

## Perchta, the Perchten and the Krampus



Of course you know Halloween with its creepy customs. In the past, however, there were also customs around the winter solstice and ghosts with creepy factor!

Maybe you've heard of the Rauhnächten? These are the days and nights between midwinter and New Year, roughly speaking.



In Austria, Bavaria, the Czech Republic and Slovenia, the Perchten appear on the scene during this time. Of these, there are good ones and bad ones. They wear scary masks with animal skulls and make a lot of noise with bells to drive away winter. In the post-Christmas period there are the Perchtenläufe in Austria and Bavaria, which are big parades.

Sometimes you can also meet Frau Perchta or Berta. Like Frau Holle, this is a variant of the Nordic goddess Frigga and has similar functions to Frau Holle. The fact that the two don't get in each other's way is because they work in different regions, one in southern Germany, the other in central Germany.

But there are a few differences. Frau Perchta tends wells and lakes for the souls of children who have not yet been born, and she makes sure that the grain grows. She rewards the industrious and punishes the lazy. She can be quite brutal: she sends them nightmares, or chops open their bellies, fills them with stones and then sinks them in the well (Little greeting from Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf). Her breath can be deadly!

She is depicted as an old woman with crippled foot, big nose and iron axe. One guess is that she was originally once a bird goddess. Hence the big nose.

The Krampus is something like the brother of the Knecht Ruprecht. Like Frau Perchta, he is at home in southern Germany and Austria as far as the Balkans. Funnily enough, he has gained a lot of popularity in the USA. There, some cities also have a Krampuslauf! When he's not accompanying St. Nicholas, he's usually out with several other Krampuses. He wears a suit of fur, has horns and a cow tail. Unlike the Perchten, he belongs to the time BEFORE the winter solstice.



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