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Graves of the Arabs in Asia Minor

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GRAVES OF THE ARABS IN ASIA MINOR

AMONG the Mahommedan religious antiquities of Asia Minor the tomb-sanctuaries held to represent the resting-places of Arabs killed during the forays of the viii-ix centuries form a well-marked and extremely interesting group. Their authenticity is on general grounds more than doubtful. The campaigns of the Arabs led to no permanent occupation: the lands they had conquered for the moment were restored to Christendom or fell to alien races. Only in the borderlands, where in times of peace Christian and Moslem might meet on equal terms, can we expect a true tradition regarding Arab graves or a continuous veneration of them to have persisted.

Of these borderland Moslem cults supposed to date back to the Arab period we can point to two examples, the tomb of the 'sister of Mahommed' at Tarsus and the tomb of Umm Haram in Cyprus.

The former is mentioned by Willibrand von Oldenburg (1210) as still a place of Moslem pilgrimage under the Christian kings of Armenia. It was situated outside the church of S. (Beatus) Peter and S. Sophia in the middle of the town.¹ It seems at least possible that this tomb was really that of the Caliph Mamoun, miscalled by the Frankish chronicler. Mamoun died in 833 A.D. at Podandus (Bozanti) and was buried at Tarsus, then an important frontier town of the Arabs, on the left hand side of the Friday Mosque.² I have no information as to the perpetuation or otherwise of this cult down to our own day. For present purposes it is

¹ Ed. Leo Allatius, *Σύμμεκτα*, 14:—*In angulo quodam extra foris Ecclesiae sepulta est soror Mahomet; cuius tumbam Saraceni in multo petunt timore et devotione.* The site of the church in question is said by Langlois to be occupied by the present Oulou Djami (*Cilicie*, 317).

² Le Strange, *E. Caliphate*, 133, quoting Masoudi (d. 943). Yakout's lexicon (1225), also quoted, says that the tomb was still to be seen. Both authors probably possessed accurate local information.

important mainly as shewing the possibility of the survival of a Moslem cult in spite of Christian domination.

The tomb of Umm Haram is, owing to Mr. Cobham's researches,¹ better documented. The Arab sources, which he quotes at length, are sufficient to prove that Umm Haram was a historical person, that she died in the course of an Arab expedition to Cyprus, and that she was buried there in 649 A.D. Her tomb seems to have been known at least three centuries later both to Arab and Christian,² but the exact position in the island is not indicated. There follows a significant *lacuna* in the history of the grave till after the conquest of Cyprus by the Turks (1572).

Hadji Khalfa,³ halfway through the next century, is the first modern authority to mention, but without giving the name of the saint, the present 'tomb of Umm Haram' on the salt lake near Larnaka, which continues down to our own day to be a frequented Moslem pilgrimage with a well-endowed *tekke*. This is the more significant since the site of the 'tomb' is not out of the beaten track; indeed the salt lake at Larnaka has always been one of the sights visited by travellers.⁴

The so-called 'tomb' itself, though now associated with Umm Haram, has been recognised by Cobham as a prehistoric building similar to the chapel of Phaneromene⁵ in the same district and the so-called 'tomb' of S. Catherine at Famagusta.⁶ All three appear to have been underground prehistoric buildings, not necessarily, or even probably, tombs.

In the case of the Tomb of Umm Haram, Mariti (1760-7) records from a Christian source a tradition that its discovery was relatively recent and that its exploitation was due to a dervish. Among Mahommedans generally was current a tradition that the building, originally underground was, at a date not indicated, laid bare by heavy rains. In this condition

¹ *The Story of Umm Haram* in *J. R. Asiat. Soc.* 1897, 81 ff.

² Const. Porph., *de Them.* iii. 40, and Al Baladuri (d. 893 A.D.) cited by Cobham.

