

PINPIRIN ETA FLORIAN VIDEO SCRIPT

Autumn does not revolve, like happens with other seasons, around a clear axis or major event: Saint John's Day or the summer solstice is the principal summer event, and in the winter, all festivities concentrate around the winter solstice or the coming of *Olentzero*. During the autumnal equinox, there are no significant celebrations.

This is a season when farming and shepherding chores acquire special importance. In the farm autumn is the time to collect the fruits yielded by the year's work. This seasonal abundance, far from leading to an interruption of the activity, brings about the hustle and bustle of flax manufacturing, maize husking and laying the groundwork to ensure the following year's harvest. In those places where the traditional way of life prevailed, autumn was believed to be the true start of the year, because a cycle came to an end and arrangements for the next started.

Saint Michael's Day is the main celebration of the season. In Arretxinaga, Markina, the festival is held in front of Saint Michael's remarkable hermitage. It is the only chance to enjoy the *ezpata-dantza* of Xemein. The names of the dancers that take part in this particular show are *Maisu zaharra* (Old master), *Ezpata nagusiak* (Main swordsmen) and *Ezpata txikiak* (Minor swordsmen). The dance is followed by *aurrekua* and *soka-dantza* performances in honour of all village girls and women.

We should give account of another beautiful dance performed on the same day, Saint Michael's Day, in Iurreta: *Dantzari-dantza* or the *ezpata-dantza* of Bizkaia. On the eve, in the evening, *Donielatxa*, a long eucalyptus or beech trunk is placed in the square. According to some experts, this custom was, at a time, observed on Saint John's Day and later postponed until autumn. Some others, in turn, believe that *Donielatxa* is originally a Saint Michael's Day ritual. Nowadays the dance, consisting of eight different movements, is executed after mass. Humboldt, the traveller, reported on the existence of this particular dance already between the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th.

Next we shall travel to Cortes to find about the local *Dance*. The dancers start their work in the morning, although the main performance takes place in the afternoon. *Dance* is a spectacle in which dance and *bertso* singing perfectly blend. There are four main characters: *Mayoral* (Head shepherd), *Rabadan* (Second shepherd), *Aingerua* (Angel) and *Deabrua* (Demon). In the end four movements are performed, two *paloteado* dances involving hitting of sticks and two *zinta-dantza* steps.

We have mentioned that autumn is harvest time. In the Errioxa region of Araba and in Nafarroa, grapes for wine production are collected at the end of September and in October. The machinery employed in winemaking has developed through the years, but the process remains unchanged. Years ago the

grapes were picked by hand into baskets, *konportak*, later into metal tanks and now the job is done by mechanical harvesters in some places. After the harvest the grapes used to be crushed by foot to release their juices and separate the stalks off the clusters; now mechanized methods are used for grape-stomping. The juices are passed into barrels or metal tanks to start fermentation and eventually become wine. Fermentation is a natural process, but nowadays chemical products help and ease the operation. At this point of the winemaking process an excess or a shortage of air could stop the juice from converting into wine. Once fermentation is over, around January or February, the wine is transferred into a clean barrel or another vessel in order to get rid of the lee or waste material. Filtration is the last step of the process; in the past wine was filtered through mesh fabric strainers, whereas now filter pads manufactured from earth are used.

In Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, cider replaces wine. Apple collection starts at the end of September and can last until November. The fruit should be picked when it is well ripe and with dry weather. Different varieties of apple are mixed in the right proportion (60% bitter apples, 30% sweet apples and 30% sour apples) so as to achieve good quality cider. The apples were collected, spread on the floor and left there for about eight days. This increased the amount of sugars in the fruit, and as a result, the apples yielded more juice. The cider making process is very similar to vinification.

The old saying claims: “Urrian, artoak burutzen eta enarak buztantzen” (The ear of the maize and the tail of the swallow grow in October). The maize is ripe and waiting in the fields to be harvested; the ears are collected and brought home to be husked, and the flour obtained will provide enough cornbread, *taloa*, and porridge, *morokila*, for the household and food for calves and pigs. Maize husking was communal work. Girls and boys from nearby farmhouses would meet after supper to husk the maize ears in turns: when the husking of a farm was finished, they would pass on to the next until the work of the entire neighbourhood was completed. They undertook the task working under lanterns or light bulbs and, of course, singing. Their songs dealt with the relationship between girls and boys, as could not be otherwise. The job was easy and straightforward: it consisted in removing the leafy outer covering of the maize ears and taking the cob filled baskets to the attic. As the ancient law established, for every ten baskets hauled to the attic, one was supposed to be taken to church. The boy who found a red cob had permission to kiss a girl. No wonder maize husking was far more popular with the youth than maize weeding! The husked maize was spread loose in the attic or stored in a deposit called *koltza* to be shelled and used as needed. The husks had several uses: animal feed, mattress filling or even cover for fishing bait.

The Basque word for November is *azaroa* or *hazila*, etymologically *hazi-aroa* or *hazi-hila*, the sowing season or sowing month. It is a relevant time in the world of agriculture and farming. Some of the grain, wheat, for instance, and flax in some areas, is sowed during this month. Flax used to be planted sometime between

September and November in most places to be harvested in the summer. After the harvest, in autumn, the flax processing pains and penalties started.

