

THE STORY OF UMM ḤARÁM



SHEIKH IBRAHIM BIN MUSTAFA

Edited in the original Turkish and translated by

CLAUDE DELAVAL COBHAM



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By SHEIKH IBRĀHĪM BIN MUŞṬAFÁ.

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CLAUDE DELAVAL COBHAM,
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Commissioner of Larnaca, Cyprus.



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Seal of Salomon *alaybi s-salam* with calligraphy “Allahu Haqq”.

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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About four miles from Larnaca, in Cyprus, on the western shore of the great salt lake from which the town (Túzla) takes its Turkish name, stands the Khálat-i-¹Sultán Tekyé, a much-frequented Moslem shrine. The situation is picturesque. The noble outline of the mountain of the Holy Cross (Santa Croce or Stavro Vouni) bounds the view on the west; and the domes and minaret, embowered in garden and grove, are not without grace, especially when seen reflected in the still waters of the lake. The shrine is held in great veneration by Moslems of every country; vessels carrying the Ottoman flag salute it as they pass, and the gardens are a favourite place of resort on Musalmán holidays. The whole is dedicated to a lady known as Umm Hārám bint Milhán, whose body lies in this holy place.

Her tomb itself is of very great interest. Shrouded from curious eyes in sanctity and black velvet, it defies any accurate examination, but I may claim the merit of recognizing in it a prehistoric monument – tomb, temple, or treasury – bearing

¹ Cf. p. 100 *infra*, I. II, and n. I *ad calc.*

very close affinities to two other monolithic structures in Cyprus, known respectively as the Tomb of St. Catherine, near Salamis, and the Hagia Phaneromene, near Larnaca (*Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. iv, p. 111, April, 1883). Of the three huge stones of which it is composed, one stands at the head, another at the feet of the corpse, while the covering stone is believed to hang in air above its companions. The legend of these stones is told in the MS. which follows. The Tekyé has an endowment of 1800 donums of land, with a yearly subsidy of £ 58, and 3000 okes of salt.

Umm Ḥarám was buried there in the spring of A. D. 649, but we know nothing about the buildings of the Tekyé until 1760, when Meḥmed Ághá, Muḥaṣṣil of Cyprus, enclosed the tomb with a wooden barrier. His successor, 'Ajem 'Alí Ághá, replaced this in the following year by a wall with two gates of bronze; and before 1787 a stately mosque, with domes and two minarets (one fell in an earthquake some forty years ago), dwelling-rooms and fountains, arose to enhance the fame of the sanctuary. We owe these details to the "Viaggio da Gerusalemme per le coste della Soria" (Livorno, 1787) of the Abbé Gio. Mariti. Premising that the author quite unnecessarily supposes that Cypriot Moslems could have been misled by the error of Constantinos Porphyrogenetos, *περὶ θεμμάτων*, xv, who makes "Abú Bekr the first Moslem who crossed over to Cyprus and made himself master of it, in the reign of Heraclius, adding that his daughter died there, and that the place of her burial is still shown," his account may be translated here: — "In the early years of the eighteenth century a dervish of a speculative turn discovered and dug out a commonplace Moslem tomb, and thought it might be a profitable business to inspire the shepherds who fed their flocks thereabouts with a veneration for the place. Old Cypriot Christians assert that it was he who, in futherance

of this project, circulated the story of miracles performed at the tomb.

“Mohammadans, however, hold that the tomb was underground, and being exposed by rains was found by some shepherds, to whom on entering it there appeared a lady of beautiful and majestic aspect, clothed in white and shining garments. They were astounded, but their fears were soon stilled by the lady, who blessed them and their flocks, and revealed to them that she was the aunt of Mohammad, and that her body lay in the tomb which they had found. The vision, which they believed was sent by their Prophet, who wished to point out for their veneration his aunt’s sepulchre, filled them with comfort and happiness, and thenceforth their flocks were ever more and more fruitful. The dervish no doubt had accomplices, who spread through the island the news of the discovery. Crowds rushed to the place: the sick were healed, the lame walked, and left for their homes in perfect health. Such virtue, it was said, lay in the mere touch of the stones.

“Offerings rolled in, and the dervish had wherewith to adorn the shrine he had created. His efforts, and the influence of certain devotees, procured him leave from the Government to build over the tomb a suitable dome, under which a few persons could assemble, as is customary throughout the East at the tomb of any notable saint.”

All this scepticism is superfluous. The tomb, whatever its vicissitudes, is certainly the resting-place of Umm Ḥarām bint Miḥán, a historic personage, well known to the early Arab chroniclers. Her father, Miḥán the Anṣarí, had two daughters, the first Umm Suleym, who married Málik, and became the mother of Anas, whom she brought to Mohammad as a boy of eight, who spent his life in the Prophet’s service, and became the great source of the Traditions. The second daughter, whose name is uncertain, was surnamed Umm