

the Bangerznmäsch people

“Ah, yes,” Countess Barbara interrupts, “I well remember my own encounter with the infamous Bangerznmäsch people, not six months before the present time. As Lady Kathryn explains (and as, indeed, she has reported in her forthcoming seminal volume on the anthropology of the New World, which I have recently had the pleasure of reviewing, discovering only 116 small - albeit extremely important - errors therein)... as the Lady Kathryn explains, the Bangerznmäsch tribe is separated geographically by gender, men from women, boys from girls. Infant boys are allowed to stay with their mothers until the first festival (of which there are twelve each year, except in leap years, when there are only seven), at which time, the two camps meet in a great celebration in a camp in the dividing range or - as was the case with the tribe that I visited - on rafts in the middle of the dividing lake. The music and festivities carry on for a day and a night, and the infant boys are sent across to the men's camp, where they are fed on the milk of a goat until they are old enough to eat.” The Lady pauses in her account. “On reflection, this may explain the enormous gap in intellect between the two genders in this tribe: the men of the Bangerznmäsch are - as the Duke will no doubt have observed - even more dimwitted than the average gentleman (present company, of course, excluded) of our own race.” The Lady delicately drains her glass in a single swig, and calls for another before continuing.

“Now, as I was saying, not six months ago, having made my way overland from the true Indies to America via a hitherto unknown route through the jungle of Uzbekistan, I found myself accepting the hospitality of the Bangerznmäsch. Of course, I did not stay in one of the pickled potato huts of the menfolk, but in a three-bedroom, double-brick abode on the women's side of the lake.

“As to the nature of the Bangerzmasch tribe's meat, I cannot attest, except to say that it was very finely spiced, and often served with maize and boiled cabbage. I saw that there was considerable profit to be made if I could acquire the secret of their spices and bring it back to the chefs of our own fair isles. But what could I offer in exchange? All my luggage - except for a small portmanteau of personal possessions carried on the back of my Indian elephant, Ralph - had been lost; eaten by the nebbcredit of Bujal as I escaped through the hidden tunnels beneath the hills, burnt by the fierce sunlight of Haididi as my servants and I trekked across the desert under the cover of mirrored cloaks, or confiscated by the Sultan of Stanbul under his most unfair Sybarite Tax laws.

“Pondering my options, I stayed with the Bangerzmasch for three weeks, paying my board with stories and the histories of our own people (for the Bangerznmäsch women are always eager for new knowledge from a reliable source) and meanwhile trying to persuade them to let me into the kitchens to assist with the cooking (all the while hoping to gain the secret of their spices). This was not to be: the tribe is run according to a strict caste system, and only those born with short fingers and curled hair may aid the cooks.

“Finally, however, my luck took a turn for the better, as I had the fortune to be present for their Festival of Long Pointy Shoes with Bells On, the most significant autumn celebration in that part of the world. I discovered that the tribe holds an unsurpassed regard for good poetry, and yet had never encountered the concept of Rhyme. By bringing the possibility of rhyming poetry to their notice, they declared that I had more than paid for the secret of their spices, so they furnished me with a good supply thereof, and a stubby-fingered, curly-haired servant to accompany me on my further travels.

Lady Barbara smiled at the memory, then looked up at her audience. “Oh, do not let me interrupt, Duke Peter. You were [saying?](#)”

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