³ Tr. Armain in Vivien de S. Martin, *Asie Mineure*, ii. 667: (*Memlahah*) . . . *il y a en cet endroit un tekieh ou couvent de dervichs, dans lequel reposent les reliques d'une sainte dame qui vivait du temps du Prophète*. The earlier Turkish geographer Piri Reis (c. 1550, ap. Oberhummer, *Cyperm*, i. 427) does not mention the tomb in his description of the island.

⁴ Kootwyck (1619) who describes the salt-lake at length, does not mention the tomb (Cobham, *Exc. Cypr.* 191): the earliest foreign notice of it seems to be that of Le Bruyn (1683, *loc. cit.* 191).

⁵ *Arch. Zeit.* 1881, 311.

⁶ *J.H.S.* iv. 12.

it was discovered by shepherds, to whom its nature was revealed by a vision of a lady in white raiment.¹ It thus seems clear that the gap in the history of the tomb cannot be filled, that its cult has not been continuous, and that its authenticity is improbable. The history of other 'discoveries' of Arab tombs makes that of Umm Haram's still more suspect.

Of the reputed Arab tombs in Asia Minor the most important is that of Sidi Battal Ghazi, which lies in a mausoleum (*turbe*) attached to the convent (*tekke*) bearing the name of the hero, six hours south of Eskişehir. The *tekke* was formerly a very important seat of the Bektashi dervishes: its popular vogue was enhanced by the fact that it lay on the pilgrims' road from Constantinople to Mecca.²

[The *tekke* of Sidi Battal is supposed by Ramsay and other authorities to occupy the site of an earlier Christian holy place, but in my opinion on insufficient grounds. The assumption rests partly on inexact archaeological data and partly on the overworked idea that every holy place has always been such.

The evidence in favour of the assumption is as follows:—

(1) The site is undoubtedly that of the ancient Nakoleia.³

(2) Ruins of a Byzantine monastery are said to be incorporated in the buildings of the convent. Radet goes so far as to say that the mosque is a Christian basilica⁴; Ouvré, his companion, is not so sure.⁵ Other travellers' descriptions are vague.⁶ A recent visitor, Brandenburg, seems to refute the idea implicitly.⁷ Turkish sources attribute the building of the mosque to Suleiman the Magnificent.⁸

(3) Cuinet mentions candlesticks,⁹ and Sir Charles Wilson a cup¹⁰ of Christian workmanship, in the *turbe*. Radet calls these Perso-

¹ *Travels in Cyprus* (Cobham's translation), 184.

² The *tekke* has been visited by many European travellers: the earliest first-hand account by a western known to me is that of the anonymous author of the (B.M.) *Add. MS. 7021* (f. 35). It was known at least by repute to Menavino (*Cose Turchesche* (1548), 60).

³ Ramsay in *J.H.S.* iii. 119; cf. *Hist. Geog.* 144.

⁴ *Arch. des Miss.* vi. (1896), 446.

⁵ *Un Mois en Phrygie*, 89.

⁶ H. Barth, *Reise*, 889; Mordtmann, *loc. cit.*; Sir C. Wilson in Murray's *Asia Minor*, 144; Ramsay, *Pauline Studies*, 168, etc.

⁷ *Byz. Zeit.* xix. 106: *In der sog. 'Kirche,' d. h. dem älteren Teil des Klosters*, etc.

⁸ Hadji Khalfa, tr. Armain, in Vivien de S. Martin's *Asie Mineure*, ii. 702.

⁹ *Asie Mineure*, iv. 213.

¹⁰ *Loc. cit.*

Byzantine¹; in any case the evidence of such movable furniture is negligible.

