

## DEUTSCHE SAGEN UND LEGENDEN

### Frau Perchta

**Perchta** or **Berchta** (English: **Bertha**), also commonly known as **Percht** and other variations, was once known as a goddess in Alpine paganism in the Upper German regions of the Alps. Her name may mean "the bright one" (Old High German *beraht*, *bereht*, from Proto-Germanic *\*brehtaz*) and is probably related to the name *Berchtentag*, meaning the feast of the Epiphany. Eugen Mogk provides an alternative etymology, attributing the origin of the name *Perchta* to the Old High German verb *pergan*, meaning "hidden" or "covered".<sup>[1]</sup>

Perchta is often identified as stemming from the same Germanic goddess as Holda and other female figures of German folklore (see Frijja-Frigg). According to Jacob Grimm and Lotte Motz, Perchta is Holda's southern cousin or equivalent, as they both share the role of "guardian of the beasts" and appear during the Twelve Days of Christmas, when they oversee spinning.<sup>[2][3]</sup> In some descriptions, Perchta has two forms; she may appear either as beautiful and white as snow like her name, or as elderly and haggard.

Grimm says Perchta or Berchta was known "precisely in those Upper German regions where Holda leaves off, in Swabia, in Alsace, in Switzerland, in Bavaria and Austria."<sup>[4]</sup>

According to Erika Timm, Perchta emerged from an amalgamation of Germanic and pre-Germanic, probably Celtic, traditions of the Alpine regions after the Migration Period in the Early Middle Ages.<sup>[5]</sup>



Peruehty in Kingdom of Bohemia. 1910

### Names of Perchta

Perchta had many different names depending on the era and region: Grimm listed the names *Perahta* and *Berchte* as the main names (in his heading), followed by *Berchta* and *Frau Berchta* in Old High German, as well as *Behrta* and *Frau Perchta*. In Baden, Swabia, Switzerland and Slovenian regions, she was often called *Frau Faste* (the lady of the Ember days) or Pehta or 'Kvaternica', in Slovene. Elsewhere she was known as *Posterli*, *Quatemberca* and *Fronfastenweiber*.<sup>[6]</sup>

In southern Austria, in Carinthia among the Slovenes, a male form of Perchta was known as *Quantembermann*, in German, or *Kvaternik*, in Slovene (the man of the four Ember days).<sup>[6]</sup> Grimm thought that her male counterpart or equivalent is *Berchtold*.<sup>[7]</sup>