

Story 1877 (1995 Tape 2)

Narrator: Olcay Serez, 45

Location: Erzurum, capital of
Erzurum Province

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A Disputed Laz¹ Cover-up

One day Temel² was walking for pleasure along the shore of the Black Sea. The water looked so inviting that after a short while, Temel decided to go swimming in it. He did not have his bathing suit with him, but this did not deter him from swimming. Since he could see no one anywhere near him on the beach, he took off his clothes, placed them together in a small pile, and jumped naked into the waves.

Temel swam for quite awhile. When he climbed out of the water, he could not find his clothes. He knew exactly where he had left them, but they were no longer there. He finally concluded that someone unseen by him had stolen his clothes.

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.

²Temel (like Dursun, İdris, and Hızır) is a name given to so many Laz males that it automatically signals Laz to most Turkish audiences. Because Lazes are stereotyped as being stupid people, the name Temel may, by extension, be applied to any stupid person, whether or not he happens to be Laz.

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Covering his genitals with his hands, he began walking home. Along the way he met his friend İdris. “Aren’t you surprised to see me walking around naked this way?” asked Temel.

“What surprises me more,” said İdris, “is the way you are using your hands. You should be using them to cover your face so that no one could recognize you!”