

Story 1916 (1992 Tape 3)

Narrator: Leylâ Özdemir, 25

Location: Kırklareli, capital of Kırklareli Province

Date: May 1992

A Laz¹ View of Comparative Anatomy

This happened when Temel² was still a child attending grade school in Trabzon. At the end of each school year the local supervisor of public education made a practice of visiting all schools in his area and testing very briefly the students in each class.

When the supervisor went to Temel's class, he started asking students questions about things they had been taught that year. Most of the students were responding well to the supervisor's questions, and each time a child gave a correct answer, the supervisor said, "Bravo!"

¹The word Laz referred originally to an ethnic minority living primarily in Trabzon and Rize provinces, along the eastern end 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.

²In tales about the stereotyped Laz, the male characters have one or another of five or six names. Temel is used most often, with Dursun in second place. Thus if either of these names occurs in a folktale, the audience knows at once that it is a Laz story.

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When it came Temel's turn to be questioned, the supervisor pointed to a picture of a human skeleton and asked, "Temel, what is shown in that picture?"

Temel answered him very promptly, "It is a picture of fish bones."³

³In Turkey the word for "fish bone" is kılçık, and the word for "human bone" is kemik. Since the two words sound somewhat alike, Temel confused the one with the other.