(4) The legend of Sidi Battal's marriage with a Christian princess is read by Ramsay² as evidence of previous Christian occupation. But it is characteristic of a hero of a border-romance—and the cycle of legend which has grown up round the name of Sidi Battal places him in this category—that a maiden on the enemy's side should fall in love with him. The corresponding Byzantine borderer, Digenes Akritas, elopes with an Emir's daughter, and as a Christian hero is compelled on that account to spend some pages in remorse³; a Moslem can without reproach add the lady to his harem.⁴ Further, the marriage of a Mahommedan potentate with a Christian was by no means unknown in the days of Ala-ed-din, to which the discovery of the tomb of Sidi Battal is referred.⁵

The Mahommedan traditions of the *tekke* are clear and consistent: the official version is given in Ethé's *Fahrten des Sayyid Batthâl*⁶ as follows:—The 'castle of the Messiah' was given by Ala-ed-din Sultan of Roum (1219–1236) to his general Hazârasp. One of the latter's shepherds, named Kodlidja, while feeding sheep on the hill opposite the fortress, saw there a miraculous light. He became as if enchanted, and his sheep gathered together to the spot. Hazârasp, being informed of the miracle, built a chapel on the site and it became a pilgrimage. The spot was not connected with Sidi Battal till he himself appeared in a dream to the mother of Ala-ed-din, who was a descendant of the Prophet, and bade her build him a monument at the castle of the Messiah where he had met his death. The mother of Ala-ed-din went to the castle and made enquiries, and another vision was vouchsafed to her in confirmation of her dream: the earth opened shewing a door through which she passed down a flight of seven steps to find the Arab

¹ *Op. cit.* 447.

² *Pauline Studies*, 168 and elsewhere.

³ Rambaud, *Études Byz.* 79.

⁴ Sidi Battal had at least two other Christian wives, a daughter of the Emperor and a daughter of his vizier Akrates (probably Akritas himself); cf. Ethé, *Sayyid Batthâl*, 99, 100.

⁵ The father of Ala-ed-din, for instance, married a Christian woman (Sarre, *Reise*, 39 f.).

⁶ Pp. 213 ff. This relation does not form part of the romance proper, to which we shall return. Other Turkish sources are quoted by A. D. Mordtmann (*Gelehrte Anzeigen d. bayr. Akad.* 1860, 260–295, and Σύλλογος Κ' πόλεως, Παράρτημα τοῦ θ' τόμου, xiv ff.).

warrior standing armed before her. The mother of Ala-ed-din built the mausoleum (*turbe*) of the newly-discovered saint; the buildings of the site were subsequently added to by the Mihaloglou family¹ and the Ottoman emperor Suleiman the Magnificent.² In the latter part of the sixteenth century the name of Sidi Battal was the war cry of the Turkish armies.³

The convent has lost much of its prosperity since the fall of the Bektashi order under Sultan Mahmoud II (1826), and the decline of the pilgrim road with the progress of steam navigation. The tombs of Sidi Battal and his Christian wife are still shewn in the *turbe* and that of the pious shepherd Kodlidja just outside it. Close by the *tekke* of Sidi Battal stands the tomb of Malik Ghazi,⁴ his companion in arms, who fell with him at Akroenos.⁵ This tomb is probably to be regarded merely as a pendant to Sidi Battal's.⁶ Both, it will be noticed, are on the further side of the river from Eskishekr and its Byzantine representative:⁷ this river may at some time have formed the frontier between Moslem and Christian.

The story of the miraculous finding of the Sidi Battal's tomb is of course strongly tinged with myth, but there is no reason to doubt that the revelation and establishment of the cult of the saint dates back to Seljouk times.

The hero himself was the historical Abd Allah Abou'l Hussein el Antaki, 'el Battal' (the Valiant) being a title of honour: he is known from contemporary sources, Arab and Byzantine, to have taken part in the Arab raids of the eighth century and to have fallen in battle at

¹ A renegade family established in Bithynia under the early Ottoman sultans.

² Probably about 1534, the year of the emperor's visit to the tomb on his way to Bagdad (Hammer-Hellert, *Hist. Emp. Ott.* v. 212).

