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Legend of the 'Father of Roses'

The dervish's holy tomb

With his feet towards Mecca, Gül Baba, the "Father of Roses" lies several feet beneath his empty oak coffin in Budapest's Rose Hill district, in the only Turkish tomb that remained intact throughout the centuries in the capital, following a 150-year Turkish occupation in the 16th-17th centuries.

The original name of the "Father of Roses" is not known. Even his identity is in doubt. Out of two theories today's historians favour the one which says that he was a Mohammedan dervish, the chief of the mosques, where the Turks would hold their ceremonial Friday noon devotions. According to another theory, he was a Turkish warrior and was considered a martyr of Islam.

Legend has it that the "Father of Roses" or "Gül Baba" arrived in Hungary with Soliman II. when the Turks occupied Buda in 1541. During a thanksgiving devotion, celebrated after a "feth-name", a victory report to the sultan, he dropped dead. His "türbe", or tomb, built of carved stone blocks, with four oval windows, was erected by order of Yakya Zade Mohomet Pasha, then the Governor of Buda.

The tomb, built for between 1543 and 1548 holding a coffin with carved turban-decorated head-board, covered with a black cloth, has become a holy place of pilgrimage for Moslems.

The service during which "Gül Baba" dropped dead was celebrated in Buda's Church of the Blessed Virgin, now Matthias Church, which was turned into a principal mosque, during the Turkish occupation with his gate bearing the quotation from the Koran: "Behold, Allah commands truth and good deeds". At the order of Soliman II, sculptures and Christian religious relics were removed from the church and the frescoes decorating the walls were whitewashed. The gallery for the choir was used to separate Turkish women from men while the organloft was the place reserved for Turkish dignitaries.

The Turks completed the "cleansing of the church" by adding a "mirhab" a multiangular, ornamented prayer-box, to mark "kibla", the direction towards Mecca.

Contemporary travellers, including the Turkish traveller and historian Evlia Celebi, and the English envoy Edward Brown, on his way to Constantinople, described in detail the Turkish transformation in Buda. One German traveller wrote, "there are strange things happening here. Men wrap kerchiefs around their heads and women wear pantaloons. And these fools are revered as saints."

Historical researches into the name of Gül Baba, or the "Father of Roses", have turned up conflicting evidences. The latest, and most plausible theory says, that he owed his name—Gül—rose, Baba—father—to the provost's emblem of his order which he wore on the top of his cap.

According to the legend, the "Father of Roses" was also engaged in rose-growing and attempted, unsuccessfully, to introduce the art of rose-oil making in Hungary.



His tomb, a shrine for Mohammedans, drew thousands of pilgrims year after year. Pilgrims even came here from as far as the Ganges River to say a "fathia" to the sage. According to documents, these "pious" pilgrims, sometimes totally forgot the teachings of the Koran, and had a glass too many of the wine grown on the slopes of the Rose Hills, sometimes causing big scandals. This, and the epidemics they allegedly brought in from the East, prompted the interior in 1877 to ban the pilgrimages to the tomb.

After the end of the Turkish occupation, the tomb was donated to Jesuits who turned it into a chapel in 1690. For many years

after the dissolution of the Jesuit Order, the tomb was private property. Its renovation began before the war and resumed in 1962. The Turkish Republic donated to Hungary several decoration pieces for the tomb which holds the engraved words of gratitude and devotion on its walls about the legendary man, saying "With the radiant cap turban of a bektashi at his head, he sleeps among the flowers in eternal peace."

His resting place is oriented towards Mecca, so that when the day of the Last Judgement comes, he will sit up and the first thing he will behold is the benign face of Allah.

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