

## **The American West and the Zeybeks in the Turk lands**

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Presented to the West Texas Historical Association  
Annual Meeting

Lubbock, Texas 2003

We all, of course, know what 'law' is. And, the enforcement of it is usually handled by fearless men wearing stars in their eyes and on their waistcoats. Balasagunlu Yusuf (c.11th century)[1] and John Rawls (1921-2002)[2] equate law with justice, so does Marx (1818-1883); not Groucho (1895-1977), the other one, but in opposite directions. The debate is all about primacy: which comes first, the individual or the state? Which individual and what state? Whose rights, needs and prerogatives has the first call on law?

Now that we have agreed on the meaning of law, we can discuss the outlaw; the person who breaks it. "Why did you do it, Slim?" asks the sheriff. "Because I could" replies the outlaw. It has been a few decades since I heard that dialogue, so I cannot recall the name of the movie or the names of the actor. But, it admirably serves as a benchmark for what is to follow: the depiction of the outlaw, even the concept thereof.

Roy Rogers (1912-1998) of the Trigger[3] fame reminisced: Republic Pictures and some other studios have been making "Westerns for decades..... As one critic put it "there's more Western' in Hollywood today than there ever was on the Old Chisholm Trail." ....The plot typically involves little more than the triumph of law and order, decency, clean living...we give villains more than an even break, even on the draw...Before the final sunset fade-out scene we always have a wild chase, with a lot of shooting. The chief villain tries to make a getaway...I naturally get the last poke on the screen. Actually, I've been knocked out cold in three of those tussles. Most of my young fans like to think I'm a hard bitten cowboy from way back, and occasionally my more extravagant promoters have encouraged the notion. I've read reports that I was reared on ranches in such places as Montana, Cody, Wyoming, Texas and Arizona. The fact is that I was raised on a farm in a hollow up back of Duck Run, Ohio---and my great ambition until I was in my teens was to be a dentist. My name was Leonard Slye.[4]

Of course, Roy Rogers was speaking as an actor, and not the raconteur. And, he scarcely paid attention to the archetypes he was creating. But, of course, he was right about the excesses, and the distortions. Çakircali Mehmet Efe (1872-1911), on the other hand, was also a product of the social conditions in his birthplace, in the Western portion of Asia Minor. His motives were as complicated or simple as those of any and the best the West Texas ever produced. Çakircali, too, had to have helpers and sympathizers among the general population, in order to evade law. At times, he may have been acting, for effect, but his actions directly involved his own life as well as those of his immediate circle. [5]

The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the common denominators of two different but similar sets of worlds in the same timeframe.

I. Causes: Why do individuals resort to actions considered to be beyond the bounds of law? Why become an outlaw? Briefly, we may contemplate the major causes:

- 1) When the law is stacked to favor only one segment of the society, to force an artificial stratification; as in creating a first class citizen category above the law, and the rest
- 2) When rules are made only by those who are in charge, to protect themselves and their possessions, in that society there is bound to be rebellion. Either in great or in small numbers. The Western outlaw may well be the individual example of this rebellion.
- 3) When the entire structure of a society has collapsed, as in the case of an invasion by a foreign army
- 4) Corruption; which is the attempt to subvert rules to obtain fast riches.
- 5) Ineffective or no law enforcement
- 6) Existence of an adventurer class, ready to test the limits, willing to risk their lives

In the case of Western Turk lands, the above conditions are very similar to those prevailing in the West..

II. Terrain: The terrain is certainly one of the most critical elements in our story. The "American West" as we know it, is a desert. An unforgiving locality. But, it also can be friend to those who respect and honor it. The desert can hide the boot and hat clad outlaw, thereby saving him from his star toting pursuers intent on doing him serious hurt. On the Western portion of Asia Minor, especially where Çakici fearlessly tread, is mountaneous. And forested. In a unique way, both the high, cold, snow capped mountains and the hot flat boundlessly large desert have commonalities. Before the age of helicopters and space based satellite imagery, mountains, too, did hide outlaws. Çakircali and his followers wore clothes unique to their environs and climate. They were pursued by law enforcement, local and national. These outlaws had their friends and supporters in the local and regional communities, and they even had international protectors. The last is a fact also not uncommon in the American West. One of the noteworthy outcomes is that, both sets of outlaws, when the time came, proved patriots.

