

Herdelezi (George's Day) in Izmir

On the eve before Herdelezi the girls gather together, and build a big fire. They hop up and down, those able to play the Tarabuka play the drums, they dance and jump over the fire. Those who do not have children build some kind of house from stones in the yard. Under a tree, they build a cradle. They put a small doll in it, a doll made from fabric scraps. They say: "Dear God, this year I am without child, but the coming year I shall have children." They fasten the cradle to the tree. Those who have no home and pay rent start building a house from stones. Those who often fight with their husbands, who do not get along well with them, or those who are widows and do not have a husband visit those who live happily with their husband and ask them for a ring. If they are widows, they say: "Dear God, the coming year I shall find me a husband; as happy as they are with their husbands, as happily I shall live with mine." For one night, they keep the ring. Those, whose husbands treat them badly visit one whose husband treats her well, take the ring, and say: "The coming year my husband shall be as wise as he. We shall live happily."

They get up early in the morning and pick stinging nettle. But our stinging nettle, they sting badly. The unmarried girls take some of the nettle and go from house to house. They burn all who are still in bed. And our old Roma say: "Oh my daughter," and they say where they have pain. "Put them here," they say, "so that the pain will go away." They treat the feet, the shoulder, the back, wherever they have pains, with the nettle.

Afterwards, the girls go to the sea. They throw flowers into the sea. If the flower swims straight, the girl will have a lover. If it turns, and the head points downward, she won't find a lover this time – and they believe it!

That's the way they do it, and then they go to the fair. Everybody goes to the fair, the married ones, the boys, the women, the girls, all go to the fair. That's where they go, and the Roma, the men, drink. It's a hustle and bustle: the girls, Tarabukas, Zurmas and violins, the whole fair, where they walk about, with songs and dances. They eat, drink and enjoy themselves, and that's the way our Herdelezi ends. Our Herdelezi is not so big. The Turks call it "gypsy party".

[Heinschink, Fatma (1996) Der Herdelezi (Georgstag) in Izmir. In: Romano Centro, Wien, 1996/13, p. 18.]