

George's Day

(...) The gypsies who have been settled in Jagodina for a long time equally eat nor lamb's meat nor sheep's milk, nor do they eat cheese before George's Day. On the eve before George's Day each house has to buy at least one sheep, in order to slaughter it on George's Day. On the Friday before George's Day they go and pick grass, put it in a brass kettle on the eve before George's Day, fill it with water, heat it up, and bathe in that water. On George's Day at about three o'clock in the morning, the women, then the men bathe in the river. Many-a-one takes with him the first red egg given to him by a Serb for Easter, and says a prayer by the river, taps the egg against his head, and immerses himself in the water. When they return from their bath, they light a fire, heat up some milk, and taste it for the first time.

When the butcher slaughters the lamb (the gypsies themselves dislike slaughtering animals) he puts apart the liver and the innards, which are roasted as appetizers. They eat them with some brandy. The other inner parts of the lamb are cleaned, put back into the lamb, and then it is brought to the baker so he can bake it. As soon as the lamb is done, they dish some of it out to the neighbors, the rest is kept for the house.

After lunch, they abandon themselves to pleasure, which continues for three days. On the third evening, all gypsies come together at a certain place, and roam the city with musicians, singing George's song and dancing to it.(...)

The most remarkable George's Day celebration takes place with the *korano roma*, gypsies who have just immigrated from Turkey (...). I had the opportunity to watch these customs in Aleksinac with the nailsmith gypsies.

They call George's Day *Erdeleze* (...). Before that day (May 6th), they don't eat lamb's meat nor do they drink milk, nor eat goat's cheese, nor young leek, and on the *Erdelezi* day itself they fast. On the same day, each head of house takes it upon himself to buy a lamb and to make wood. Moreover, each head of house takes a special cherry tree twig with leaves home. As soon as he arrives at home, his wife takes a copper kettle, goes to the river and scoops on three different places, and thus fills her kettle with water. She adds stinging nettle, willow and beech leaves, which she collects together with other grasses and herbs along the way. Back home, she adds the cherry twig into the kettle, and puts it over the fire in order to heat up the water. As soon as the water is warm enough, it is poured into a trough, and first the head of house, then all other members of the household one after the other bathe in it. At dusk, the head of house gets some willow twigs, and decorates the house with them. Then, the head of house lights a fire in the yard and sits down together with his wife, his children and guests from the neighborhood. They stay up all night, have their dinner there, drink, sing, tell fairy tales to each other, abandon themselves to merryness and fire guns. (...)

At the break of day, at about two o'clock, both men and women go to the river and bathe in it for reasons of health. He who would not take a bath in the river on that night would be ill the whole year through.

When they come home from their bath everyone drapes himself with willow birch, some of them also with wild wine from the wood. When dawn breaks, the head of house slaughters the lamb, or – if he finds that unpleasant – the butcher will. The lamb's blood is kept, and they put it on their forehead. One half of the lamb is roasted in a frying pan, the other half is used for a variety of cooked dishes. The liver is fried by the head of house himself, and distributed among the neighbors for the souls of the deceased. After that, *šukljaše* (rice with milk) is cooked, and the head of the house

distributes the mash to the children under six. Then, the head of house goes to a coffee shop with his friends, and makes free with coffee, however without eating anything solid. In the meantime, the housewife prepares a meal: sour soup (*šutali čorba*), lamb paprikasch (minced meat in its own sauce sautéed with onion, and seasoned heavily with Spanish pepper and salt), roasts, a *kolprita*, and cake (*bokolja*).

At about ten, they sit down to eat, and after the meal they go to sleep. At about three o'clock they get up again and betake themselves to the round dance (*horo*). At the dance, the old people sit and watch, delighted by brandy and the young folk's bounce. At dusk, the men and women proceed home. (...)

Before dinner, the head of house seizes the lamb's head, carves it up with his hands, takes out the tongue and hands it over to his wife, who has to hide and keep it until the next year.

The tongue is stored because of a common belief that a girl who tastes it will love the giver, and vice versa the receiver will love the girl who gives it to him. On the next day, immediately after break of day, the gypsies make congratulatory visits to one another:

Whenever they enter a house, they greet "*batalo to lačo dive!*" (A happy and good day!), which is replied to with "*to je sasto!*" (You should be healthy!). In every house, the visitors are entertained with brandy and coffee. After lunch they devote themselves again to the pleasure of dancing. The third day is spent like the second one.

[Gjorgjevic, Tihomir R. (1903) Die Zigeuner in Serbien. Ethnologische Forschungen, Budapest, p. 76-79.]