

NASRETTİN HOCA AND TİMUR : THE COMIC MODE OF REACTION TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS

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I. Introduction :

Although it is generally held that Nasreddin Hoca lived in the thirteenth century, the narratives which depict him as a contemporary of Timur who was in Anatolia around the turn of the fifteenth century imply that he lived in the second half of the fourteenth century and the first half of the fifteenth. I argued elsewhere (Karabaş 1981) that whether or not a man named Nasreddin Hoca who was also the doer of the actions in at least some of the narratives attributed to him ever lived, the anecdotes and the beliefs which have constallated around him constitute a trickster mythology in Turkish culture, and that studying the nature and social function of this mythology is far more significant than attempts to solve the quite irresolvable biographical problems involved. Since Timur is a historical figure, the Nasreddin Hoca-Timur narratives are a big challenge for the mythological and social functional approach to the Nasreddin Hoca phenomenon. In this paper, I will discuss, some of these narratives from this viewpoint, thus testing its applicability to the Nasreddin Hoca phenomenon.

My argument will be that although some Nasreddin Hoca-Timur narratives are quite within the bounds of the possible and probable, so that the historicalness of these figures need not be questioned, some other narratives present improbable actions and imagistic elements which are difficult to

reconcile with the biographical approach to Nasreddin Hoca. These narratives invite the utilization of the mythological and social functional approach. I will then suggest that the Nasreddin Hoca-Timur narratives serve as satire against oppressive administrators of which Timur is a good example in the Turkish people's memory. Such narratives both give examples of "getting even" with a powerful oppressor by using the comic mode, and make comments about his nature.

II. Timur in Akşehir

Although Nasreddin Hoca-Timur narratives give the impression that Timur must have been in Akşehir long enough for the two of them to establish informal ties, historical research does not support this impression.

According to Togan (1993:238-239), Timur visited Akşehir twice in 1403 after the conquest of Smyrna, first of his way to Afyonkarahisar to visit his dying prince elect Muhammed Mirza, and then, after his prince's death, when he was on his way for his eastern campaign. Hilda Hookham mentions only the first of these visits by Timur to Akşehir: "The imperial heir, son of Jahangir and Khan-Zada, had been stricken. Muhammed-Sultan, hope of the old Emir, lay dangerously sick. Timur ordered that the body of Beyazid be conveyed with all ceremony to Bursa, then left the baggage train at Aq Shahr to go to the prince" (Hookham 1962:275).

It is clear that whether Tamburlane visited Akşehir once or twice, he may have stayed there no longer than a few days. I tend to assume that such a short time is not sufficient for the establishment of the close, informal ties between Nasreddin Hoca and Timur that we see in the narratives. Consequently, we have to deal with the existence of the Nasreddin Hoca-Timur narratives by taking into account this historical discrepancy. However, some of the narratives seem to be specially intended to convince their listener(s) that they have a historical basis.

III. Nasreddin Hoca-Timur Anecdotes Which Bear a Semblance of Verisimilitude

There are two kinds of narratives which depict Timur as a ruthless oppressor in Anatolia. In the first, kind, Nasreddin Hoca plays the role of a tactful local dignitary who intercedes on behalf

of the lownspeople and contains Timur's temper. In the second kind of narratives, Nasreddin Hoca behaves as a courtly fool.

An example for the first kind of narratives is one in which Nasreddin Hoca presents to Timur the wishes of the people of Akşehir. Timur through Nasreddin Hoca was speaking too familiarly with him and asked him how he dared to behave so impudently with a great sultan. Nasreddin Hoca answered: "If you are great, we are small" (Gölpınarlı 1961:93, No: 228). Nasreddin Hoca thus serves as a representative of the townsfolk and pacifies Timur with his glibness: He invites Timur to show a good ruler's greatness by being lenient on his followers. His glibness also helps him question Timur's greatness as a sultan: His followers are relatively small human beings only if he is great. However, Timur hardly seems capable of learning to be a good ruler; one day, he dreamt that a man insulted him, and he had him put to death. Upon hearing this, Nasreddin Hoca began packing to leave the town. To those who begged him not to leave them unprotected against Timur, he said: "I might try anything, but I cannot control his dreams" (Tokmakçioğlu 1981: 207, No: 296).

