

Story 1958 (1992 Tape 4)

Narrator: Leyla Özdemir, 25

Location: Kırklareli, capital of Kırklareli Province (a Black Sea or Laz province)

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A Laz's¹ Fluency in Russian

Temel² lived close to the border of Russia, and he traveled into that country several times. After awhile he claimed that he could speak Russian.

One day while he was at a coffeehouse, some of his friends asked him several questions about the Russian language. One of them said, “Temel, you have been in Russia many times, and since you claim to know Russian, I should like to ask you this: What is the Russian word for camel?”

¹The 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.

²In 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 in second place. Thus if either of these names occurs in a folktale, the audience knows at once that it is a Laz tale.

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Temel answered, “Well, a camel is a very big thing, but there are so few in Russia that there is no regular word for camel.”

Then another friend asked, “Temel, what is the Russian word for fly?”

Temel answered, “Oh, a fly is too insignificant for us to bother about.”

A third asked, “Temel, what do they call a sheep in Russian?”

Temel said, “I do not know, but the Russians call a goat by a very strange name.”