

Smingus Dyngus - Polish Easter tradition

Zmingus Dyngus (an Easter Monday tradition which exists to this day).

Every Polish person remembers those Easter Mondays when they would lie in bed and their friends or family poured water on them. The greatest victory was catching someone in bed, unconsciously awaiting their watery surprise! But another great part of the day was going to church or visiting relatives – getting together in groups with buckets and water pistols, making sure that no one missed out on a soaking!

Those who got thoroughly drenched were those who would be blessed with good fortune. They would be cleansed of all evils and illnesses.

Smingus Dyngus was first mentioned in the 15th century. Back then there were two separate customs: during ‘[mingus’ men would pour water on the women and beat their bare legs. During ‘dyngus’, on the other hand, people would go round asking for donations. During the ‘dyngus’ tradition all whippings were banned.

The tradition of pouring water on people on Easter Monday is a custom which now appears in all Slavonic cultures. Smingus Dyngus is known by a number of different names in different regions. According to ethnographers the pagans used to have similar celebrations to mark the beginning of spring. The pagans believed that water was a magical, purifying force. The pouring of water is also reminiscent of the collective baptism of the Polish people and, later, the Lithuanian people. During the reign of King WBadysBaw JagieBBo, the church forbade the exchanging of eggs and other Easter gifts. People were also banned from gathering around wells and ponds as it was decided that they were overusing them for their water-pouring games. Back in those days the boys would pour water on the girls and they would often decide beforehand how much of their bucket of water should be poured on each girl. The number of bucketloads of water that were poured on a girl were a good indication of her popularity. Therefore if a girl had not had a proper soaking it was a cause for great sadness. There were even occasions when a girl’s parents would take offence and refuse to give any donations: “Our daughter hasn’t been drenched, so you can jolly well move along”, they would say to the boys collecting for ‘dyngus’.

translated by Sonia Clough