³ *Wann sie Krieg fürnehmen, so rüffen vnd schreyen sie zu dem Sedichassi dem Heyligen der Victori und dess Siegs . . . Soll begraben liegen auff den Grentzen Othomannorum und Caramannorum* (Breuning, *Orient. Reyss.* (1579), 106). The convent was by this time already in the hands of the Bektashi (cf. *J. R. Asiat. Soc.* 1907, 568), who were intimately associated with the Janissaries.

⁴ Visited by Radet and Fougères in 1886 (see map in *Arch. des Miss.* vi. 1895).

⁵ 'With Al Battal was killed Malikh the son of Shu'aib' (*Kilab Al 'Uyun* (xi cent.) ap. Brooks in *J.H.S.* xviii. 202).

⁶ The *tekkes* of Melik Ghazi (1) in the Kale Dagħ near Sarimsakli (R. Kiepert's map, section *Kaisarieh*) and (2) at Niksar in Pontus (Evliya, *Travels*, tr. von Hammer ii. 18, 104, Cumont, *Stud. Pont.* ii. 261) are probably to be connected with the Danishmend prince of that name (1106-1113), but the legend current at Niksar suggests contamination with the Arab cycle.

⁷ Karadja Hissar according to Radet (*op. cit.* 515).

Akroenos (Afoum-Kara-Hissar), many miles south of the *tekke* which bears his name, in 740 A.D. Even if the topographical difficulty could be got over it is impossible to bridge the gap in the history of the tomb between the battle of Akroenos and the reign of Ala-ed-din, unless we suppose (which is highly improbable) that an inscription was found with the remains. Sidi Battal is comparatively well known from history: his apocryphal adventures, like those of his Byzantine counterpart Digenes Akritas, are numerous and in the canonised version of the romance fill a considerable book.¹ Certain incidents of the romance are widely current; such are the hero's adventures at Maslama's siege of Constantinople (717 A.D.), where he penetrated alone as far as S. Sophia and rode into the building on horseback²; his dealings with a Christian nun whom he afterwards married; and his romantic death, caused by a stone thrown as a warning by a Christian princess in love with him, who eventually killed herself from remorse.³

The wide vogue of this popular legend is shewn by its connection with many localities in Asia Minor. Sidi Battal's rock is shewn at Mal-tepe near Constantinople,⁴ his castles at Erdek⁵ and in the Karadja Dagħ (Cappadocia),⁶ a mosque reputed of his foundation exists at Caesarea,⁷ and a second tomb at Kirshehr,⁸ while a dome commemorates his birth-place at Malatia.⁹ Opposite Constantinople he is connected with Kadi Keui (by the verbal identification of *Kadi* and *Ghazi*),¹⁰ and one version of the legend of the Maiden's Tower makes Sidi Battal the cause of its construction: the Greek governor destined it—of course in vain—to shelter his daughter and his treasure from the redoubtable Arab

¹ For the adventures of Sidi Battal see the authorities cited by Mordtmann (*loc. cit.*) and especially the canonised version of the romance, a Turkish composition of the xiv-xv century based on an Arabic original, translated by Ethé (*Fahrten des Sayyid Batthâl*, Leipzig, 1871).

² The historical Sidi Battal appears from the Arab sources (Brooks, *J.H.S.* xix. 26) to have been present at this siege.

³ It is this princess who is buried beside the hero.

⁴ Oberhummer in Meyer's *Konstantinopel*, 332.

⁵ Hamilton, *Asia Minor*, ii. 99.

⁶ Ramsay and Bell, *Thousand and One Churches*, 435.

⁷ Hadji Khalfa, tr. Armain, 676; cf. Le Strange, *E. Caliphate*, 146.

⁸ Le Strange, *op. cit.* 152; cf. Cuinet, *Asie Mineure*, i. 332.

⁹ Hadji Khalfa, 660. So Digenes has at least three tombs, near Trebizond, in Crete, and in Karpathos, and other memorials in Cyprus and Crete (Polites, *Παραδόσεις*, i. 73, 74, 118-122, 131), while the historical Christian conqueror of Crete from the Arabs, Sarandapechys, multiplies to such an extent that his name becomes a generic word for a giant.

