

Story 870 (1996 Tape 1)

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### Anticipated War Between Lazıstan<sup>1</sup> and China

There was once a very small country named Lazıstan. The people there became bored and restless, and they wanted to find some activity to which they could devote their energy. Someone among them suggested that waging a war against China<sup>2</sup> would not only provide an exciting challenge but it would also keep them occupied for some time.

The Lazes decided to appoint a committee which would first carry a declaration of war to the Chinese emperor and then oversee the war itself. After making the long journey to China, the committee went into the presence of the emperor and handed him the declaration of

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<sup>1</sup>Lazıstan means the place of Lazes. Whatever the ancient status of the Lazes, they have now for some time been citizens of Turkey. The word Laz referred originally to an ethnic minority living primarily in Trabzon and Rize provinces, along the extreme eastern part of the Turkish Black Sea coast. More recently the word has come to be applied to any resident of the entire Turkish Black Sea coast. In the Turkish oral tradition Laz people are stereotyped as being stupid or inept. This stereotype (like most others) is unjustifiable, for Lazes are, of course, much like other people.

<sup>2</sup>The stereotype of the Laz often pictures him as being warlike and trigger-happy. Some scholars claim that the stereotype has an historical basis.

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war. The great ruler thought for a few minutes about this daring declaration from tiny Lazıstan. Then he said, “We accept this declaration of war. Our army will soon start marching to the border of your land. To protect our honor, we cannot do otherwise.”

After the war committee had brought home this news from China, the committee was immediately called to a meeting of the Laz National Assembly to discuss the approaching conflict. Hearing of this meeting, the residents of Lazıstan began to gather outside the National Assembly building to await news about the military plans. They waited one day, two days, three days, but still no one came forth from the building to make an announcement to the people. The people said to each other, “Do you think that our government is afraid of the Chinese?”

At last, on the fourth day of deliberations, the war committee emerged from the National Assembly building. By then, the people were angry at having been kept waiting for news, and so they spoke rudely to the committee. “Why did you take so much time to make decisions about the war? Were you afraid of combat with the Chinese?”

Temel,<sup>3</sup> the leader, said to the Laz people, “No! Of course we were not afraid of the Chinese! Our problem was very different. It did

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<sup>3</sup>In tales about the stereotyped Laz as dummer or fool, the male characters usually have one or another of five or six very common Laz names. Temel is the name used most often, with Dursun

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not concern the fighting but what would happen after we had killed all of the Chinese troops. Where could we in this very small country find space enough to bury so many Chinese?"

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in second place. Thus if either of these names occurs in a folktale, the audience knows at once that it is a Laz tale.