

Story 2204 (Collected by Ahmet Uysal and transcribed from a tape of Dil ve Tarih-Çoğrafya Fakültesi.)

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Location: Çelikgürü village, Biga kaza, Çanakkale Province

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Lazes¹ Measure the Height of a Minaret

Once there was and once there was not² a minaret built by some Lazes. A visitor to their town admired the minaret and asked some of the residents, "How tall is that minaret?"

One Laz said, "It is the height of five men."

A second Laz said, "It is the height of ten men"

A third said, "It is the height of twenty men"

The stranger realized that none of them actually knew the height of that structure. He said, "You are probably all wrong in your estimates. Why don't you actually measure

¹The word Laz originally referred to an ethnic minority living at the extreme eastern end of the Turkish Black Sea coast, mainly in Trabzon and Rize provinces. As time has passed, the term has broadened to include all Turkish residents of the entire Turkish Black Sea coast. Lazes are stereotyped as being stupid or inept, and there are countless jokes and anecdotes that so picture them.

²This is the beginning of a Turkish narrative formula for the opening of a folktale. Following these words there is a nonsense jingle. The whole opening is called tekerleme.

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its height?"

A number of Lazes went to the balcony of the minaret. A very strong man grasped the top of the minaret and his legs dangle. A second Laz hung from the feet of the strong man. Then a third Laz hung from the feet of the second man. This continued until the twelfth man's feet were only a meter from the ground. At that moment the strong man on top called out to his friends below, "Hey, fellows, hold on tightly. My arms are getting very tired. A few seconds after that his arms weakened so much that he lost his grip on the minaret. The whole chain of men plunged to the ground, and several of them were killed.