



Ritual bread and traditions in Bulgaria



What is the way of bread?

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Preparing the ground for sowing. It can be done during the autumn or during the spring - it depends on us.





During the autumn the seed takes root in the ground and while it's hidden under the snow cover it grows little by little ; on spring it penetrates the ground and it starts growing as a plant.



Harvesting is done with a tool called “reaping hook”, as shown in the picture below. It is as sharp as a knife. That way the wheat is gathered.



The gathered stems are put into sheaves.



After that it is time for the wheat to be milled in the flour mill so that the flour is produced, which we are going to use for cooking the bread.



In Bulgaria, the big family meals and get-togethers occur on Christmas Eve. The menus are generally comprised of an odd number of meatless dishes and include Koledna Pitka, a beautifully designed honey bread with a surprise inside. Traditionally, a coin is baked into the bread. Whoever finds the coin will be the breadwinner in the next year.



In the evening, when the whole family comes together, the oldest member of the household censes the entire home and dinner. Then the head of the family breaks the festive bread. The first piece is left aside for the Holy Virgin. The rest is divided between family members, starting with the oldest and finishing with the youngest.







The “bread and salt ”or “ Welcome bread “ tradition is probably one of the most famous Bulgarian traditions among foreigners. This is a ritual that is performed when a new person is welcomed – a woman bakes a loaf of bread and offers a piece of it to the newcomer together with a pinch of salt (and, sometimes, honey). This ritual usually takes place at the threshold – another symbolically-saturated element. The meaning of this ritual is the acceptance of the outside person as a part of the family – one of the greatest signs of hospitality a foreigner can witness in Bulgaria!



The first Saturday of the Easter Lent, the East Orthodox calendar celebrates Todorovden (St. Theodore's Day) – the feast is also popular by the names of “Tudoritsa” or “Horse Easter”. As the tradition requires, early in the morning, before sunrise the women make rite bread in the shape of a horse or a horseshoe and decorate them with walnuts, garlic and salt. Every housewife visits her neighbors and gives them from the bread she has baked and while she does so she hops runs and imitates the movements and whinnying of the horses. Her ambition is to be first.



The ritual bread is part and parcel of Easter celebrations. In Bulgaria it is called “kozunak”. That is a type of sweet bread, with milk and plenty of eggs, to meet the need for abundance on the table after the period of fasting. The kozunak appeared in Bulgaria in the end of the 19th century. It is believed it was brought to Bulgaria by Hungarian immigrants. The name was borrowed from Romanian, where it means “pastry with grapes”, and the Romanian “cozonac” was borrowed from Greek: there, the word “kuzunaki” means “bell”, referring to the shape of the ritual bread at that time.



Our traditions are alive and we keep them !