were scattered over a wide area, and people collected silver coins for days. It is such accidental manifestations of buried money as these that stimulate the inherent urge for search in the folk mind.

There are in Turkey people, like Halit Beygu, once president of the Bursa Treasure Hunters' Society, who look at the subject from a spiritual point of view. They believe that treasure hunting is essentially a mystical adventure, a search for God, a dig into one's own heart, and the discovery of God there. That is why Halit Beygu founded the Bursa Society, and wrote on its wall in bold letters the slogan "Seek the treasures in thine own heart".

After its foundation in 1963, the Treasure Hunters Society in Bursa functioned as a kind of center of therapy for relieving the treasure sickness for many years. Chronic sufferers from the disease, as well as those who have caught the gold-fever epidemic recently, frequent the premises of the Society, where they find treasures in the smoky regions of the imagination, and become millionaires without being struck by angry demons, or prosecuted by merciless state authorities.