In the second kind of narratives which depict Timur as a historical figure in Anatolia and in which Nasreddin Hoca acts as a courtly fool, food symbolism is used to depict indirectly Timur's uncivilized nature. For example, one day Nasreddin Hoca was taking to Timur a basket of sugar beets. Someone recommended him to take figs instead. Timur ordered his men to beat Nasreddin Hoca's head with each fig. As they did so, Nasreddin Hoca thanked God. When Timur asked him why he did so, he said: "If I did not listen to that man and brought sugar beets as I was doing initially, my head would now be broken to pieces" (Gölpınarlı 1961: 89-90, No: 220). The exchange of presents is a basic and simple form of expressing positive feelings. This narrative implies that Timur was uncivilized enough not to know how to respond properly even to presents.

The role of a courtly fool which Nasreddin Hoca plays in such narratives conflicts with his role as a local dignitary in some other narratives, and is close to the trickster figure's acting as a fool. As in European Renaissance drama, in his role as a fool the trickster either uses exaggeration to make critical statements, or authority how things are. In the Nasreddin Hoca-Timur narratives, the second technique is used more often.

In one such narrative, Nasreddin Hoca got fed up with Timur, went up to him, and said: "Will you take your army and get the hell

out of here?" Very surprised by such a question, Timur asked him what he was talking about. Undaunted, Nasreddin Hoca said: "I'm speaking clearly. Will you or won't you? I know what I will do if you won't." Timur became furious and thundered: "I won't. And what will you do?" Nasreddin Hoca answered as follows: "I will take the people in the town and leave" (Gölpınarlı 1961: 95-96, No: 234). Such a conversation is hardly possible between an oppressive conqueror within months or perhaps weeks of his conquest. However, as a narrative based upon the creation of an unlikely situation for the sake of humor, it does express the feelings of a helpless people suffering in the hands of a conqueror.

A rather clumsy narrative comes close to making Timur himself fool figure who asks a question for the sake of eliciting a cutting remark which it begs: one day, Nasreddin Hoca went to the public bath with Timur. When they were only in bath wrappers, Timur asked Nasreddin Hoca: "What would my value be if I were sold as slave?" Fifty *akches*. "Oh come on, only my bath wrapper would cost that much." "That's the thing whose value I estimated" (Gölpınarlı 1961:91, 93, No: 225). Nasreddin Hoca thus tells Timur that he is worthless. Any oppressed people would like to do this to its conqueror. Any person who feels a strong resentment against his administrator. The body symbolism used in this narrative to make a negative comment on Timur will be discussed below in more detail.

Such Nasreddin Hoca-Timur also narratives contain some assumptions about the effect of power upon persons who wield it. A narrative is of interest from this viewpoint because it puts aside the image to Timur as an oppressive ruler: Timur heard that the police superintendent at Akşehir became quite rich by embezzling tax money, and told him to bring him a list of all the possessions he had acquired at the expense of other people. The next day, the police superintendent produced a large notebook. Nasreddin Hoca as the new tax collector in Akşehir. After collecting the taxes, Nasreddin Hoca brought to Timur the accounts written on a flat bread. He explained what he did as follows: "You will eventually make me eat the accounts like the police superintendent. This is what I can digest" (Gölpınarlı 1961: 93-94, No: 229). The first point of interest about this narrative is that Timur appears to be motivated not by the senseless wrath of a bad ruler, but by a just ruler's hatred of corruption. The real surprise comes when Nasreddin Hoca admits that he himself will eventually have to eat the accounts; he can also become corrupted.

This narrative thus reveals that the narratives which bring Nasreddin Hoca and Timur together are a part of the social critical aspect of the Nasreddin Hoca corpus that deals with social, political and judicial corruption (The narratives which depict Nasreddin Hoca in contact with other administrators and with judges are excluded from this paper solely for the purpose of formal unity.). The Nasreddin Hoca-Timur narratives are thus part of the Turkish trickster mythology in which the trickster and other characters are used very flexibly, depending upon the purpose of satire and humor in any particular narrative.