### III. Responses

Naturally, both the law enforcement and the law breakers will respond to each other, until either the equilibrium is restored or one side decisively defeats the other. Or, we may look at it as a dynamic and never ending process. For every law enforcement move, there is certainly an outlaw countermove.

We also need to remember the justice impulse so embedded in the two cultures presently under discussion. There is the "American Way" involving an understanding of even handed, common sense based justice. It may even be rough justice, sometimes meted out to law enforcement when they step outside the line to play both sides. The Turkish side also has a similar sense of justice, as displayed on numerous occasions over the past recorded millenium. The Zeybek practices were a continuation of that tradition of wrighting the

wrongs.[6]

The Zeybeks wore distinctive clothing to make certain that they were easily identifiable.[7] That, too, was part of the code of conduct of the Zeybeks. It was necessary for the general population to know, with certainty, that the Zeybeks were involved in meting out justice. That, in turn, ensured that the Zeybeks received help from the same populace when needed.

The term, perhaps, is traceable to the 13th century. When a Turkish polity arrived in the western reaches of Asia Minor, they were referenced by the Byzantine sources in a fashion, as the lords of the seashore.[8] There were numerous 'justice' movements in the Eastern parts of the landmass, between the 13th and 19th centuries. It was not until the 19th century that the western reaches caught fire. There were a long list of reasons and culprits against to rail. And the Zeybeks did just that.

But while the movement and the groups, collectively were known as Zeybek, the head of a group of Zeybeks had a special name: Efe. His word could not be contradicted, as the Efe bore the responsibility in enforcing the Zeybek rules.

#### IV. Outcome

Ideology is a straight-jacket, a frozen piece of idea, a filter to keep out whatever the person holds them does not like or deems harmful to himself.[9] Ideologies may also be applied to larger scale communities, for the benefit of a small group, at the expense of masses. The masses may be asked (or, indeed, forced) to bear the burdens while the smaller group enjoys a lighter load. This may be accomplished under the assertion of first-come-first-served, or, ownership of resources to the extent of monopoly. Land settlements follow this general (and, simplified) model in the West. Then, there is the ideology of might makes right: The cattle baron regards the water and land of his much smaller neighbor as his for the taking. And, when John Wayne saves the small neighbor, we all applaud and go home with a lightened heart and belief that justice has been served. All of the foregoing has to do with who the actors are, whether on the screen or in real life, and their identities.[10] Hence the roots of the ideas and ideologies of law and outlaw immediately visible to the outside observer.

Of course, the successful outlaw had to have, among other attributes, charisma, and personal likeability. Let us take two examples:

An Associated Press dispatch, dated Langtry May 27, 1901, read: "Judge Roy Bean (?1825-1903), notorious throughout western Texas and many times the subject of magazine articles, also known as 'The Law West of the Pecos' again distinguished himself last night by going through a Pullman car while the westbound Southern Pacific train was stopping at Langtry and, with a .45 caliber Colt in his hand, collecting from an eastern tourist thirty-five cents due for a bottle of beer. The tourist had bought the beer at the Judge's saloon but had rushed off without paying for it. Going through the car, Bean peered into each passenger's face until he found his man when he said, 'Thirty-five cents or I press the button.' He was handed a dollar bill and returned the correct change. As the Judge left the car, he turned to the aisle and said to the frightened passengers, 'If you don't know what kind of hombre I am, I'll tell you. I'm the law west of Pecos.' The passengers thought it was a holdup." At the time of this incident, Roy Bean was over seventy years old.

