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## THE CALIPH MAMOUN AND THE PROPHET DANIEL

### I. CALIPH MAMOUN AND THE MAGIC FISH

THE circumstances attending the death of the Caliph Mamoun (A.D. 833) are thus related by Masoudi (+ c. 956), who wrote about a century after the event. On his return from a victorious raid against the Greeks the Caliph encamped in the beautiful valley of Bedidoun.<sup>1</sup> Like all Orientals, he was susceptible to the charm of clear, running water, and at his orders a rustic pavilion was constructed over the spring called Kochaïrah, from which the river Bedidoun flowed. In this the Caliph sat. A silver coin was thrown into the spring, and so clear was the water that the legend of the coin beneath its surface could be read. Mamoun then noticed in the spring a fish 'a cubit long and shining like an ingot of silver,' which he desired should be caught for him. This was done, but the fish, when brought to the Caliph, escaped by a sudden movement into the spring, sprinkling the Caliph's breast, neck and shoulders with cold water as it did so. It was again caught, and the Caliph gave orders that it should be cooked. As he did so he was seized by a shivering fit, and when the fish was cooked he was in a high fever and unable to eat it. This was the beginning of the illness which caused his death. Before this took place he had the guides and prisoners called and asked them the significance of the name of the spring Kochaïrah. He was told that it meant 'stretch out thy feet,' which he took for an omen of his death. He then asked the Arab name of the country he was in: the reply was 'Rakkah.' As it had been foretold him that he should die at a place thus named, he knew that his hour was come. And he died then and was carried to Tarsus and buried on the left side of the mosque.<sup>2</sup>

As to the local nomenclature in this story two observations may be made. (1) To Masoudi and the Arabs the name *Kochaïrah* meant nothing; but the historian says that some held that it was *Bedidoun*, and not *Kochaïrah*, that meant 'stretch out thy feet.' We have thus clearly a local Greek derivation of Podandus from *πούς* (foot) and *τείνω* (stretch).<sup>3</sup>

In *Rakkah* we have probably to do with a corrupt form of the name of the neighbouring Byzantine fortress Herakleia, called by the Arabs Irakla:

<sup>1</sup> Podandus, the modern Bozanti, two days from Tarsus on the post-road to Eregli.

<sup>2</sup> *Les Prairies d'Or*, ed. and tr. Barbier de Meynard, vii, pp. 1-2 and 96-101.

<sup>3</sup> If the pun seems far-fetched, what about Ἰκόνιον διὰ τὸ ἡκέναι τὸν Περσέα (Preger, *Script. Orig. Constant.* i. 72)? For punning on local names cf. Theoph.

Cont. Const. Porph., V. xxv. p. 113 P, A.D. 838 (cf. Bury, *J.H.S.* 1909, 125), where Omar inquires the local names from Greek captives and derives bad omens from the names. The idea is probably Greek, as in both cases the Moslem comes off badly and the puns are Greek.

the resemblance between *Rakka* and *Irakla* is close enough for the purpose of the story.<sup>4</sup>

The story itself is pretty evidently based on a folk-legend turning on the theme of inevitable fate.<sup>5</sup> But what is the point of the elaborate fish episode? It is clear that the fish was a magic fish, otherwise it could not have caused the Caliph's death as it did. The only hypothesis which really explains the story is that both spring and fish were sacred, that the Caliph sinned by wishing to catch the fish, and persisted in his sin even after his first warning. This hypothesis is backed by two points. (1) The Greek name of the spring is given as *Aïdareka*, which evidently contains the name of a saint, to whom the spring was held sacred by Christians. (2) A coin was thrown into it,<sup>6</sup> evidently in accordance with the world-wide custom at sacred springs and wells. This incident may be held to prove that the Caliph knew from the first that the spring was sacred. One can hardly doubt that the tale came originally from a hostile (Christian) source. Masoudi had plenty of opportunity for access to non-Moslem writers and is said not infrequently to have made use of them.