Thus, the historical and the non-historical or mythological merge in Nasreddin Hoca-Timur narratives to make them a part of the Nasreddin Hoca phenomenon in Turkish culture. A narrative (Gölpınarlı 1961:95, No: 233) emphasizes that Timur was a descendant of Jenghiz Khan. This is a historical element. However, imagery which derives from folkloric or literary sources shapes the conception of the characters found in these narratives and expectations concerning their behavior. We already identified the use of presents and body symbolism for this purpose. Animal imagery is another important group. For example, in one such narrative (Gölpınarlı 1961:94, No: 230), Nasreddin Hoca was talking to some people against Timur when he was caught by the latter disguised as a dervish. As soon as the disguised Timur said that Nasreddin Hoca was unfair to Timur, Nasreddin Hoca recognized him. On the one hand, this narrative emphasizes how cruel and oppressive Timur was; it is implied that only Timur could conceive of any negative statement being unfair to him. On the other hand, the last question Nasreddin Hoca asked Timur in a supposed attempt to identify him was: "Is 'wolves' (wolfishness) one of your titles?" When the dervish answered in the affirmative, Nasreddin Hoca became certain that he was Timur. It is thus stated indirectly that Timur was like a wolf. In Turkish folklore, "wolf" symbolizes cruelty, destructiveness and warlikeness, the last quality being treated as a positive or negative one depending on the context.

Another narrative (Tokmakçioğlu 1981: 208, No: 298) also uses animal imagery to make another interesting indirect comment on Timur. One day, when Nasreddin Hoca was in Timur's court, the latter asked him a question: "What is the difference between you and a donkey?" Nasreddin Hoca estimated the distance between himself and Timur, and said: "Two ells." According to animal imagery in Nasreddin Hoca narratives, the donkey and the cow constitute a binary oppositional pair, in terms of which

the donkey symbolizes the premarital, egoistic, asocial individual, and the cow symbolizes the individual who is socialized through marriage and who has overcome his egoism.¹ Thus, the general image of Timur in the Nasreddin Hoca narratives is a warlike, cruel, destructive, asocial and selfish ruler.

There is a narrative (Gölpınarlı 1961: 91, No: 222) which clarifies the position of the people of Akşehir with respect to such a ruler. One day Timur invited Nasreddin Hoca to a game or jereed and the latter came riding an ox instead of a horse. While the people were laughing, Timur said: "In jereed one's animal has to be very agile. Why are you riding an ox?" Nasreddin Hoca answered him as follows: "Although I haven't tried it during the last five or ten years, even a bird couldn't keep up with it when it was a calf." Since an ox is a castrated animal, this narrative refers to sexuality, which is part of body symbolism to imply that Nasreddin Hoca (and, by extension, the Turkish people) was like a castrated animal in terms of physical or military power with respect to Timur.² Furthermore, by refusing in effect to join the game or jereed, Nasreddin Hoca implies that the use of physical force was not the way to struggle against a ruler like Timur; these narratives depict a time when no active opposition is possible against a cruel conqueror or ruler.

In short, animal imagery serves in Nasreddin Hoca narratives to indirectly attribute the qualities of an animal to the person with whom it is associated, and is part of a very general phenomenon. Zimmer describes this phenomenon in Indian mythology as follows: "The animal symbol, placed beneath, is interpreted as carrying the human figure and is called the 'vehicle' (*yahana*). It is duplicate representation of the energy and character of the god. ...The device did not originate in India, but was imported, at an early period, from Mesopotamia" (Zimmer 1974:70).

We can now discuss in some more detail the Nasreddin Hoca-Timur narratives as a part of the Nasreddin Hoca

1 I discussed this subject in some detail in a paper titled "Nasreddin Hoca'nın Eşeginin Nasreddin Hoca Olgusundaki Yeri" (The Place of Nasreddin Hoca's Donkey in the Nasreddin Hoca Phenomenon) which I delivered at the 1981 International Hoca Festival in Akşehir.

2 The more important function of the ox in the Nasreddin Hoca narratives is to emphasize Nasreddin Hoca's affinity with *Keloğlan* "bald young man" and *Köse* "beardless man" in some folktales. Nasreddin Hoca, *Keloğlan* and *Köse* are the three major trickster figures in the larger Turkish trickster mythology, which contains a number of minor figures too.

phenomenon in Turkish culture. I want to approach these narratives from three viewpoints: (a) what they say about how a struggle can be waged against a powerful and oppressive ruler; (b) the function of humor in this struggle; (c) what these narratives say about the nature of the oppressive type of ruler or administrator.

IV. Holding One's Own in Spite of Everything

Since language is the only weapon available to humor for use for aggressive purposes, the message that anecdotes can give about how to struggle against a powerful and bad ruler is that bad times have to be weathered off without succumbing to his power - hopefully, until the time when an active struggle can be launched. Two narratives based upon the arrow shooting contest reflect how such a waiting period can be weathered off.