Trains stopped long enough for thirsty customers to buy a bottle of beer at Bean's bar. The Judge, who also acted as bartender, hated to give change and he would delay until the engine had given a warning toot and if the passenger was displeased by the high price, he didn't linger to argue for fear he would miss the train. There was one exception---an Eastern dude who bought a bottle of beer and laid down a twenty-dollar gold piece. Bean slowly counted out \$19 in change. 'What!' the customer shouted, 'a dollar for a bottle of beer!' and then he began to cuss. Bean yanked his six-shooter from under the counter and announced, 'Court will come to order! I fine you \$6.66  $\frac{2}{3}$  for public profanity; \$6.66  $\frac{2}{3}$  for disturbin' the peace; \$6.66  $\frac{2}{3}$  for contempt of court.' This, of course, accounted for the entire \$20. Then, with a grand gesture, Bean concluded, "The beer's on me.[11]

Çakircali Mehmet Efe did not consume alcohol, but was very fond of Turkish coffee. On one occasion, he was visiting a coffeehouse, and he was treated to a cup of the best. He took a sip, put the demitasse down, and bellowed to the owner: 'You know that I am one of the deepest of the Yörüks[12]; we always drink it without sugar.' His voice had the unmistakable ring of 'how dare you?' The word got around; he was never served sweetened coffee again.

Çakircali and his entourage were visiting a good friend. They had sat down to a feast. At the end of their repast, the host challenged Çakircali to a shooting contest. Çakircali, who had a reputation of being a crack shot, smiled gently. A few minutes later, the host repeated the request. Next, without waiting further for a firm answer, the host ordered his butler to suspend a coffee demitasse from a far tree branch by a piece of string, through its small handle. When that was done, the host invited Çakircali to go first. Çakircali smiled again, and gave the first turn to his host with the words 'let us see if you have improved.' The host shouldered his gun, took aim, and pulled the trigger. The small demitasse shattered in the distance. Çakircali seemed pleased and he urged his host to repeat the feat. The broken coffee cup was replaced at the same spot. The host straightened his barrel. A puff of smoke later, the second piece of china disappeared. By now Çakircali was now laughing out loud. He said, 'go ahead, make it three.' Same procedure, same result. The host had shot the target three out of three. Çakircali slowly lifted his rifle, and asked his host: 'How about the string? Can you cut the string with your bullet? No response. Çakircali briefly aimed. Before the casing was ejected, the freshly tied coffee cup fell from the branch intact, due to the string holding it to the tree having been cut by Çakircali bullet.[13]

Çakircali began his adult life early, having to earn a living. He did so by selling contraband tobacco. In those days, the tobacco sales were in the monopoly of Regie[14], a part of the debts administration.[15] So the farmer who grew the tobacco had to sell it to this monopoly at a low cost, only to buy it back at a more dear price. And then he had the right to roll it up. A group of individuals objected to the practice, and began selling it without the intermediary cut of the Regie. Çakircali was one. When the enforcement division of the Regie began chasing him, he 'went to the mountain;' meaning, he formed his own close knit band. In the process, he was pardoned three times by the emperor, but was constantly harried by the local enforcement officials and returned to the mountains every time. He died during a shootout.

The life Çakircali led was not that of a freebooter, but part of a tradition that had strict rules. Those who adhered, and honored the process could count on the help and aid of their kinsmen and even the population at large. Those who did not could not survive long, and would lose their lives.[16] These rules included not doing any act that could be regarded as unjust to the general population. It was, of course, expected that the Efe would come to the aid of his aiders

in their time of need.[17] Indeed, they did. On one occasion, Çakircali and his companions happened upon an elderly couple at camp on a mountain clearance. They were inconsolable. When Çakircali Efe inquired of the reason, they were barely able speak. It finally transpired that a rival group (of a different ethnicity) had kidnapped their daughter and abducted their sheep herd to boot. In the process, they declared themselves to be the Çakircali troop. Çakircali Efe was incensed beyond belief, on several accounts. His good name and deeds were usurped. He gathered his men, and despite their exhaustion, marched them immediately. After an arduous and most urgent search, the impostors were spotted red handed, arguing about the distribution of spoils. In a manner that would have warmed the hearts of Randolph Scott[18] fans, Çakircali Efe and his men staged an ambush and saved the daughter unharmed. The offenders were brought back to the camp of the elderly parents, along with their plundered goods. While they had a thankful reunion with their daughter, it is said that Çakircali had a very large bonfire lit, and burnt every last one of the impostors. Similar deeds later were composed as songs by admirers.

