

Story 1972 (1992 Tape 4)

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

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Laz¹ Respect for Military Authority

While Temel² was serving his term of military duty,³ the army attempted to improve his education. He was assigned to take some courses in basic subjects. One of those courses was devoted to general science.

At the end of that course, all of the students were given an oral examination by an officer. When it was Temel's turn to be tested, the officer asked him, "Can you tell me what the shape of the earth is?"

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.

³All able-bodied Turkish males are required to serve a term of military training. The length of each man's service depends upon his education and the nation's need for troops at the time.

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Temel answered, "The shape of the earth is round, sir."

The officer then asked, "How do we know that the earth is round? Can you give me a reason?"

Temel answered, "When you see a ship approaching on the ocean, you always see the masts and upper part of the ship first."

"Can you give me another reason?" asked the officer.

"Well, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. But then next morning there is the sun again, and it is again rising in the east."

"Very well," said the officer. "Now can you give me a third reason for knowing that the earth is round?"

Temel was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Another reason is that my sergeant said it was round, sir."