

Story 1377 (1989 Tape 5)

Narrator: Şerafettin Gölcük,
48, Member of School
of Theology, Selçuk
University

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Some Exploits of Çakıcı Mehmet Efe¹

During the later years of the Ottoman Empire there was a folk hero named Çakıcı Mehmet Efe. He lived in the western part of Turkey at Ödemiş. He fought to protect the rights of the common people during the last years of Ottoman rule. As a result, people in that whole area loved Çakıcı Mehmet Efe and showed him great respect.

Efe survives, and people still tell stories about his heroic exploits. Especially during the wintertime, when there is little farm work to be done, people like to talk about him. There are many anecdotes told about him in the village coffeehouses, and there have been several films in which he

¹According to the Redhouse dictionary, efe and zeybek both referred to swashbuckling village dandies in western Anatolia prior to the founding of the Republic. Like

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has appeared.

What did Çakıcı Mehmet Efe do to earn such great popularity? He lived in the mountains with some of his friends, and these kızanlar² did various things to help the peasants.

of the daughter of such and such a poor man."

On another day they went to the ağa of a different village and said, "This village needs a bridge across the river which flows through it. Crossing the river after a

Köroğlu and Robin Hood, they were often pictured as noble outlaws, righters of wrongs, and defenders of the poor and downtrodden.

²Although it is not used frequently, kızan is a synonym for efe and zeybek.

³An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

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rain is very dangerous. No one but you can afford to build a bridge, and so we are ordering you to build it. If it is not completed by a month from today, you can consider yourself a dead man." The ağa was frightened by this threat. Not everyone can build a bridge, but he rode here and there until he found a bridge builder, and he had the bridge constructed within the month. In still another village he compelled the ağa to build a fountain so that people would not have to dip their water from a stream.

Çakıcı Mehmet Efe forced the wealthy to provide such things for the poor people who needed them. He was also concerned about the way in which poor people were sometimes treated by government officials and the police. If he saw a police officer in a town treat people cruelly or unjustly he later went to that officer's home and warned him to change his behavior if he wished to continue to remain in this world.

These are just a few of Çakıcı Mehmet Efe's deeds, they reveal why he was so well liked by the common people. Even though he was at times a bandit, and even though he and his men sometimes fought against government forces, he was admired by the peasants. In their eyes he was a hero. Even

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today there is a song about Çakıcı Mehmet Efe known widely in western Turkey. I have heard it even on local radio programs.

The poplar trees of Ödemiş
May soon all drop their leaves.
They call us men of Çakıcı.
Our beloved is tall and slender.
It was we who burned the mansions.

No tree is taller than my cypress.
Though lush with leaves, it bears no fruit
They call us men of Çakıcı.
Our beloved is tall and slender
It was we who burned the mansions

The zeybek Kamal⁴ has been killed.
His branches fell upon the ground.
They call us men of Çakıcı.
Our beloved is tall and slender.
No one would speak against his name.

⁴A rival bandit.

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Some of Çakıcı Mehmet Efe's grandchildren still live at Ödemiş and people in the surrounding villages still dance the typical zeybek folk dances during wedding celebrations.

During World War I and the War of Independence Çakıcı and his friends did everything they could to protect people from the enemy. They also distributed weapons among villagers so that they could also protect themselves.

My relatives on my wife's side of the family were all efes. They were all part of the Kuvayı Milliye.⁵ My wife's grandfather was called Kara Erkek Mehmet. During the War of Independence, he protected Celâl Bayar (later the third President of the Turkish Republic), who was, under the name of Galip, fighting the enemy in our area. In every battle, the first bullets against the enemy were always fired by efes. In the provinces of Aydın and İzmir (especially in the vicinity of Ödemiş) the zeybek tradition is still very much alive.

⁵The Nationalist Forces led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk during the War of Independence.