The memory of Mamoun seems to have survived at Tarsus, at least among the learned, till the middle of the seventeenth century, when the incidents recorded of his death were located not at Podandus (Bozanti), but quite near Tarsus itself.<sup>7</sup> Of his tomb nothing is recorded after the thirteenth century, when it was still a Moslem pilgrimage, though Cilicia was in Christian hands and the mosque had become a church of SS. Peter and Sophia. This curious fact rests on the authority of Yakout (1225)<sup>8</sup> and Willibrand of Oldenburg (1211).<sup>9</sup> The latter speaks of the tomb as that of the 'sister of Mahommed,' which looks as if the identity of its occupant was already becoming vague among the common folk. The church of SS. Peter and Sophia is thought by Langlois<sup>10</sup> to have occupied the site of the present Oulou Djami, a purely Mahomedan building, but this is far from proved.

## II. SACRED FISHES IN THE LEVANT

Sacred springs are exceedingly common in Turkish lands. Christians regularly, and Turks occasionally, associate them with the names of their saints. Springs containing sacred fish are not uncommon in Syria. Most famous are the fish of the sacred tank dimly connected with Abraham at Urfa,<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> An Armenian authority of 1108 (cited by Tomaschek in *Sitzb. Wien. Akad., Phil. Hist. Cl.* cxxiv. 1891, viii. 66) speaks of a fortress *Krakka* near Kybistra or Herakleia Kybistra = Eregli).

<sup>5</sup> The lesson seems never to be learnt.

<sup>6</sup> For this world-wide practice see Frazer's note on *Paus.* i. 34 (4). For Asia Minor see V. de Bunsen, *Soul of a Turk*, p. 173. Niebuhr (*Voyage en Arabie*, ii. 281) records that the Yezidis are reported to throw gold and silver into a cistern at Sheikh Adi in honour of their saint, and he compares the Jebel Sindjar practice.

<sup>7</sup> Hadja Khalfa, tr. Norberg, ii. 360.

<sup>8</sup> Le Strange, *E. Caliphate*, p. 133.

<sup>9</sup> Ed. Leo Allatius, Εἰμύματα, 137.

<sup>10</sup> *Voyage dans la Cilicie*, p. 317. See my *Graves of the Arabs in B.S.A.* xix. p. 182.

<sup>11</sup> The first modern writer to mention it seems to be an Italian merchant (c. 1507: see *Italian Travels in Persia*, ed. Hakluyt Soc., p. 144). See also Barkley, *Asia Minor*, p. 254; Buckingham, *Travels in Mesopotamia*, i. 111; Warkworth, *Diary in Asiatic Turkey*, p. 242; Pococke, *Descr. of the East*, II. i. 160; Tavernier, *Voyages*, p. 68; Olivier, *Voyage*, iv. 218; Sachau, *Reise in Syrien*, p. 197; S. Silvia, ed. Geyer, p. 62; Thévenot, *Voyages*, iii. 141; de

and the fish of Sheikh Bedawi at Tripoli,<sup>12</sup> which are treated with the greatest respect and never caught. An interesting passage in Feburé's *Théâtre de la Turquie* probably refers to the Tripoli fish, almost certainly to Syria. It runs as follows :—

‘ Ils ont une espece de respect & de veneration pour les poissons de certains lacs & fontaines, où qui que ce soit n’ozeroit pescher, si ce n’est de nuit & en cachette, le plus secretement qu’ils peuvent; ce qui fait qu’ils s’y multiplient en tres-grande quantité, & qu’il y en a de monstrueux. Ils les appellent Checs [i. e. *Sheikhs*] qui est la qualité qu’ils donnent à leurs principaux Religieux, & leur allument la nuit des lampes par devotion.’<sup>13</sup>

The stages in the development of these Syrian fish-cults seem to have been as follows. First the fish as the denizen of the spring is regarded as the incarnation of the spring divinity himself, whence the fish-tailed Baals of Syria;<sup>14</sup> later it is conceived of as a sort of *famulus* of the divinity, under his immediate protection. Numerous secular folk-stories of Eastern origin deal with fish possessed of miraculous powers as well as with fish which are really human beings enchanted.<sup>15</sup>

