

Story 1166 (1989 Tape 12)

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Location: Taped at Ankara, but
narrator is from
Trabzon Province

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The Shape of Laz¹ Chickens

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One day a foreign tourist was driving through the streets of Sürmene, a district on the outskirts of Trabzon. When a chicken ran out in front of his car, he tried to avoid hitting it, but in spite of his efforts, he ran over this chicken. This stranger picked up the chicken and carried it about in his hand as he asked people randomly if they knew who its owner was, for he wished to pay its owner the value of the bird. Finally someone directed this man toward the office of the muhtar,² saying, "If anyone knows whose chicken this is, it will be the muhtar

¹The Laz people constitute one of the larger ethnic minorities in Turkey. Their exact origins are not definitely known. The largest concentrations of Lazes are in extreme northeastern Turkey along the Black Sea coast. Reputedly stupid, they are made fun of in numerous folk anecdotes about fools. The frequent success of Lazes who move to İstanbul belies the folk image.

²A muhtar is the elected head of a village or town mahalle (ward, district). He is the only elected official known to many villagers, for most other officials they would see are usually appointees of one or another federal ministry.

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The stranger went to the office of the muhtar, whose name was Hızır.³ Hızır took into his hand the crushed chicken, which was as flat as a loaf of yufka.⁴ He turned it over and over in his hand, examining it carefully. After doing this for several minutes, he said, "My fellow citizen,⁵ no one in our village owns this creature. No one here raises flat chickens."

³The name Hızır is a clear clue that the character is a Laz. Hızır is one of the three most common male names among Lazes--especially those in folktales.

⁴Yufka is a thin, unleavened bread baked on a griddle known as a saç or sac.

⁵Literally, the muhtar calls the stranger Hemşerim, which means resident of the same city.