

Story 1143 (1974 Tape 11

Narrator: Necip Görpele, 46

Location: Sekeli village, Yerköy
kaza, Yozgat Province

Date: August 7, 1974

The Lost ¹¹(Laz) Head

One day there were some Laz people wandering about the fields in their hunting clothes. In those days there were hand-operated stone mills used for grinding flour, and as the Lazes walked along, one of them spotted a stone the right size and shape for use in such a mill. He called, "Come here, Hasan!"

"What is the matter, Mehmet?"

"We have just discovered a stone here that would be suitable for use in Ahmet ^{10-7 2}(Ağa)'s² mill."

¹ The Laz people constitute one of the larger ethnic minorities in Turkey. Their exact origins are not definitely known. The largest concentrations of Lazes are in extreme northeastern Turkey along the Black Sea coast. Reputedly stupid, they are made fun of in numerous folk anecdotes about fools. The frequent success of Lazes who move to İstanbul belies the folk image.

² An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

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"Really?"

"Yes, yes!"

stone turned out to be very heavy, too heavy for them to pry up out of the ground. They cut some pieces of wood and used them as levers to try to pry up the stone. They managed to raise the stone part way up when one of the levers broke, and the stone fell back, smashing Ahmet Ağa's head beneath it. The edge of the stone was sharp, and when it fell on Ahmet Ağa's head, it separated the head from the body

"Brother Mehmet!"

"Yes?"

Ahmet Ağa have a head on his body this morning or not?"

"I really do not know. I observed once that he was scratching his beard, but I didn't notice whether or not he had a head. Let us go and ask his wife.

returned to their village and went to Ahmet Ağa's house. There they talked with his wife. "Aunt Fadime, did Ahmet Ağa have a head on his body when he got up this morning?"

"I really don't know. He was scratching his beard during the morning prayer, but I did not notice whether he had his head."

Then one of the Laz men had an idea. He said, "Could it

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have been his head that was smashed beneath the stone, or could it have been just his beard?" Running back to the field where the stone lay, they pried it up a little again. Beneath it was Ahmet Ağa's squashed head.