

## *The “Apalpador”*

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This peculiar custom which is called “The night of the apalpadoiro” consists in touching people’s stomachs on New Year’s Eve to check if they ate or didn’t eat during the entire year that is about to finish. Witnesses from different places in the mountains of Lugo refer to the same habit or rite, known in the Galician language as “apalpadoiro” or “apalpadoira” (the man or woman who touches), which takes place on New Year’s Eve

This rite consists in the touching of someone’s belly, especially that of children, in order to know if they ate enough during the year. Researcher José André Lopez González published in GZ-AGAL, a Galician Language Portal, an article entitled “The mythical Apalpador”, a character representative of the traditional Galician Christmas. In the article the author unveils some pieces of information from witnesses in the lands of Lóuzara, O Courel and O Cebreiro in the province of Lugo (north-eastern Galicia), information which had already been compiled in 1994. In the article the writer explains that the “Apalpador” is a “giant” that dwells in the “devesas” (the woods) who wears a beret and smokes a pipe and who feeds on wild boar. On December 31 he comes down the mountain and visits the children once they are asleep. Then he touches their bellies to check if they are full or if they are hungry. If the child has a full belly he says: “So you will be fine all throughout the year”, and leaves him a handful of chestnuts. If the child has an empty belly, he says nothing and leaves also a handful of chestnuts. Recently, in a program of the Galician radio there was another testimony from Miguel Losada who referred to the “Pandigueiro” character in the land of Trives (south-eastern Galicia). He came to the beds of children, who had to lie in bed on Christmas Eve with an empty stomach. Children were then supposed to ask the “Pandigueiro” for milk and chestnuts. Sometimes he would also give the children toys carved in wood.

It would be desirable to encourage further research on this character who used to touch the bellies of those children who were lucky enough to eat a lot at Christmas Eve or at New Year’s Eve.

