

Story 3: The story of Bibijaki



Story shared by: *Bratislav*

Representing: *a Roma and lives in Belgrade*

The Story:

One of the stories that is told among us is the story of Bibija. We are Orthodox Roma, and we recognize Bibija as a sort of family patron saint, similar to how Orthodox Christians celebrate their family patron saint (slava). Essentially, we celebrate her in the same way. However, she is not recognized by the church. Since Bibija's feast day is a moving holiday, meaning it's not always on the same date, when a priest comes to read the prayers, he prays for the saint who is recognized on that day. Therefore,



Bibija is generally not mentioned. We have an icon of her, which is painted, but again, the church does not recognize or acknowledge her as a protector or saint.

The story that is passed down among us is that Bibija was actually a woman who travelled the world, but in our context, she travelled through Serbia. She was an old woman, almost like a homeless person, and as she travelled, she sought shelter. In return, she helped the people who took her in and who helped her continue on her journey. Mostly, she protected their children and healed them.

There is a story about a man who had a sick child. Bibija came to him almost by accident. They hosted her and gave her food and a place to sleep. But she didn't sleep; she just sat quietly in a corner. The family was a little scared, wondering why she was so silent and why she didn't speak to anyone. In the morning, the woman simply disappeared, and no one knew when she left. The sick child suddenly began to feel much better, even started walking, and eventually fully recovered.

These are the kinds of stories about Bibija. Essentially, they are stories about an old woman who went from town to town, village to village, helping children. And this is the celebration we call the children's feast, the protector of children. Bibija is celebrated in different towns at different times precisely because there was a path she travelled. For example, in Arilje, she is celebrated at the end of February or the beginning of March, then a few days later in Požega, and after a few days in Čačak—roughly following the route she is believed to have taken.