According to the first one, Timur needed a particularly courageous man for a certain mission and he recommended him Nasreddin Hoca. He made Nasreddin Hoca stand in a square with his arms open. One of his sharpshooters shot an arrow between Nasreddin Hoca's legs, but he did not even budge. The sharpshooter then shot two arrows, piercing Nasreddin Hoca's sleeves, and yet he did not display any fear. Finally Timur's soldier shot the button of Nasreddin Hoca's turban, but he again stood perfectly still. Timur was very pleased with Nasreddin Hoca's courage, and ordered presents to be given to him. However, Nasreddin Hoca requested also a pair of baggy trousers (Gölpınarlı 1961: 94-95, no: 231); he had wet his trousers out of fear. This narrative thus implies that when there is something to be afraid of, it is very human to experience fear. Heroic behavior without being afraid is not human. But, holding one's own in a trying situation is always laudable; it shows that one is able to pay the necessary price for not succumbing to pressure. According to the second narrative, Nasreddin Hoca made the mistake of boasting of being a good archer, and Timur challenged him to demonstrate it. Nasreddin Hoca's first arrow went a meter too wide the right of the target, but he was not perturbed and said: "This is how our *Sekbanbaşı* (a Janissary officer) shoots arrows." His second arrow whizzed off towards the mountains, and he said: "This is how our police superintendent shoots arrows." By luck, the third arrow hit the target and, Nasreddin Hoca coolly said: "This is how your humble subject does it" (Gölpınarlı 1961: 93, No: 226). Together, these two narratives depict how a powerless man

or grout can behave in the face of a powerful oppressor; bearing the pressure as long as it lasts, and weathering off the bad times until one becomes strong enough to fight back. The three arrows shot at Nasreddin Hoca in the first narrative cover the extremities of his body; thus, body language seems to be used to imply the comprehensiveness of Timur's attack. There is a big improvement in the second narrative because in it Nasreddin Hoca himself wields the bow.

The bow, the arrow and shooting arrows with the bow are used as a motif to delineate power relations also the *Oguz Kagan* epic. In the preislamic version of this narrative, Oguz Kagan, the mythical forefather of the Oguz Turks, gave a big feast when he built up a large empire and reached the end of his military career. He shot an arrow into the air and told his six sons to find it. His three sons by his first wife found a bow and his three sons by his second wife found three arrows. Oguz Kagan told his first three sons to shoot the three arrows into the air, and he told his other three children to be like arrows (Bang 1936:31). This implied political superiority of Oguz Kagan's first three sons is stated explicitly in the Islamic version of the narrative: "And these were decided as follows; the place of those to whom he gave a bow should be above (that of the others) and they should take the right side in the army (Togan 1972:48). The "Grey Arrows" descended from Oguz Kagan's first three sons and the "Three Arrows" descended from his second three sons. I have argued (in Karabaş 1974) that this incident marks the mythological inception of the kinship moiety system among the Oghuz Turks and that it also shows that the Grey Arrows moiety held political superiority. Zimmer comments as follows upon the representation of power relations with the bow and arrow in Indian mythology: "The bow denotes the mind; it dispatches the five arrows- the five faculties" (Zimmer 1974: 46). The bow and arrow are used in a similar way in *Oguz Kagan* to represent power relations.

This motif is reflected also in the two Nasreddin Hoca narratives mentioned above. Especially in the first one where Timur has some arrows shot at Nasreddin Hoca, he clearly has power. One might even talk of a wish fulfillment in the second narrative: Nasreddin Hoca makes an assertion, gets hold of the bow, and learns to become a good archer. Thus, another comment by Zimmer seems to explain better what Nasreddin Hoca achieves in this second narrative: "The Goddess carries, ...the bow and arrow, the noose and the goad. The bow and arrow denote the power of will. The noose... denotes knowledge the master-force of

the intellect, which seizes and fixes with a firm hold on its objects. The goad, for the urging on of the mount or beast of burden, denotes action" (1974:204). Similarly with Nasreddin Hoca, he seems to express the wish to become powerful against Timur in the second narrative, and bearing the oppressor's pressure without breaking down in the first narrative.

Another Nasreddin Hoca-Timur narrative both supplies further information on what it means to live under the rule of an oppressor and how the oppressor is conceived of: Timur asked Nasreddin Hoca a few questions and then asked whether or not he was a cruel ruler. Nasreddin Hoca answered as follows: "God makes the winter harsh according to the height of the mountain" (Tokmakçioğlu 1981: 229, No: 336). While Nasreddin Hoca thus flatters Timur by resembling him to a high mountain, he also manages to say the truth by likening his personality to a harsh winter. The preliminary questions that Timur is said to ask are not specified. However, the last question that Timur is said to ask are not specified. However, the last question that he asks makes it clear that the specific contents of the question that he asks makes it clear that the specific contents of the question are not important. But, they obviously endanger one's life if one does not give the "right" answer. Timur in this narrative is thus similar to the sphinx who kills if the right (or suitable) answer is not given. Hence, the oppressive conqueror is compared with the sphinx in his cruelty; one is always gambling with one's life in his relations with him. It is under these conditions that humor becomes a precious weapon in fighting against a powerful enemy.

Such evidence in the Nasreddin Hoca-Timur narratives makes it impossible to agree with a generalization Bakhtin makes: "Laughter is a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically" (Bakhtin 1990:23). To begin with, I do not see why feeling fear when there is an objective cause cannot be part of a realistic approach to one's environment. Bakhtin seems to ignore the various social contexts in which works of humor can have significant functions while concentrating upon intra-textual features of such works. It is true that most works of humor which aim at attacking a powerful figure create a make-believe world in which the figure of authority is not feared. But this is only for the sake of creating humor; the implied reality with which a work of humor is associated in the minds of its consumer(s), and in which the figure of authority preserves his power, remains intact. In fact, if the implied reality with its

powerful figure did not continue to exist, the psychological release in the form laughter would not be accomplished by the work of humor in the mind(s) of its consumer(s).

This relationship between a work of humor, its consumers and its implied reality also renders questionable what Bakhtin says concerning comic representation a little after the comment quoted above: "The plane of comic (humorous) representation is a specific plane in its spatial as well as its temporal aspect. Here the role of memory is minimal: in the comic world there is nothing for memory and tradition to do. One ridicules in order to forget" (Bakhtin 1900:23). Taking the Nasreddin Hoca phenomenon in Turkish culture as an example, memory and tradition in fact serve two important functions in works of humor. First, they are the source for the social function of works of humor without which there would be no motive for creating such works. Second from the aesthetic viewpoint, memory and tradition are the source for the formal features of works of humor and for elements of content such as images, symbols and motifs with which works of humor are given an aesthetic or literary shape. Body symbolism, food symbolism and animal imagery are some of these elements of content that can be identified in Nasreddin Hoca narratives. I take it for granted that such literary works which have a strong ability to exist autonomously are not created only to forget what they deal with; on the contrary, they may be said to be intended to keep reminding their consumers of what they ridicule. In other words, contrary to what Bakhtin seems to assume, the comic mode is equal to the tragic mode both in the social functions it fulfills, and in the aesthetic tools it utilizes.

V. Humor as a Weapon in Retaliating Against an Oppressive Administrator

Body symbolism and sexuality are used in some narratives to indirectly express aggressive feelings against Timur. There is a narrative which supplies interesting evidence on both the conceived origins of Nasreddin Hoca as a trickster and a basis for the use of body symbolism and sexuality for aggressive purposes in some narratives; while Timur was marching towards Akşehir with his army, the people of Akşehir begged him to do something to save them from Timur. He demanded a huge green pulpit and a green seat to be built outside of Akşehir. He also told them to make for him a huge green turban. When Timur's army came up against Nasreddin Hoca seated at this pulpit and dressed in

greens, Timur asked him who he was. Nasreddin Hoca said he was the earth god. Aggravated by this answer, Timur challenged him to cure the blindness of one of his soldiers. But Nasreddin Hoca said: "I am the earth god. As such, I don't deal with matters above the waits" (Gölpınarlı 1961: 90-91, 221). To begin with this narrative indicates that as trickster Nasreddin Hoca is conceived to be deeply rooted in Middle Eastern mythology; his claim to be a deity and his association with the color green indicate that he is believed to have been a vegetation deity. On the other hand, Nasreddin Hoca retorted that he was concerned with matters "below the waits", with the physical body and sexuality. Hence, body symbolism and sexuality are used for various purposes in these narratives.

In one such narrative, Timur invited Nasreddin Hoca to a hunting party and gave him an old and weak horse. A rainstorm broke out, everybody ran for shelter, but Nasreddin Hoca's horse could hardly walk. To protect his clothes from rain, Nasreddin Hoca undressed and sat on them. They remained dry and he put them on when he came near Timur's tent. He told Timur that his clothes remained so because his horse was very swift. The next time Timur organized a hunting party, he asked to ride the same weak horse in spite of his men's warnings. There was a rainstorm again and Timur became soaking wet. When he complained about this to Nasreddin Hoca, the latter said: "If you had undressed and sat on your clothes as I did, your clothes would also have remained dry" (Gölpınarlı 1961: 91, No: 223). This highly complex narrative presents natural hardships - rainstorm - by using a hunting party as a pretext to test personal worth behind clothes, which are often used to represent man's social claims. Unlike Timur, Nasreddin Hoca is able to use his naked body to protect his clothes from rain, thus accomplishing two feats: he rises above clothes by sitting on them, and he overcomes the difficulty presented by the horse's weakness by using his body. Thus, both of these feats bring out the worth of Nasreddin Hoca's body in the face of natural hardships and the horse's weakness. In this narrative, the horse seems to stand for power to act - both to protect clothes against natural phenomena and for effectiveness or valor in hunting. Timur is thus depicted as worthless when deprived of power supplied by a good horse, whereas Nasreddin Hoca is depicted as capable of rising above all difficulties by using his body. In short, this narrative implies that Timur is worthless without his martial power, whereas the seemingly weak Nasreddin Hoca - and the Turkish people - will eventually gain the upper hand because of the basic worth represented by Nasreddin Hoca's body.

Both body symbolism and sexuality are used in the following narrative to express aggression against Timur: Nasreddin Hoca was taking a roasted goose to Timur, but he ate of its legs on the way. Timur asked why the goose had only one leg, and Nasreddin Hoca said the Geese in that area had single legs, and pointed to some geese which were resting on single legs. However, Timur ordered the drums to be beaten and the geese fluttered around, displaying both their legs. Timur looked victoriously at Nasreddin Hoca, but the latter said: "If you were given such a beating, you would have become four-legged" (Gölpınarlı 1961: 89, No: 218). At a superficial level, Nasreddin Hoca thus tells Timur that physical mistreatment - all kinds of torture oppression entails - dehumanizes people. However, much more than this might be involved in this narrative on account of the animal and food symbolism in it.

In Turkish folklore, the goose is part of the goose-duck binary opposition in terms of which the duck stands for man and goose stands for woman in a love relationship (Karabaş 1981:249-250). In a narrative, Nasreddin Hoca eats his bread by dipping bites of it into the Akşehir Lake, and says he is eating duck soup (Tokmakçioğlu 1981:115-116, No: 96). Nasreddin Hoca thus eats "soup for ducks" by dipping his bread into a lake. This evokes water symbolism in Turkish folklore, where there is the water-snow binary opposition, in terms of which water stands for sexual needs (Karabaş 1981:118-121). A narrative in which people ask Nasreddin Hoca whether or not he made any inventions reflects this water symbolism: he answers by saying he did make an invention, that of eating bread with snow, but that he himself did not like it (Tokmakçioğlu 1981:117, No: 99). In other words these last two narratives show that Nasreddin Hoca does not like eating bread with snow, but regards bread and lake water as "soup for ducks" It thus becomes clear that the first of these narratives implies sexual gratification, whereas the second one implies sexual starvation.

When this goose-duck binary opposition is taken into account, it becomes clear that in the narrative where Nasreddin Hoca takes a roasted goose to Timur he shares Timur's "goose" or female by eating one of its legs. In other words, Timur is brought under a sexual attack.

On a third level of meaning, this narrative may be using Indian mythology to insult Timur: "These vehicles or mounts (*vahana*) are manifestations on the animal plane of the divine individuals themselves. The gander is the animal mask of the creative

principle, which is anthropomorphically embodied in Brahma. As such, it is a symbol of sovereign freedom through stainless spirituality" (Zimmer 1974:48). The mutilated goose/gander (the sex of the bird is unclear in Turkish because of the lack of gender in Turkish) that Nasreddin Hoca brings to Timur may thus be a commentary on the shortcomings of his spirituality because he is an oppressive ruler. It is significant that Nasreddin Hoca himself mutilates the goose/gander that he brings to Timur; similarly, an oppressed people causes its bad ruler to erode spiritually.

This narrative thus seems to state that oppression dehumanizes a people, but that, the oppressor's stature and spirituality also erode in the process. Hence, the oppressor becomes open to a sexual attack through animal symbolism. Sexual aggression is far more strong in the next narrative.

One day, Nasreddin Hoca put three plums in a bowl to present them to Timur. But the plums moved in the bowl and he ate two of them. So he took to Timur a single one. Timur became very happy to receive it, and he gave several presents to Nasreddin Hoca (Gölpazarlı 1961:89, No: 219). In this narrative, the joke is at the expense of Timur who, unlike Nasreddin Hoca and the listener(s), does not know that Nasreddin Hoca set out with three plums, and that "he received one of three." In Turkish, the idiom "to receive one of three" (*üçün birini almak*) means "to get the short end of the stick" and is based on a sexual pun: "three" stands for the male genitals and "one" stands for the plallus. Thus, in this narrative Nasreddin Hoca mases a direct sexual attack against Timur.

If the objects in the last two narratives are regarded as representations of Timur, it is interesting to note that both narratives state a lack in Timur; in the first one, he is weak enough to share his female with another man, and in the second one he lacks testicles, and is hence a sterile male. In short, both of these narratives insult Timur by attributing a sexual lack to him. From this viewpoint, these narratives belong to a larger group which approaches an oppressive ruler as someone who is led to oppress his people because he lacks something spiritual or mental.

VI. The Constitution of Timur as an Oppressive Ruler

Some people presented a donkey to Timur and praised it to the skies. Unable to put up with such hypocrisy, Nasreddin Hoca said the donkey was so intelligent that he could even teach it how to read. Timur challenged him to do so and he requested a period of

one month. At the end of this period, the donkey indeed turned the pages of a large book with its tongue, after pausing briefly at each page. When the books was finished, it brayed. Then, Nasreddin Hoca revealed to Timur that he used the trick of putting a few grains of barley between the facing pages of the book, that the donkey picked up these grains with its tongue, and that it brayed when there was no more to pick up (Tomkaçioğlu 1981: 221-222, N: 321). We already saw a narrative in which Nasreddin Hoca resembles Timur to a donkey (Tokmakçioğlu 1981: 208, No: 298).

When this narrative is taken into account, it becomes clear that in the present narrative people praise Timur to the skies although he is just an ass. In contrast with the other people Nasreddin Hoca praises the donkey's intelligence and claims he can teach it how to read, thus saying that Timur is very backward intellectually. According to Nasreddin Hoca's trick of teaching the donkey how to read, which he frankly owns to be only a trick, Timur's donkey can only lick barley grains from among the pages of a book; in other words, you can never improve it -or Timur-intellectually.

Furthermore, in Turkish folklore barley and wheat constitute a binary oppositional pair. In terms of this binary opposition, barley represents the woman and wheat represents the man in a love relationship. For example, according to a narrative Nasreddin Hoca had a green barley field where his daughter made love with her lover. When he caught them one day while making love, the lover quickly took himself off and began to run away. The daughter tried to stop him with a handful of barley. But, Nasreddin Hoca said to her: "... is a fellow who goes off leaving such a sterling vulva likely to come back for a handful of barley?" (Burrill 1970:32-33, No. 7, Burrill's translation). In this narrative the green barley thus represents Nasreddin Hoca's young daughter.

To return to the narrative under discussion, if a donkey takes the trouble of picking up grains of barley placed among the leaves of a book, it must be very hungry. This narrative thus uses sexuality to underline a lack in Timur depicted as a donkey which inhibits his intellectual or spiritual maturation. In other words, this narrative emphasizes the view that the egoistic, asocial aspect of man has to be satisfied before he can develop his higher faculties.

That the donkey aspect of man should not be neglected is emphasized in another Nasreddin Hoca narrative in which

Nasreddin Hoca gradually reduces the barley rations of his donkey to see with how little it can live. However, one morning he discovers his donkey dead and says: "You died just as you were about to learn to live without barley" (Gölpınarlı 1961: 55, No: 99). The point in this narrative seems to be that hunger for barley, man's need for sexuality, should not be neglected.

This union with the female, which is implied to be essential in some Nasreddin Hoca narratives, actually evokes the mythological representation of perfection with the union of the male and female elements. However, we have to see an interesting substitution in animal imagery before we can evaluate properly this representation of perfection in Nasreddin Hoca-Timur narratives.

One day Nasreddin Hoca said in his sermon that people should be grateful that camels do not have wings, because otherwise they would land on their roofs and damage them (Tokmakçıoğlu: 1981:79-80, No: 3). In another variant, Nasreddin Hoca says that they would land on the chimneys of houses (Burrill 1970:49, No: 2). In such narratives, the camel seems to be a substitute for the elephant in Indian mythology where "In the wonderful age of the mythological beginnings, the offspring of the original eight elephants had wings. Like clouds, they freely roamed about the sky. But a group of them lost the wings through heedlessness... Henceforth they and their whole race were deprived of their wings, and remained on the ground subservient to man" (Zimmer 1974:106). Hence, these narratives show that there was some exchange between Turkish and Indian cultures.

