

Story 2125 (1966 Tape 1

Narrator: Altın Erol, 50

Location: İstanbul, capital
of İstanbul Province

Date: August 3,

The Laz¹ and the Minaret Seeds

Once there was and once there was not, a long time ago, when travel between the eastern provinces and İstanbul was very difficult, only a few Lazes from the Trabzon area went to İstanbul. But I want to tell you about a Laz who did complete the round-trip to and from this great city

When this Laz arrived in İstanbul, he was astonished by some of the things that he saw there. He was especially impressed by the tall minarets that stood near some of the mosques. He stopped a man in the street and asked him, "What are those tall things?"

Realizing from his general appearance that the stranger was from a rural area, the İstanbul resident answered,

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.

Story 2125

"Oh, those are forest radishes."

"Is that so?" asked the Laz. "Where can one buy seeds for such tall radishes?"

"You can buy them in the flower market in the Eminösü district of this city."

Walking to Eminösü, the Laz entered the flower market and approached a vendor. He said, "I want some seeds to raise some of those very tall white radishes over there." As he said that, he pointed to the minarets of a nearby mosque.

The vendor thought, "What kind of a fool is this?" But he proceeded to hand the Laz a packet of seeds. He said, "Take these home and dig a small pit in your backyard. Mix some manure with the soil in that pit and sprinkle into that mixture these seeds. Then cover them well."

Returning to his village, the Laz was greeted by his friends. They said, "Tell us about your experiences in İstanbul. What did you see there that was interesting?"

"I saw there some amazingly tall radishes, and I bought seeds for those radishes to plant here. I am going to plant them at once." Going to his garden, he dug a shallow pit and mixed its soil with manure. He planted

Story 2125

the seeds in that mixture and then he covered them.

After a short while some green leaves appeared in the traveler's garden, but there was no sign of any stems as tall as minarets. He was so annoyed that he grabbed the leaves of one plant and pulled it out of the ground. Upon seeing a long white radish beneath the leaves, the Laz exclaimed, "Oh, I must have planted those seeds upside down!"²

²In most versions of this anecdote the Laz (or other dummer) recognizes the tall towers alongside the mosques as minarets. He does not, therefore, ask for radish seeds but for what he is misled to believe are minaret seeds. He hopes to replace the short minarets of his village's mosque with the towering minarets he sees in İstanbul.