

Baba Marta & Bulgarian March holidays

Last fall, I went to visit the Madara Horseman with a fellow colleague at Shumen University, Irina. While walking up to the top of the plateau I noticed a red and white bracelet hanging from a tree. I asked Irina what it was doing there. She explained that in March people hang bracelets on trees. I really didn't understand what she was talking about.

In February, the grocery stores and street vendors here in Shumen started to proffer red and white bracelets and pins (as seen in the photo). I figured this was what Irina had spoken about. I consulted Wikipedia and learned a little about martenitsi and Baba Marta, but I still grasp who gave who bracelets, why folks tied them to trees, and the like. Thus, I asked my first year students at Shumen University to explain some of the March traditions and what these holidays meant to them.



Photo by Ralitsa



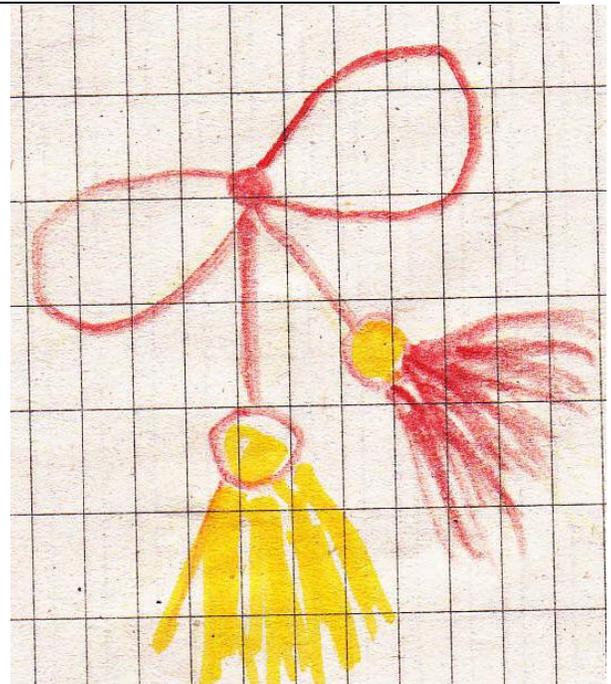
Students working on their responses in class

Here is a selection of the students' responses:

Baba Marta's Day is Bulgarian holiday, but isn't national or Christians holiday. It's a folkloric holiday. Baba Marta is "grandmother March" in Bulgarian. Baba Marta's Day is on the first of March, because it's the first day of March and grandmother is coming. The spring coming with her. --Tamara

Baba Marta is a personage of the Bulgarian folklore. Word for word "Baba Marta(Баба Марта)" means Grandma March. We connect this holiday with the coming of the spring. --Tsveti

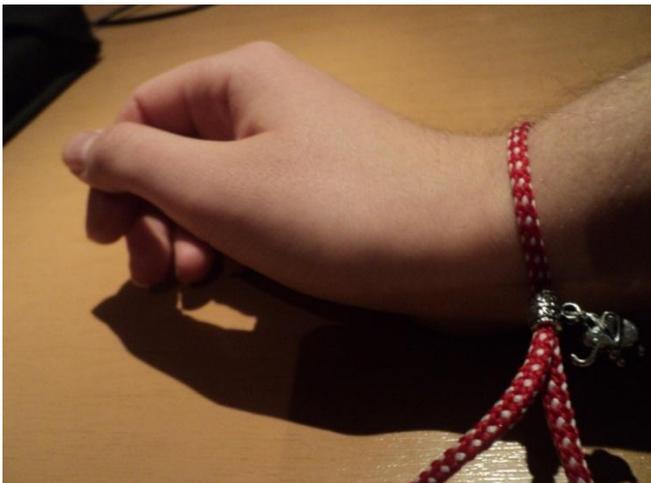
There are few legends about the holiday called "Baba Marta". According to one of them "Baba Marta" (Grandma March) had two brothers – January and February. And two husbands - young and beautiful husband, and old and ugly husband. When she saw the beautiful husband - she smiled, but when she saw the ugly husband - she was angry. Because of that the people says that the weather during March is like her mood, sometimes sunny and smiled, sometimes cold and dark. – Tsveti