Similar fish-cults in the Turkish area are hard to find. Fish are preserved in the sacred well of the Shamaspur Tekkeh near Aladja<sup>16</sup> in Paphlagonia, while on the Christian side we have at Constantinople a well-known instance in the famous fish of Baluklu.<sup>17</sup> We should probably find that both these are ultimately of Syrian origin. The religious significance of the fishes concerned seems to have died down to a minimum. The fishes of Baluklu at least have become a mere peg for folk imagination.<sup>18</sup> Those of Aladja are probably thought of as deriving their sanctity merely from their sacred surroundings, just as the fish of the river which flows by the tomb of Daniel at Susa are now said to be immune from capture in honour of the prophet;<sup>19</sup> though the origin

Bunsen, *Soul of a Turk*, p. 218; Niebuhr, *Voyage en Arabie*, ii. 330; Rubens-Duval, *Hist. d'Edesse*, in *Journ. Asiat.* 1891-2, p. 92.

<sup>12</sup> Lortet, *La Syrie d'aujourd'hui*, p. 58 f.; d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, ii. 390-1; Burekhardt, *Travels in Syria*, p. 166; Kelly, *Syria and the Holy Land*, p. 106; Renan, *Mission de Phénicie*, p. 130; Soury, *Études sur la Grèce*, p. 66.

<sup>13</sup> Paris, 1682, p. 35. Cf. Jessup, *Women of the Arabs*, pp. 296-7, who says one black fish at Tripoli is the *Sheikh* of the saints, whose souls are in the fish of the pool. Death is supposed to follow the eating of these fish, but the sceptical Jessup experimented without any untoward results. During the Crimean War many of the fish went off under the sea to Sebastopol and fought the infidel Russians, some returning wounded.

<sup>14</sup> For a fish river-god in Asia Minor see the dedication ΠΟΤΑΜΩ ΕΥΧΗΝ in *J.H.S.* xix. 76 (32).

<sup>15</sup> Cosquin, *Contes de Lorraine*, i. 60;

Hartland, *Perseus*, i. 24; Legrand, *Contes Grecs*, p. 161, all give examples of magic fish. The first story in Burton's edition of the *Arabian Nights* mentions a bewitched fish.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson in Murray's *Asia Minor*, p. 36; Hamilton, *Asia Minor*, i. 403; H. J. Ross, *Letters from the East*, p. 243. The fish mentioned by Hamilton (*op. cit.* i. 98) at Mohimoul near Tauschanli may also have been sacred. For sacred fish near Afion Kara Hissar see Calder in *J.R.S.* ii. 246.

<sup>17</sup> Carnoy et Nicolaides, *Folklore de Constantinople*, pp. 54 ff. (many versions). See my forthcoming *Studies in Popular Religion*.

<sup>18</sup> Fishes are similarly kept in the *ayasma* of Παναγία Παζαριώτισσα at Gemlek (Kios) in Bithynia, but this is probably due to the influence of Constantinople.

<sup>19</sup> Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, p. 240; cf. Benjamin of Tudela, ed. Asher, i. 117 ff.; Carmoly, *Itinéraires de la Terre Sainte*, p. 459 (citing Jichus Ha-Abot (A.D. 1564), ed. Uri de Biel).

of the *tabu* is explained by a historical legend, it may be older than the tomb itself. The fish, that is, may have begun as the incarnation of the river deity, to be eventually ousted by the personality of the prophet and degraded to the position of a mere *protégé*.

### III. THE TOMB OF DANIEL AT TARSUS

What appears to be the chief Moslem pilgrimage of modern Tarsus is the Mosque known as Makam Hazreti Daniel ('Station of his Excellency Daniel'), which is supposed to contain the grave of the Prophet Daniel.<sup>20</sup> This grave has been shown as Daniel's certainly since the latter part of the seventeenth century. Lucas says in his description of Tarsus: 'les Habitans assurent que c'est chez eux où est mort le Prophète Daniel: j'entraî dans une Mosquée, sous laquelle on pretend qu'il a été enterré. Les Turcs y ont mis sur une grande tombe un cercueil de bois, qu'ils reverent; & ils le font voir eux-mêmes comme une rareté. Ce cercueil est toujours couvert d'un grand drapeau noir en broderie.'<sup>21</sup>

Barker, for many years consul at Tarsus, gives the following description of the tomb:—

