

May 6th

BULGARIA

SAINT GEORGE'S DAY GERGYOVDEN

GERGYOVDEN, OR Saint George's Day, is an important spring holiday accompanied with many different rites and rituals aimed at securing health, happiness and plenty. In the Christian calendar, St George is also considered to be the patron saint of shepherds and their flocks.

The preparations for St George's Day would begin early. The householders would get up at the crack of dawn, for the popular belief was that anyone who slept later on this day would be unsuccessful in his undertakings this year. This was the first day on which the sheep would be milked in the year, so the housewife would walk around the sheep-pen three times with a freshly baked loaf in his hands. Then the youngest matron of the family would enter the sheep-pen and roll the loaf into it. If the loaf fell on its face, it was taken to mean that the year would be successful and the sheep would be healthy throughout the year and yield plenty of milk.



Then the master of the house would choose the sheep for the St George's milking. It would have to be the first one to have bred the previous year and be a white sheep, so that the milk would be white this year. The first milking would be done by the youngest matron, who would wear her bridal clothes for this purpose. They were believed to promote fertility and health among the animals. Then with a rose- twig the milk would be splashed on the remaining sheep of the flock. Then the milk would be boiled on a fire kindled with a bird's nest, and the first to drink from it would be a young maiden, so that more lambs would be born during the year. When the sheep were herded out the pen would be cleaned to keep the good harvest in the house. On the door of the sheep-pen the mistress of the house would inscribe a circle of tar and sprinkle millet on it. This was to protect the animals from disease.

Then at the height of the festivities, came the time for the ritual slaughter of the first lamb in the flock. It would be slaughtered by the oldest person in the family, beside a fruit-tree or a rose-bush.

Bulgaria is a country which carefully guards its traditions. Saint George's Day is also the Day of Bulgarian Army and this makes it a very popular holiday largely celebrated in Bulgaria, full of vitality.