¹⁰ Evliya, tr. von Hammer, i₂, 78.

leader.¹ The Kirk Kuz Dagħ (*Mountain of the Forty Virgins*), near the *tekke* of Sidi Battal, is probably associated with the episode of the Convent of the Forty Princesses in the romance.²

A similar cycle of popular tradition groups itself round the name of Hussein Ghazi. The centre seems to be Aladja in Paphlagonia, called by Hadji Khalfa³ Husseinabad, which remains the official name of the Aladja *nahie*.⁴ Hussein Ghazi, brother of the *serasker* of Malatia, says the local legend, had his head cut off in an attack on Angora and carried it to a mountain an hour-and-a-half east of the town where he died. The spot was commemorated by a *tekke* which was a much-frequented pilgrimage in the seventeenth century.⁵

Hussein's death was avenged by his son Djaffer, who took from the Christians a castle near Kirshehr and converted the governor Shamas after a single combat.⁶ The name of the latter is commemorated in that of the Shamaspur Tekke at Aladja, which contains another reputed grave of Hussein.⁷ Djaffer is probably the hero buried at the *tekke* near Touloumbounar (on the Cassaba line) which bears his name.⁸

Another Arab warrior certainly historical is Abd-el-Wahab, whose tomb is venerated at Sivas.⁹ He is said by the Arab chroniclers to have been killed 'in the land of the Romans' in 730-1 A.D.¹⁰

Nearly all these persons are commemorated in the romance of Sidi Battal. Hussein is the father of Battal,¹¹ Djaffer is Battal himself before he received his title,¹² and Abd-el-Wahab is constantly mentioned.¹³ In the romance, however, the fighting centres round Amorium (Hergan Kale), which was historically a notable Byzantine fortress during the Arab wars, but, having been razed by the Arabs after the great siege of 838, disappeared at that date from history. Its site, like that of Akroenos, has only recently been identified, and by Westerns; the reputed Arab tombs, as we have seen, are nowhere near it. But the later Arab

¹ Evliya, tr. von Hammer, i, 78.

² Ethé, *op. cit.* 89.

³ Tr. Armain, 678.

⁴ Murray's *Asia Minor*, 20.

⁵ Evliya, ii. 228; there is now a *turbe* only, administered by the Bairami dervishes of Angora (Perrot, *Galatie*, i. 283).

⁶ Ainsworth, *Travels*, i. 157; cf. Barth, *Reise*, 74, 78. Schumas (*sic*) figures in the romance (Ethé, *loc. cit.* 21) as a monk converted by Battal.

⁷ Wilson, in Murray's *Asia Minor*, 36.

⁸ (F. W. H.)

⁹ Cuinet, *Asie Mineure*, i. 166.

¹⁰ *Khitab al 'Uyun* ap. Brooks in *J.H.S.* xviii. 200: the death of Abd-el-Wahab is placed under the next year by Al Tabari (d. 923, *ibid.*).

¹¹ Ethé, *op. cit.* 7.

¹² *Ibid.* 57; cf. Evliya, i. 27.

¹³ *Ibid.* 37, etc.

writers seem to have been misled by the similarity of the two names in Arabic into identifying Amorium with Angora,¹ which accounts for their placing the tomb of Hussein Ghazi at the latter town, while the romance makes Amorium the scene of his death.²

Other Arab memorials in Asia Minor, not apparently connected with the Battal cycle, are mentioned by Ibn Batuta at Daouas³ (vilayet of Aidin) and at Sinope,⁴ the former a memorial of the birthplace of Suhayb, a Companion of the Prophet, the latter a tomb of Bilal the Ethiopian. Another tomb of Bilal, presumably if not authentic at least earlier than that at Sinope, is shewn at Damascus.⁵