Drawing by Genoveva

The tradition ritual comes from the very old times. Baba Marta had two brothers who were very naughty. She loved them, but they often irritated her and made her angry. Marta is a myth well describing women's character—changeable and contrastive. Women give love and life but could often be just capricious and impulsive. They devote themselves to the ones they love (could be said adore), but easily get very angry and rude with the ones they do not agree with.--Lora

On 1st of March people give "martenitsa". It's made of white and red threads. It could wear as bracelet or necklace, or put on your clothes. When we give a "martenitsa", we say "Happy Baba Marta" and we wish to other people health and happiness. – Tsveti



Classic Martenitsa by Tsveti

Everyone on the 1st of March change and wearing of "martenitsa". It's red and white coloured wristbands or figurines, that symbolise health and happiness. We have a lot of kind of martenitsa, but popular and comfortable is bracelet.—Tamara

Baba Marta is a very joyful tradition in Bulgarian holiday calendar. It gives people health and happiness. Everybody gives “martenitza” of red and white color to the others. That’s how he wishes them a worthy-life. Baba Marta reminds people to think of the others’ destiny. It’s a symbol of the coming spring—sun, flowers, love, green and smiles. “Martenitza” protects people from “evil.”---Lora

People should wear a “martenitsa” until they see a stork. Then they should put it under a stone or put it on a tree.-Tsveti

Baba Marta’s Day is special to me because my favorite season is spring. I

like the all season, but I prefore the spring and the autumn because the weather is warm. I like spring because I like the smell of the blossom trees and grass clippings. The life seemed to be wake up. The birds are singing. I love in the spring to sit on bench in the park and enjoy the beautifil nature.—Tamara



Sezen & the martenitza tree in Shumen



Photo by Tamara

I remember when I was a child, we used to go to the village with my family and I always made lots of martenitsa with my sister and my grandma. Then we put them on our pets and domestic animals. It was so funny and interesting. —Nuray

I like this holiday because it reminds me of my personality and help me get out of the daily life and thoughts and makes me concentrate on the meaningful side of living. Life is so beautiful and it’s possible for most people to smile. Spring is coming, freeing the hearts. Often I’m the first to give “martenitza” to unknown people which makes them so happy. Small gestures could unveil goodness in people. Every day could be a holiday if you let it be!—Lora

We Bulgarians like the holiday "Baba Marta," but there is another holiday in this month which is more special to us. On March 3rd we celebrate the national liberation day of our country. We honour those who have died for the freedom of Bulgaria and we put flowers on their monuments. We do this in every town. Usually the celebration begins with a festive church service. On this day most of the Bulgarians go to the freedom monument "Shipka" on Skipka Pass. It is one of the most incredible places I've ever been. I've been there twice and I'd love to go again. It's a truly amazing place. --Diana

On March 3rd Bulgaria had a big national holiday. This year almost all of Bulgarian people were outside. It was Sunday and day of the protest. It was so beautiful! Everybody had a flag (Bulgarian), and people in Varna wrote "BULGARIA" on the road in front of the community (municipality). I told you that we have problems with the government and people are trying to change something. Unfortunately nothing has changed for now.--Ralitsa

A couple of days it was "Proshka" day (Forgiveness). You have to ask people to forgive you and inverse. This is all I know about month March and evil Baba Marta. Today the weather was really hot and now (5PM) it's freezing, but this is Baba Marta, she is deciding what to be weather. That's why I think she is evil. -Ralitsa



The month of March is very special for us Bulgarian because it is Baba Marta when the winter is over and the spring comes. But that's not everything. On this month we celebrate the 3rd of March, our national holiday, something like the 4th of July where everybody is singing patriotic songs, drinking rakia and dancing. Here in Bulgaria we really love our holidays and I think that's because we really like to drink rakia. It's a fact that we Bulgarians are drinking a lot! This may be one of my favorite holidays at the year and that's because I hate winter and I love spring and summer and I love to have moments with my family and friends, but mostly because

I'm really proud with myself being Bulgarian. --Filip

Filip & his family celebrating on March 3rd