Another Zeybek leader, Yörük Ali Efe, much later summarized the task and involvement of the major efe and zeybeks: "An individual, regardless of his courage and bravery, cannot claim he did a good deed for the population. He can only say that he had served his people." [19] He was speaking of confident humility born of experience.

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[1] Balasagunlu Yusuf, Kutadgu Bilig (Istanbul, 1947-1949), Derleyen: Resit Rahmeti Arat. English translation: Robert Dankoff, "Kutadgu Bilig: Wisdom of Royal Glory (Chicago 1983).

[2] John Rawls, A theory of Justice (Harvard ,1971); idem, Justice As Fairness: A Restatement (Harvard, 2001 )

[3] The name of his equally famous and, According to Rogers, very intelligent horse.

[4] Roy Rogers "Don't Shoot, Ma!" The American Magazine, Vol. CXLVIII (August, 1949) No. 2, Pp 131-132. cf. B. A. Botkin, Ed., A Treasury of Western Folklore (NY: Crown Publishers, 1951)

[5] Özkul Çobanoğlu, The relationships between oral forms of folklore and mediated performances in the cult of Çakircali Mehmet Efe (Indiana University M.A. Thesis, 1992)

[6] That does not mean that in the process other wrongs may not have been committed.

[7] Akdes Nimet Kurat , 4. Ve 18. Yüzyillarda Karadeniz Kuzeyindeki Türk Kavimleri ve Devletleri , (Ankara 1972) P.325 about Peçenek.

[8] Salpakis > Sal Bey > Sahil Bey > Zeybek. Hikmet Aydın , Aydınogullari Tarihi Hakkinda Bir Arastirma (1946); Paul Wittek, Mentese Beyligi (Ankara,1944). Cf. Ozan Ruhsatioglu www.turan.tc

[9] Michael Freeden, Ideologies and Political Theory (Oxford, 1996)

[10] <http://www.ku.edu/~ibetext/texts/paksoy-7/> H.B. Paksoy, Identities: How Governed,

Who Pays? (Lawrence, KS: Carrie, 2001)

[11] B. A. Botkin, Ed., A Treasury of Western Folklore.

[12] For the present purposes, a subdivisional unit of the Turkmen confederation. See also <http://www.spongobongo.com/zy9952.htm> H.B. Paksoy, Basmachi Movement and Z. V. Togan:

the Turkistan National Liberation Movement Cahiers d'Etudes sur la Mediterranee orientale et le monde turco-iranien No. 27, 1999. Pp. 301-312. <http://www.ku.edu/~ibetext/texts/paksoy-6/cae12.html> H.B. Paksoy, Essays on Central Asia (Carrie, 1999)

[13] Halil Dural, Bize Derler Çakirca: 19 ve 20. Yüzyilda Ege'de Efeler. Yayima Hazirlayan, Sabri Yetkin Istanbul, 1999). The genesis of the epithet Çakircali is explained therein.

[14] Societe de la Regie cointerese des de l'empire ottoman-Memalik-i Sahane Duhanlari müsterekü'l Menfaa Reji Sirketi.

[15] Stanford Shaw, Between Old and New, The Ottoman Empire Under Sultan Selim 1789-1807 (Cambridge, 1971); idem, History of the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey (NY, 1976-1977) 2 Vols.

[16] M. Çagatay Ulucay, 18 ve 19cu yüzyillarda Saruhanda Eskiyaalik ve Halk Hareketleri (Istanbul 1955 )

[17] Seref úsküp, Bozdog Efe Efsanesi (Izmir, 1994)

[18] An actor specializing in 'good' Sheriff roles; distinguished by his portrayal of humane, likeable and compassionate lawmen.

[19] Yörük Ali Efe. Orkun Dergisi sayi:51, 12 Ekim 1951