

Story 1976 (1992 Tape 4)

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

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Laz¹ War Against China Canceled

The wise elders of Rize decided to wage war against another country in order to keep their citizens busy. Out of all the countries in the world to fight, they chose China. They sent a messenger to China to deliver a declaration of war. This confused the rulers of China, for none of them knew where Rize was located, and most of them had never even heard of Rize before. They consulted a world atlas, and when they discovered that Rize was a tiny province in the northeast corner of Turkey, they accepted the declaration of war and sent the messenger back with an acceptance letter.

After the messenger had returned, the wise old rulers of Rize called a meeting to set a date for the beginning of the war. The meeting continued much longer than had been expected, and when it

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.

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had not ended at the close of the fourth day, Temel² went to the meeting place and asked, “After spending so much time, why have you not yet set a date to start the war against China? Are you all afraid to do so, or is there some other reason that is preventing you from doing so?”

One of the wise elders was insulted by this question. He left the meeting and went outside to address the crowd of people who had gathered there with their weapons and were awaiting the war news. He said, “People of Rize, calm yourselves! We would have no fear of China if the war should occur. But we have been debating a serious question about the aftermath of such a war. We have so little land here that we are wondering how we could find room to bury the huge population of China.”

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.