

Story 2209 (2000, dictated) Narrator: Fethi Pirinçcioğlu

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Laz¹ Etymology for Some American
Place-names

Some years ago several groups of Lazes left Turkey and emigrated to the New World. One group which moved into the southwestern part of the United States lost some of their possessions in transit. Among these lost items were almost all of their musical instruments, a sad blow for these avid singers and dancers. The only instrument that survived was a saz.² Nevertheless, they managed to get enough music from that single instrument to accompany quite a numbers of songs and folk dances

¹The word Laz originally referred to an ethnic minority living along 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 living along the entire Turkish Black Sea coast. The Laz people are stereotyped as being stupid or inept, and there are countless jokes and anecdotes that so picture them. This stereotype, like most others, is baseless.

²A simple three-stringed musical instrument resembling a lute. It is the most popular folk instrument in Turkey, often played for accompaniment by the folk singer himself.

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of the merrymakers shouted out, "We should choose a suitable name for this new home area of ours!"

"We already have an appropriate name for this place," responded the saz player

"What is it?"

is 'Tek-saz'" [meaning only or single saz is the way that Texas got its name.

Another group of Lazes moved even farther west to settle. Many of them were farmers, and they raised large crops of their favorite vegetables, especially beans and black cabbage. When these crops were harvested, the Laz people there consumed great quantities of them and inevitably farted much gas into the air. This led them to name their settlement Laz-ve-Gas. [In Turkish ve means and, but by retaining the ve, these Lazes invented a name for the Arizonan city of Las Vegas.]

Those Lazes who settled much farther south in the New World went to a place not yet named Amazon. They danced and sang their way along for quite some time without finding a suitable location. Finally one of them exclaimed, "Aman, ne uzun yol!" [meaning, "Alas, what a long way to go."

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Hearing this, others picked up just part of his remark. They asked, "What do you mean by 'Aman-uzun'?" In time those sounds named a great river, the Amazon.

One community of Lazes settled in and named the Carolinas. The name Carolina derived from their principal crop, black cabbage. The Turkish name for this vegetable is karalahana.³

A large segment of Lazes never went far beyond their landing place in northeastern United States. One day when they were entertaining themselves with song and dance, their sounds grew into an uproar. Finally a prominent member of that group stepped forward to caution his kinfolk about all the noise they were creating. He said, "Yeter [enough of] bu [this yaygara [hullabaloo]]. What is it all about?"

Someone retorted, "Ne yaygara? [what hullabaloo?]. That should be the name for this place." In time ne

³Among most English-speaking people the i in Carolina is long--like the i in side or diet. But in the American southern dialect that same i is pronounced as ah. Thus an American Southerner would be likely to pronounce the word Carolahna, thus making it closer in sound to karalahana.

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yagara became the name of a great waterfall, Niagara