

Story 1918 (1992 Tape 3)

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The Frugality of Laz¹ Farmers

In one of the Laz villages of Rize Province, a veterinarian was examining the physical condition of all the livestock. When the veterinarian reached Temel's² village, he was surprised to discover how many of the farm animals there had wooden legs. He looked at several of these wooden-legged animals very closely, but he could not determine why they had needed artificial legs. Finally he decided to ask Temel to explain this situation. He asked, "Why do so many of these animals have wooden legs?"

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

²Temel (like Dursun) is a name given to so many Laz males that it automatically signals Laz to most Turkish audiences. Because Lazes are stereotyped as numskulls, the name Temel may, by extension, be applied to any stupid person, whether or not he happens to be Laz.

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Temel answered, "When we want to eat some animal hocks, we can see no reason for slaughtering an animal. We simply cut off a leg."

³Animal trotters or hocks (hockies in the American vernacular) are the feet and ankles of sheep or pigs. Pigs' hocks are often pickled. Since pork is forbidden to Muslims, the reference here is probably to sheep trotters. Actually, hocks are the poorest meat of an animal, and some livestock owners throw them away after an animal has been slaughtered. But they do contain a slight amount of edible meat (along with much skin and gristle), and so both the poor and the frugal do eat them. They would hardly be valuable enough to cause the slaughtering of an animal or even the removal of its leg!