

LOVE CELEBRATED

While Valentine's Day focuses more to people and the various ways they find to express love, the Romanian Dragobete is strongly connected to nature. Celebrated on February 24th, it is linked to that special time of year when birds build their nests and mate. As the first signs of spring show, nature and man restart the cycle of life and love, so what better reason to celebrate, sing and kiss girls?



Dragobete, also named Dragomir, is the local counterpart of Cupid; a positive character, a symbol of pure love, completely opposite to his mother, Dochia, who is said to have been a very cruel woman and a very harsh mother in law. Legend has it that Dochia sent her daughter-in-law to pick berries in the middle of winter, and when the girl returns with the fruit, the old woman believes spring has come. She then goes up the mountain wearing twelve lambskin coats which she gradually loses along the way. The story has two versions here: they either get wet because of the rain or she throws them as it was very warm. Both Dochia and her son, Dragobete freeze to death on the mountain. Another legend version says Dochia was a proud woman, teasing the month of March who then gets even by taking a few days from February. Other stories are of Dochia, sister of Decebal, who runs away in the mountains to seek refuge from the Roman Emperor Trajan. She disguises herself as a shepherd, but loses her lambskin and freezes. She is then metamorphosed into a stream and her sheep are turned into flowers. Regardless of its origin, the myth of Dragobete speaks of pristine love, of nature's rituals translated into people's life, of new life cycles and rebirth.



According to the Romanian common belief, those who took part in the Dragobete festivities were protected against any sickness all year long.

So: early in the morning, dressed up in their Sunday best, young people used to meet in the center of the village or in front of the church. If the weather was good, they would go singing in small groups to the forest, to look for snowdrops or other spring flowers, and if the weather was bad, they would gather at one's place to play games and tell stories.

In ancient times, young people used to make symbolical engagements on this day, sometimes followed by real engagements. They would gather around fires in the forest and talk. The girls would pick up all sorts of plans that were thought to have miraculous powers, in order to perform special rituals for love magic. Young girls would collect the fresh snow they could find on this day and turn it into water. This was considered to be a magic love potion, which girls would use throughout the whole year. The entire village community attended, be they in love or not: afternoon was dedicated to a special party where everybody had to have some fun.

The ones refusing to participate were said to remain unmarried for the rest of the year. This was one of the village rituals where woman was in the center of all things. Another tradition goes that, if touched by a woman in that day, a severe man would turn soft and would behave well with all the nature's creatures. So Dragobete was a holiday of love, ripe with superstitions and special rituals. It was considered to bear luck for all activities and human actions, not only the small things, but also the big businesses. Farmers believed Dragobete could help them have a richer year. Even if he sometimes "punished" the disobedient ladies, Dragobete was seen as protector of love, bearing luck to young lovers and young people in general, like a true Romanian Cupid.