This exchange may be useful in explaining in some Nasreddin Hoca-Timur narratives where elephants figure in the allusion to the representation of perfection with the union of the male and female elements. According to one such narrative, the people of Akşehir became fed up with all the harm Timur's elephants were giving them, and asked Nasreddin Hoca to intercede with Timur on their behalf. However, the people who agreed to go with him sneaked away one by one so that he was left alone when he reached Timur's tent. So he told Timur that the people of Akşehir were very pleased to host his elephant, but that the elephant seemed to be lonely without his female. Thereupon, Timur agreed to have also the female one brought (Gölpınarlı 1961:95, No: 232). Considering that the white elephant was a symbol of fertility and abundance in Indian mythology (Zimmer 1974: 53, 108) and that "The owning of elephant, it appears, was a preogative of kings" (Zimmer 1974:103), it becomes clear that in the narrative

under discussion Nasreddin Hoca symbolically asks Timur to behave as a good king without wielding power only for the sake of oppression. In mythological terms, Nasreddin Hoca asks Timur to show his munificent female aspect too besides his authoritarian male aspect: "Another name for the Elephant of Shri is 'Son of Atravata.' Son, in the language of myths and symbols, means 'double', 'alter ego', 'living copy of the father', 'the father's essence in another individualization'" (Zimmer 1974:109). Similarly, the devouring male elephant in the Nasreddin Hoca narrative under discussion seems to symbolize Timur's oppressive aspect, and, asking for the female elephant seems to symbolize asking Timur to show his benevolent aspect. The important point is that the male and female principles have to be combined in the same being.

According to a narrative, people asked Nasreddin Hoca if the kite was indeed male for six months and female for six months (Tokmakçioğlu 1981: 202, No: 285). In another variant (Burrill 1970: 13, No: 51), the alternating period named is one year. Hence, the important point is whether or not the kite is male and female alternatingly. Nasreddin Hoca's answer is that one has to be a kite for one (or two) years to answer this question. Androgyny is often used in this way in mythology to express perfection.

Shiva and Devi, Shiva and his consort with the many names-Kali, Durga, Parvati, Chandri Chamunda, Uma, Sati, etc. - are regarded as the primeval twofold personalization of the Absolute. They are the first and primal unfolding of the neuter Brahman into the opposites of the male and female principles. The literary religious tradition of the Tantra represents an unending dialogue between these two, each alternately teaching and asking questions of the other. Through this dialogue the essence of the Brahman is made known to human understanding, ... (Zimmer 1974:197).

Thus, the Nasreddin Hoca narratives involving elephant, especially the one in which Nasreddin Hoca asks Timur to bring to Akşehir his female elephant too, seem to imply that Timur is an oppressive ruler because he has not achieved maturity. In other words, these narratives seem to point out that not only an oppressed people, but also the oppressor suffers.

The narratives in which Nasreddin Hoca and Timur figure together thus lend themselves also to discussion purely as works to humor; their function as satirical works attacking bad rulers outweighs their possible historicity. This unhistorical social function of the Nasreddin Hoca corpus which is independent of

any specific period seems to support Bakhtin's thesis that "It is precisely laughter that destroys the epic, and in general destroys any hierarchical (distancing and valorized) distance. As a distanced image a subject cannot be comical; to be made comical, it must be brought close" (Bakhtin 1990:23). But this is true only intra-textually. The body language, including sexuality, and food and animal symbolisms that are used in Nasreddin Hoca narratives emphasize the existence in them of an aesthetic tradition or distance, and their social function to give vent to aggressive feelings pent up in an oppressed people, and to also comment humanely upon the psychological configuration of oppressive administrators emphasize the existence in them of a social or "contextual" distance. In fact, some of the imagery and beliefs reflected in the Nasreddin Hoca-Timur narratives point to a tradition which probably includes extensive exchange between Turkish and Indian cultures. It could also be argued that Nasreddin Hoca narratives and *Dede Korkut* represent comic and epic treatments of similar concerns in Turkish culture; comic and epic or tragic treatments of social concerns need not be regarded as fundamentally different from each other in terms of distance of any kind.

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