

Story 1541 (1992 Tape 1

Narrator: Mustafa Aytekin, 30

Location: Derinkuyu, a kaza town  
of Nevşehir Province

Date: 1992

A Laz<sup>1</sup> View of Geography

One day during the geography class, the teacher asked the following question: "What is the name of the largest province in Turkey?"

Temel<sup>2</sup> immediately stood up and answered, "Teacher largest province is Rize."

The teacher said, "No, Temel. Rize is not the largest province. Konya is."

Temel answered, "But, teacher, when you see Rize on map, it is still unironed. If you took an iron and pressed Rize, you would see that it is larger than Konya."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Laz people are a large ethnic minority living primarily in extreme NE Turkey along the Black Sea Coast. While there are Lazes throughout Turkey, the vast majority live in Rize, Trabzon, and Artvin provinces. Although their native language is a form of Megrillian Caucasian, most adult Lazes speak Turkish readily, though they may have a number of dialectal pronunciations. Like the inhabitants of three or four villages elsewhere in Turkey, Lazes are often stereotyped as being stupid. Of course they are not in fact any more stupid than anyone else; they are simply the butt of folk humor.

<sup>2</sup>Temel, Dursun, Cemal (for standard-Turkish Kemal), and Hızır are very common male names among Lazes. The first three are so strongly associated with Lazes that whenever they appear in folktales they automatically signal Laz, even if the word Laz has not been used.

<sup>3</sup>Of the three Northeastern provinces where the bulk of the Laz people live, Rize Province has the highest percentage of

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Lazes. Temel is here obviously promoting the Laz heartland. Rize Province is actually only about 1/10 the size of Konya Province, but it is quite mountainous, as opposed to the wide plains that constitute most of Konya. These mountains are shown clearly on a topographical map.