'The Turks hold in great veneration a tomb which they believe contains the bones of this prophet, situated in an ancient Christian church, converted into a mosque, in the centre of the modern town of Tarsus. The sarcophagus is said to be about *forty feet below* the surface of the present soil, in consequence of the accumulation of earth and stones; and over which a stream flows from the Cydnus river, of comparatively modern date. Over this stream, at the particular spot where the sarcophagus was (before the canal was cut and the waters went over it), stands the ancient church above mentioned; and to mark the exact spot of the tomb below, a wooden monument has been erected in the Turkish style. [This monument is covered with an embroidered cloth, and stands in a special apartment built for it, from the iron-grated windows of which it may occasionally be seen when the Armenians take occasion to make their secret devotions; but generally a curtain is dropped to hide it from vulgar view, and add by exclusion to the sanctity of the place.] The waters of this rivulet are turned off every year in the summer, in order to clear the bed of the canal.'<sup>22</sup>

This 'tomb of Daniel' continues down to our own day to be an object of Moslem veneration. The best authenticated 'tomb of Daniel' is, however, the interesting sanctuary at Sus (Shushan?), the traditions of which seem to go back at least to the sixth century A.D.<sup>23</sup> A point of contact between the two graves, noted by Barker, is that both are said to lie beneath

<sup>20</sup> It is mentioned by Lucas and Barker (cited below), also by Langlois, *Cilicie*, p. 329, and by Cuinet, *Turq. d'Asie*, ii. 48.

<sup>21</sup> *Voyage dans la Grèce*, i. 272 f. (Amsterdam, 1714). Hadji Khalfa is silent. The legend of Daniel in Cilicia at Shah Meran

Kalesi is omitted in Bianchi's translation of Menassik-el-Hadj (in *Recueil de Voyages*, ii. 103).

<sup>22</sup> *Lares and Penates*, p. 17, and note.

<sup>23</sup> Theodosius, *De Situ Terrae Sanctae*, ed. Tobler, 359 (ed. Geyer, p. 149).

streams.<sup>24</sup> A learned Mussulman professor, consulted at my request by Dr. Christie of Tarsus, gave it as his opinion that the identification of the younger 'tomb of Daniel' rested on a confusion between *Sus* and *Tarsus*, which is probably correct; the coincidence (?) of the grave being under a stream may have aided, or even have been devised to aid, popular acceptance of the Tarsian 'tomb of Daniel.' There seems a considerable probability that it really marks the site of Mamoun's grave,<sup>25</sup> which would thus have been continuously venerated, under various names, from the death of the Caliph to our own day: we may readily conceive that the name of its occupant became lost under the Armenian kings, though the spot was vaguely known to be sacred. At some date unknown, the name of Daniel was given to it under learned inspiration. With the incident of Mamoun and the magic fish transferred, as we have seen it was, to the immediate neighbourhood of Tarsus, it would be interesting to know whether the new 'tomb of Daniel,' like the old, places a *tabu* on the neighbouring stream, since this would form a link between the cycles of Caliph and Prophet.

<sup>24</sup> For the tomb of Daniel at Sus see *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, iv. 430, s.v. *Daniel, Tomb of*; for details of its legendary history Asher's edition of Benjamin of Tudela, i. 117 ff., and for its present state Ouseley, *Travels*, i. 420; Loftus, *Travels in Chaldaea*, pp. 416 ff.; de Bode, *Travels in Lauristan*, ii. 190; Rawlinson in *J.R.G.S.* ix. (1839) 69, 83; Layard in *J.R.G.S.* xvi. (1846) 61. Cf. also Carmoly's *Itinéraires*, pp. 489 ff. A plan is given by Loftus in *Trans. Roy.*

*Soc. Lit.* v. (1856) to face p. 422; a view is given by Flandin and Coste, *Voyage en Perse*, Pl. 100, and a sketch accompanied by a short account of the tomb may be found in the *Field* of July 13, 1918.

<sup>25</sup> There is, of course, no proof of the 'Mosque of Daniel' occupying the site of the church of SS. Peter and Sophia; but the former is placed by Barker (*loc. cit.*), as the latter is by Willibrand (in Allatius, *Σύμμικτα*, p. 137), in the centre of the town.

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