

# Comparing and contrasting the stories of polyphemus and tepegöz



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Giants, monsters, and other mythical creatures are seemingly ubiquitous throughout Eastern and Western folklore. These figures are often depicted as man-eating diabolical entities, and it is up to the heroes to stop them.

Although giants are immensely powerful, they are ultimately defeated by the heroes. Homer's *Odyssey* and the Turkish epic *Book of Dede Korkut* are just two examples of literature that display this type of interaction. As such, it is useful to evaluate the similarities and differences between these two narratives.

In both epics, there is a fight between good and evil. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus must find a way to defeat Polyphemus. Likewise, in the *Book of Dede Korkut*, Basat confronts Tepegöz in order to protect his people. This recurring concept is significant because it represents an aspect of human nature. Moreover, the heroes in both narratives must go through a series of trials before defeating the giant. For example, the first test for Odysseus and his men is the Cicones. Odysseus and his men initially defeat the Cicones. However, his men insist on reaping the benefits of their plunder and refuse to leave. This gives enough time for the Cicones to regroup and drive Odysseus and his men out to sea and to the land of the Lotus-eaters. It is interesting to note that the Lotus-eaters themselves are of no danger to Odysseus and his men. In lines 106 to 110, Odysseus recalls, " Any crewmen who ate the lotus, the honey-sweet fruit, lost all desire to send a message back, much less return, their only wish was to linger there with the Lotus-eaters, grazing on lotus, all memory of the journey home dissolved forever." Similarly, Basat had to go through a series of tests before finally killing Tepegöz as well. Tepegöz tested Basat with the ring, the treasure house, and

the swords. In all three trials, Basat never let Tepegöz get the better of him. For example, when Basat entered the cave to retrieve the naked sword, he noticed that the naked sword was moving up and down. When Basat drew his own sword and held it against the naked sword, it sawed his own sword into two. In order to obtain the sword, Basat shot an arrow at the chain by which the sword was hanging. Not only did these tests represent the growth of the heroes but it also allowed the heroes to gain the courage and wisdom that they needed to defeat the giants. Furthermore, the emphasis that both works places on religion gives the reader insight into the beliefs of the ancient Greeks and Turks. For example, in *The Odyssey*, phrases such as "... and Zeus presented us with disaster..." (61) " Now Zeus who masses the storm clouds hit the fleet with the North Wind," (76-77) and " We flung our arms to Zeus..." (331) show that the Greeks placed themselves in the mercy of the gods. They believed that the gods played a significant role in their daily lives. In the *Book of Dede Korkut*, Basat repeats the phrase, " My Allah saved me." This implies that the Turks believed that Allah was merciful. All in all, the constant reference to religion indicates that it played a key role in Greek and Turkish cultures.

Despite the numerous parallels between these two literary works, there are also differences. For instance, the method in which the heroes defeat the monsters are different. Odysseus gets Polyphemus drunk and tricks the giant into thinking that his enemy's name is Nobody. Later on, Polyphemus claims that Nobody is attacking him, but the other giants misunderstand and think that Polyphemus is actually being punished by the gods. On the other hand, Basat kills Tepegöz through sheer force. Moreover, Odysseus and Basat had

somewhat different intentions. Although both can be considered heroes, Odysseus fights the giant for adventure while Basat fights for his people. Odysseus' original intention was to steal food from the giant's lair. However, once they got the food, Odysseus refuses to leave because he expected gifts from Polyphemus. In lines 256 and 258, he admits that he " would not give way" and thought about " what gifts he'd give." These lines are significant because they outline the ancient Greeks' emphasis on hospitality. When Odysseus realizes that the giant had no sense of morality and did not fear the gods, he tries to escape. On the contrary, Basat confronts the giant without expecting anything in return. He is already aware of the devastating chaos that Tepegöz causes. Basat does not try to escape and willingly makes the choice to risk his life for his family and his community. On page 128, Basat says, " Beys, I am going to meet Tepegöz for the sake of my brother. What do you think about this?" This sentence tells the reader that Basat respects and values the opinions of his family. He is willing to put his own life at risk to avenge his brother. This shows that the Turks placed an emphasis on the importance of family.

When these two epics are compared, it becomes apparent that there is a link between Greek and Turkish culture and folklore. It is also important to note that stories are often adapted or changed from one generation to another. However, the essence of the narrative remains. The concept of good and evil is a classic and will continue to remain so. It is clear that the struggle between hero and monster is one of the most important aspects of the literary world.