The old saying goes: “Linuaren atsekabeak, amaigabeak” (The fatigues of flax manufacturing are endless). Indeed, our women ancestors worked really hard and employed a wide range of tools to manufacture fibre out of the flax plant and later produce fabric. First, the skin of the flax stalks was removed and the straw separated from the fibre to later make thread. Flax processing disappeared at the beginning of the 20th century. Let us describe the process, even though briefly.

To start with, the flax was allowed to dry; the seeds were then scraped off with a toothed comb called *garrama*; next the plants were packed into bundles and retted (apparently the soaking flax gives off a foul odour). After the plants dried, the rotten skin was shed by beating the stalks with a wooden mallet. Breaking and scotching processes followed, whereby the stalks of flax loosened and became tender, and the wood and straw were detached from the filaments. The fibre was then pulled through a heckling comb or *txarrantxa*. All these jobs were done in autumn, and those left to be done were finished during the winter: the thread was spun and converted into yarn, wound, bleached in a tank by pouring hot water through an ash covered sheet, dried on green grass and curled up into balls. Flax processing up to this point was carried out in the farm; next the flaxen yarn was taken to the weaving workshop where fabric was manufactured.

There are curious sayings and beliefs about the women spinners. We shall mention two of them. Around midnight they had a supper popularly known as *sorgin-afaria* (witches' supper), and it was believed that if the spinner went to sleep before spinning all the flaxen thread in the spinning wheel, witches took it away: “Amaitu goruko hondakin hori, sorginak berorregaz dantzaz egin ez dagien!” (Spin up the remainder, otherwise the witches will dance with it).

In November, with the increase in the flow of rivers and streams, another trade acquired relevance: ironworks or water-powered forges. It was an occupation tough and important alike. Forges were the first iron manufacturing plants, equivalent to modern furnaces. There iron ore was smelted and refined into wrought iron. They emerged in the 14th century and their downturn started at the end of the 19th century. On the last Sunday of October, the owner of the forge invited all the villagers to a lavish meal, and at midnight the plant began to function. Work would not stop until the following Saturday at midnight. The forge kept operating from November till May.

Forges were dark, hot and noisy places. The work carried out there was truly hard. The workers ended up completely black; they only wore a hat or other means of restraining hair and white linen clothing. The forge worked day and night, so sleep was scarce. Workers enjoyed the little sleep they could on site, on dirty maize husk filled mattresses placed on the floor.

There were four workers: two smelters, a hammer man who laminated the iron and an assistant. The assistant's duty was to break down the iron ore with a hammer to the size of a walnut ready for the forge. The smelters were in charge

of the hearth, of lighting it and loading it with charcoal and iron ore. They melted the iron ore to turn it into iron. The lump of iron was removed from the hearth, thrown to the floor and placed under the trip hammer. The hammer man opened the water flow control valve to make the hammer and its head work and kept moving the bloom under the hammer until it acquired the shape of an iron bar. The trip hammer would hit the iron over a hundred times a minute! Each operation lasted from five to six hours since the hearth was filled until the iron bar was produced.

Plenty of charcoal was needed in a finery forge. Let us bear in mind that it took approximately 500 kilograms of charcoal and as much of ore to fill the hearth each time; hence the importance of charcoal making. During the 19th century, with the flourishing of the forges, the charcoal making craft developed until the 1960s, when both trades finally disappeared.

Charcoal making is the production of charcoal out of wood. To start with, the wood is collected; four kilograms of wood yield approximately just a kilogram of charcoal, so imagine! Second, the chimney or central shaft is erected. Then the logs of wood are piled around the chimney but not anyhow: the heaviest logs close to it and the finest branches further away until a five-to-six-metre-high pile is stacked. Next the whole pile is covered with branches, leaves or moss. The remains of a previously charred pile, *iduria*, are added on top. The coal pit is lit through the chimney, and the wood slowly carbonizes and becomes charcoal. The entire process took ten to fifteen days to be accomplished and on-site attendance was required. Charcoal making was a tough job; the collier or charcoal burner stayed in a wooden hut up in the mountain, always covered in soot and endlessly looking after the pit.

We have reached to 11 November, Saint Martin's day. Pig slaughter in Euskal Herria traditionally started on this day. The saying goes: "Asterik eta urterik onenak txerria hiltzeko astea eta ezkonduko urtea" (The best week and year are the pig-slaughter week and the weeding year). Pig slaughter certainly brought plentiful supply to the house: loins, bacon sides, black pudding, spicy sausages, hams...

Finally, and as a symbol of the abundance of autumn, we wish to mention the vegetable and livestock exhibitions: the fair celebrated in Gernika on the last Monday of October, Saint Andrew's, Saint Thomas'... Farmers put up for sale the fruits of their work. Nevertheless, payments have to be made too: for many tenants Saint Thomas' Day was the fixed day to pay the yearly rent to house owners.

We have come to the end of autumn. Nights are getting longer and days shorter. Christmas and the winter solstice which we opened the cycle of the year with will soon be back. And the complete cycle will repeat itself: Saint Agatha's festivity, Carnival, the rites of May, Saint John's Day... once and again till who knows when.