It appears from the foregoing that the graves and memorials of the Arabs in Asia Minor, though they commemorate in many cases historical persons and the great historical fact of the Arab wars, and indicate also in a vague way the area over which these wars were fought, are almost certainly all fictitious. So far as we can see the traditional sites have been discovered by 'revelation' and identified by an uncritical use of written sources or merely by floating tradition.⁶ They thus afford no independent topographical evidence for the Arab campaigns. It is further to be remarked that Ibn Batuta's notice of two Arab memorials already in the early fourteenth century shews that such memorials were sought for and identified in this way already in the Seljouk period. Earliest of all is the tomb of Amrou'l Kais, a contemporary of the Prophet, which is mentioned as shewn at Angora by the early thirteenth-century geographer Yakout.⁷ If we may believe the traditional account, the tomb of Sidi Ghazi was discovered at the same period.

The motive for the 'discovery' of such tombs is consciously or subconsciously political. At the back of the mind of the conquering race lies the idea of substantiating a prior claim to the conquered soil.⁸ The tomb of Eyoub, the great *Ghazi* of the Arab siege of Constantinople, was

¹ Le Strange, *E. Caliphate*, 153.

² Ethé, *op. cit.* II.

³ Tr. Sanguinetti, ii. 277.

⁴ Tr. Sanguinetti, ii. 349. Cf. Evliya, ii. 38.

⁵ Le Strange, *Palestine*, 272.

⁶ The beginnings of a Battal myth were recognised in our own times by Barth (*Reise*, 153) between Yuzgat and Caesarea, where a historical person of the reign of Murad IV (1623-40) bearing the title of Battal was already becoming confused with the legendary hero.

⁷ Ap. Brooks in *J.H.S.* xxi. 76.

⁸ A *real* burial gives a similar claim. It was not without such an intention that the Caliph Mamoun was buried in the frontier town of Tarsus (Le Strange, *E. Caliphate*, 132-3).

said to have been revealed actually during the siege of 1453.¹ Similarly at the siege of Bagdad under Suleiman (1534), where religious animosities might be used to spur on the soldiers, the tomb of the orthodox (Sunni) doctor Abou Hanifa was 'discovered' under the walls of the heretic (Shia) town.² The discoverer in the case of the tomb of Eyoub (and probably in all such discoveries) was a pious sheikh; if we bear in mind the extraordinary influence of dreams and their interpretation in the Eastern world it is obvious that the good faith of a devout and pious mystic need not be called in question.

But, as we have seen from the cases of Umm Haram, Sidi Battal, and Eyoub, the fully-developed type of legend postulates two agents in such discoveries, the shepherd, to whom the sanctity of the spot is revealed by an outward miracle, and the wise man, who is guided by a dream to interpret it according to his learning. The sequence is psychologically true. To the simple and devout peasant any chance combination of circumstances may give a religious colour to a commonplace discovery, and anything remotely resembling a tomb pre-supposes a buried saint.³ It remains for the learned to give the saint a name and a historical setting.

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¹ Hammer-Hellert, *Hist. Emp. Ott.* ii. 595 (who aptly compares the finding of the Sacred Lance by the Crusaders before Antioch); cf. Evliya, i. 35. The occurrence is not mentioned, however, by any contemporary authority for the siege (Mordtmann, *Belagerung K'pels*, 111), and probably took place shortly after. (So Cantemir tr. Joncquières, i. 106; d'Ohsson, *Tableau*, i. 305.) A modern version of the story is told by S. Adamson in *Harper's* (June, 1913, 30 ff.) in which, as in the case of the tombs of Umm Haram and Sidi Battal, the first discovery of the sanctity of the site is attributed to shepherds.

² Hammer-Hellert, *Hist. Emp. Ott.* v. 221.

³ The cult of Houlfet Ghazi at Amasia (Cumont, *Stud. Pont.* ii. 169) is probably based on no more than the discovery of the (ancient) sarcophagus in which the hero is said to rest. Similarly in Karpethos two ancient sarcophagi are supposed to be those of Digenes Akritas and his wife (Polites, *Παραδόσεις*, i. 122).