



Comenius Partnership 2013-2015

Bulgarian water customs and traditions calendar

“Save our WATER Sources”

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Epiphany /St. Jordan's Day (6th of January)

In Eastern Christianity, Jesus' baptism is commemorated on 6 January, the feast of Epiphany. Epiphany/ St. Jordan's Day (Yordanovden in Bulgarian) is one of the major Christian holidays in our country.

According to the Bible, on that day, John the Baptist baptized Jesus Christ in the Jordan. When Jesus accepted John's baptism, they heard a voice from heaven saying, "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased". After that the spirit in the form of a dove descended on Jesus. It was a sign that Jesus was the Lamb of God who had been promised. In Bulgaria, Epiphany is celebrated on January 6 and is known as Bogoyavlenie (the Manifestation of God), or Yordanovden (Day of Jordan). On this day, a wooden cross is thrown by a priest into the sea, river or lake and young men race to retrieve it. As the date is in early January and the waters are close to freezing, it is said that good health will be bestowed upon the home of the swimmer who is the first to reach the cross.



St.Lazarus' Day (April)

Lazaruvane is a Bulgarian custom. Traditionally it is practiced on the Christian holiday Lazarovden. The main rite of the holiday is called lazaru4ane - a custom of matchmaking. Girls over 16 years of age, called lazarki, can participate. They go around the field and the houses, playing and singing songs about love and women, fertility, health and family welfare. Their number cannot be fewer than forty and they are dressed in the typical festive clothing borrowed from young brides and wear gold coin necklaces and other ritual bridal jewellery. Some also have towels used to bless the brides on their wedding day. They carry flowers - violets, geraniums, primrose, hellebore, and plum blossoms in their hands.

Special songs are sung only on Lazarovden. On the day, before sunrise, the lazarki get together early in the appointed place and they start singing. Everyone has to eat something before their songs are heard. After singing the song they go around the neighborhood. The lazarki sing songs for each family member. First they sing for the master of the house who goes in the centre of their circle. The host then gives them money. They sing songs for the hostess, for a young girl and a bachelor, for marriage, for a little child, for a young bride. The lazarki are invited in many houses most often with bread, leeks, onions and salt served on a table or a three-legged chair in the yard. They are given fruit. In houses where there are bee hives, there is also a plateful of honey, a bowl of water, as well as a loaf of bread. The lazaritsi dance in a circle in the rhythm of their song. Then each lazaritsa takes a piece of the bread, dips it in the honey and eats it, then dips her fingers into the bowl of water, and moistens her mouth. Next, she dries her hands on the hostess's apron, so that the new bees can stay in that household. Leaving the yard, the lazarki sing another song. At the end of the day, they split the money they have collected among themselves and return the clothes to the young brides they belong to. Young men used to ask their betrothed's hand in marriage on that day.



A ritual song

Ой Лазаре, Лазаре
добре стори,че дойде,
че Великден наближи,
че Великден ще дойде

Ризата ми на крусно,
чукманят ми на руно,
чукманят ми на руно,
сърмен елек на бало.

Сърмен елек на бало,
папуцето на пазар,
папуцето на пазар,
пафтите ми на златар



The Day of St. George (6th of May)

The night before the holiday, before the roosters crow, people go to a field or a meadow, where they roll in the morning dew, because popular belief claims that at this time of the year everything is "drenched in good dew", and in the past rolling in the dew used to be done naked. In some places people only walk barefoot in the dew or wash their hands and face with it, elsewhere they also drink the dew. Bathing in the dew is done by people so they can be healthy and not suffer from lower back pain. Barren women also bathe in dew believing that it can help them become fertile. Another ritual related to the dew is carrying it home. It is believed that the dew collected on the Day of St. George has special healing powers.

Besides the "bathing" in the dew, another ritual of bathing in rivers and springs is also performed. Bulgarian Muslims from Chepelare, after walking in dew, go to the holy spring of St. Georgi, where they wash or bathe. This custom is very common in the entire Middle Rhodopes and in the Tryavna Region, Kazanlak and so on. There exists the custom of carrying water home (in some places it is carried in silence – the so called "silent water"), which is used for ritual breads. In some parts of Bulgaria (Razgrad, Plovdiv) it is believed that on this day the water is so healing and has such power, that even bears bathe for the first time in the year.

It is generally believed that the rain of St. Georgi is particularly fruitful - "every drop brings a gold coin."



Enyovden (24th of June)

Midsummer, also known as St John's Day, is the period of time centered upon the summer solstice, and more specifically the Northern European celebrations that accompany the actual solstice or take place on a day between June 21 and June 25 and the preceding evening. The exact dates vary between different cultures. The Christian Church designated June 24 as the feast day of the early Christian martyr St John the Baptist, and the observance of St John's Day begins the evening before, known as St John's Eve. On Midsummer day Bulgarians celebrate the so-called Enyovden. On the same day the Eastern Orthodox church celebrates the day of John the Baptist and the rites and traditions of both holidays are often mixed. A fire-related ritual is also performed in Bulgaria on that day, it involves barefoot dance on smoldering embers and is called Nestinarstvo. Bulgarian folklore states the beginning of summer starts on Enyovden. It is thought that in the morning of Enyovden, when the sun rises, it “winks’ and “plays”. Anyone seeing the sunrise will be healthy throughout the year. It is believed that on Enyovden a variety of herbs have the greatest healing power, and that this is especially true at sunrise. Therefore, they have to be picked early in the morning before dawn. Women—sorceresses and enchantresses go to gather herbs by themselves to cure and make charms. The herbs gathered for the winter must be 77 and a half – for all diseases and for the nameless disease.



