

Zorica Rajković

"BUTCHERING BEEF"
(On a delicate nuptial custom)

Summary

The article discusses a modern nuptial custom in the village of Lobar, in Croatian Zagorje. It is difficult to establish whether the custom was known and practiced in the past. Ethnological literature does not mention it, and it is not included in a description of nuptial customs from the same village written at the beginning of the century (Kotarski 1915, 1917, 1918). The beef butchering goes on at night, when the newlyweds retire: a group of boys on a hill above the village imitate the butchering and preparation (chopping up into pieces) of a steer (calf). Shouting, they discuss who will get each cut of the imaginary meat among their neighbors, and they pretend that they are chopping off the pieces while instead they hit a tree; in the silence of the night the entire village can hear their revels. The principle of dividing up the "meat" is that the parts of the animal allude to a certain quality or fault in the person or family they refer to, or an allusion to some event related to that person (for example they will save the hooves for a bow-legged woman, a woman chaser will get the rump, and an old bachelor will get the balls). The comments and allusions heard in this sound performance ought to be light and witty, with the objective of entertaining those who listen, they might "tease" those they refer to, but shouldn't insult them. However the custom can be quite unpleasant for those referred to and their families, and the commentary is often insulting.

In relation to this custom, there are several ethnologically relevant questions to pose:

