

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Arrakis

Post by “Joshua” of September 18, 2022 at 10:05 PM

So I've been thinking of getting into some light game modding and I've been getting into the worldbuilding side of Frank Herbert's *Dune*, one of the greatest sci-fi worlds ever made. His stories are set in our galaxy, but in a far distant future where Earth is nothing but a faint memory and mankind has spread across the stars. Herbert's narrative texture relies for its effect on extrapolating the development of human language, religion, and folkways across this vast scale of time, and words from today's languages are used freely by the representative culture. So I came across this in my reading from *Dune Messiah*;

Quote

"You are the instrument I was taught to play," Bijaz said. "I am playing you. Let me tell you the names of the other traitors among the Naibs. They are Bikouros and Cahueit. There is Djedida, who was secretary to Korba. There is Abumojandis, the aide to Bannerjee. Even now, one of them could be sinking a blade into your Muad'dib."

This is expanded on elsewhere; "*Bicouros of Shaitan*"; "*a lazy missionary of the devil*". *Somebody who serves an evil purpose out of lazyness or to achieve privileges.*

I've read this book before, but only now did "Bikouros" leap out at me. And it turns out, there's something to it! One of Herbert's many sources was a book by [Cunninghame Graham](#) called *Mogreb-el-Acksa: A Journey in Morocco*, published in 1898. It will be useful to remember how Maimonides in his *Guide to the Perplexed* turned Epicurus' name into a bad word with *apikoros*, a skeptic or apostate. Graham in his book suggests that *bikouros* developed independently of *apikoros*, and in an unusual way;

Quote

Almost all Europeans in Morocco must of necessity be merchants, if not they must be consuls, for there is hardly any other industry open to them to choose. The [christian] missionaries bought and sold nothing, they were not consuls; still they ate and drank, lived in good houses, and though not rich yet passed their lives in what the Jews called luxury. So they [the Jews] agreed to call them followers of Epicurus, for, as they said, "this Epicurus was a devil who did naught but eat and drink." The nickname stuck, and changed into Bikouros by the Moors, who thought it was a title of respect, became the name throughout Morocco for a missionary. One asks as naturally for the house of Epicurus on coming to a town as one asks for the "Checquers" or the "Bells" in rural England. Are you "Bikouros"? says a Moor, and thinks he does you honour by the

inquiry; but the recipients of the name are fit to burst when they reflect on their laborious days spent in the surgery, their sowing seed upon the marble quarries of the people's hearts, and that the Jews in their malignity should charge upon them by this cursed name, that they live in Morocco to escape hard work, and pass their time in eating and In in quaffing healths a thousand fathoms deep.

"Checquers" and "Bells"? Is that tax-collectors and church bells (tolling someone's death)?