The cult of St. Marina (17th of July)

St. Marina is the patron of the town of Sozopol, which also celebrates the holiday. It is believed that the saint is the patron of water and protectress of the city. She wanted to receive the holy sacrament of baptism, but because of persecution, neither in the city, nor in the vicinity could she find a priest who would baptize her. Listening to her prayers to God to let her be baptized in water, her husband decided to drown her. He chained the young woman and threw her into a huge tub of water. She began to pray to God to loosen the chains and allow her to be baptized in the same water.

No sooner had she finished her prayer, than the chains broke and a bright light shone upon Marina. She was standing in the water singing praise to God. Eventually, the governor condemned her to death. In many churches and monasteries that bear her name, there are healing waters, whose forces are increasing on the 17th of July.



“Butterfly”/ Peperuda

"Butterfly" is the popular name of the most widespread custom for rain in the Bulgarian lands . The main participants are children and women whose actions are watched over by older women, usually widows. At the appointed day all the maidens gather at the home of an orphan girl. They prepare her, dressing her in an old shirt or covering her naked body with of elder, ivy, or beech foliage. In this custom the orphan is the butterfly.

According to local traditions, a butterfly can be the firstborn or the last born child in the family. It is believed that they can be beneficial on the will of the gods and patron saints of rain. There can be more than one butterfly in the group.

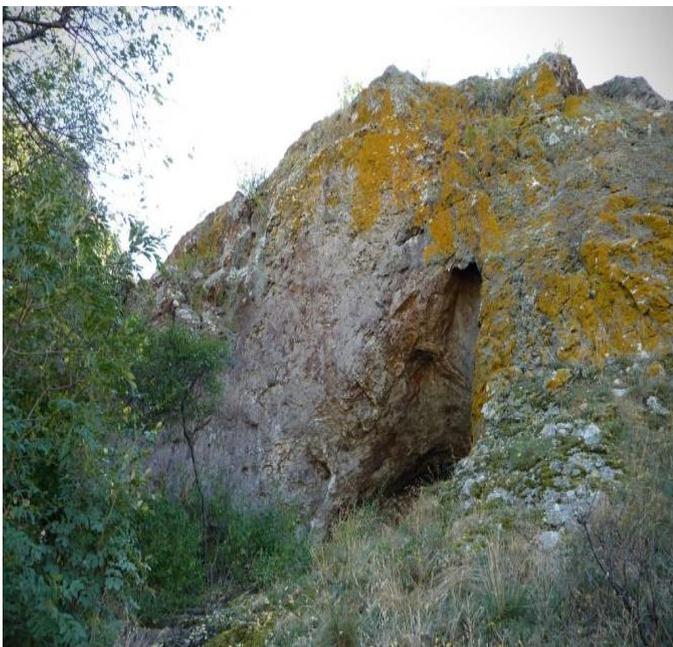
After the butterfly is dressed and adorned in greenery and flowers (in the lands of Thrace, it looks like a small moving bush or a green hive), the girls lead her with songs around the village. The group visits every home. The hostess greets them with a jug of water in her hands and waters the butterfly. She shakes the water drops waving her hands like a bird in its flight.

After the butterfly and its friends have visited all the wells, fountains and springs in the village area, they head to the river. There, they undress the butterfly, throwing her green clothing in the water. They splash in the water and wish it would rain soon. Then the girls sit around a table by the river.



The legend of Rusokastro

In the village Rusokastro, there is a legend about the girl Rusalia (Blonde). On St. George's day, Blond was snatched by the Dragon and taken into the cave at the medieval fortress of Rusokastro. The name of the legendary Blonde is not accidental. It is associated with ancient festivals called Rusalia. Today believe that the water dripping in the cave is curative. A few decades ago people used to sprinkle drops of this water on their clothes for health as it is still believed to have magical power. If used at night or before sunrise, this water can chase away diseases and restore health.



Quiz

1. Look at the picture and guess the custom:

a)



b)



c)



2. Epiphany is commemorated on 7 January.

a) True

b) False

3. On St. George's Day, people bathe in dew or in springs.

a) True

b) False

4. St. Marina is the patron saint of the town of Nessebar.

a) True

b) False

5. "Butterfly" is the popular name of the most widespread custom for rain in the Bulgarian lands .

a) True

b) False

6. In the village of Dryanovo, there is a legend about the girl Blonde.

a) True

b) False



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“Bulgarian traditional calendar”

