

## Celebrating the Ascension

**Folk piety also held that on the eve of Ascension**, all running streams and rivers would stand still for a second, receiving a miraculous healing power. Many people would bathe themselves in rivers and streams on this night. The children already sleeping were bathed the next morning with heated water to which herbs and plants had been added.

**The most famous of the variety of ways of casting lots** is the one that is called *vijagakhagh*. This is how it was done. Wednesday morning before Ascension Thursday, young girls would go to gather flowers from seven different homes. Then towards evening they would take a pail and go to seven households or to seven fountains to fill their pails with water. This ritual, called "stealing water," forbids any talking, looking back, or placing the water pails on the ground. The flowers or herbs would be added to the pail.

**Each person participating in the *vijagakhagh*** would place a personal belonging (nishan) -- such as a ring, bracelet, or necklace - into the pail. This pail was placed out in the open at night, under the stars, so that the stars would influence the nishans and grant their owners their hearts' desires.

**Throughout the night**, young girls would keep watch over the vijag pail, so that the young men of the neighborhood would not snatch it away. If the boys managed to do so, the girls would have to give a ransom to get the vijag pail back.

**After church on Ascension Thursday**, all the participants took the vijag pail and would go on a picnic, or gather in someone's backyard. One of the girls dressed up as a bride. Usually this girl would have to be the eldest daughter of a family. Vijag songs were sung and verses were recited. After each song or verse, the bride drew out of the pail one of the nishans. To whomever the object belonged, that song or verse would become her vijag or her lot.

### The Celebration of *Hampartsoom*

**A variety of popular games, contests, and circular group dances** were the ornaments of the feast of Hampartsoom. So it seems evident that while Hampartsoom takes place around the Ascension of Christ, the two have little other connection. We do not know what the pagan name of this feast was.

***Hampartsoom* was the gem of all the Armenian folk festivals**, as it was entirely dedicated to youth and generally to fertility. There were many ways of calling upon the magic of love and fertility. The foremost was collection of flowers to form a bouquet for each family. The largest of the clusters was placed in sacred water and given the name *Dzaghgamer*.\* In a container they occasionally placed husks of wheat that reminded one of the plant fits presented to the goddess Anahid.

***Dzaghgamer* and the sacred liquid** in the container were connected with the essence of water, Nar and Asdghig. This explains why women secretly bathed at night before daybreak on Thursday on the eve of the Hampartsoom so they would get pregnant. **Men who witnessed** the alleged embrace of stars on that night united with their wives so that they could conceive boys.

## Celebrating the Ascension

**During the same night, women and girls**, secretly withdrawing from the men, went around silently, gathering within a container sacred water and sand from seven fountains. These secret wanderings as well as the secret bathing were probably connected with those rituals of fertility that were intended to eliminate barrenness.

\* According to some scholars, Dzaghgamer symbolizes the virgin St. Barbara. Under the name Dzaghgamer we should understand the goddesses Asghig and Anahid. Barbara was substituted for them during the Christian period with the purpose to commit them to oblivion. A young girl was veiled on the day of the feast, and designated as "daughter-in-law," she determined the love life of young people by drawing lots thus symbolizing Asdghig and Anahid.