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Hampartsoum
Zulal's Favorite Armenian Holiday

Our favorite holiday is definitely Hampartsoum, Ascension Day, because on it, young girls perform the *vijag*, a wonderful fortune-telling ritual for which we have sung a couple of songs.

Hampartsoum is a day on which it is believed that the seams of the universe loosen and therefore destinies can be told. Unmarried girls in the village collect water from seven springs, (never looking behind them as they gather the water), and pour all the water into a jug in which they also place seven stones. Whoever wants her fortune told puts an object belonging to her into the pot of water. A simple doll dressed as a bride and decorated with pearls and gold, the *vijag*, is mounted over the vessel, and both are placed under the moonlight for the night so that the stars, or the fates, can act upon the water, writing the girls' fortunes onto the objects within it. The girls have to guard the *vijag* and the vessel of water all night to protect it from boys who try to steal it.

In the morning, the girls gather around a fountain or near a stream, which they decorate with flowers, and they place the *vijag* in it. The oldest girl removes the *vijag*, kisses it, and passes it around, each girl kissing it as well. Then they give the *vijag* to a seven-year-old girl who herself becomes the symbolic "bride", replacing the *vijag*. The young girl, holding the *vijag*, is covered, and the whole group sings *vijag* songs. After each song, the seven-year-old pulls an object out of the vessel. The song that has just been sung tells the fortune of the girl whose object has just been plucked from the water. The most desired fortune is one that hints at a gold ring...