

CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS AND CAROLS IN GREECE



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Χριστουγεννιάτικο καράβι

CHRISTMAS BOAT

The traditional Greek boat is a tradition of the old times of Greece. An ancient custom of our maritime homeland together with carols, Christmas songs, sweets, gifts and liturgy in the church, the boat also marks the festive days of Christmas and New Year. However, it was also a kind of honor and welcome to the sailors, who were returning from their travels.

50 years ago, we met the boat in many Greek homes and in the hands of children singing carols. However, Chios, a primarily maritime island, continues to observe this ancient custom, paying tribute to its sailors and keeping our folk tradition



Τα κάλαντα

CAROLS

The carols are among the customs that are shared to this day. The lyrics of the carols narrate the historical events in myth. The carols mainly begin with a greeting, then announce the great Christian holiday that is coming and end with wishes. A characteristic point is the language in which these are sung, in the katharevousa, indicating their direct origin from Byzantine times.

The carolers wish health, joy, happiness, good fortune and a good harvest to those who visit. After the congratulatory song is heard, the children receive a tip. In the past, it was usually something edible (sweet, fruit, nut), now it is usually money.



Η βασιλόπιτα

THE KING PIE

King pie is a New Year's tradition. It is cut and eaten usually at dawn, as soon as the weather changes. The traditional vasilopita of Smyrna is a tsoureki, while in other regions of Greece it can be as thin as a biscuit or resemble a cake. It often contains spices, fruit or mastic that add flavor and aroma. The number of the new year is drawn on its surface, sometimes with sugar, sometimes with almonds or chocolate. Before baking, a coin is added to the mold, which is considered to bring luck for the new year.

It is likely that it comes from ancient Greece where it was an offering to the gods and was associated with agricultural production. There are several legends about the handing over of the coin, the main one mentions Basil the Great who wanted to return jewels and valuables to the people of Caesarea so he put them in small pies and distributed them to the world.



Το Χριστόψωμο

THE CHRISTMAS BREAD

Christ bread is generally called the bread (loaf) or roll that Greek housewives have prepared 2-3 days before Christmas especially for this great religious holiday. The only difference with the other common breads is its rich decoration with various embroidery (kentidia) or "plumidia" as they are called.

It is prepared like ordinary bread. It is usually round and has a dough cross or seal on its upper surface and is sprinkled with sesame seeds. In many places they also put in shelled walnuts, dried figs, raisins and almonds, with which they make various shapes.



Το σπάσιμο του ροδιού

THE BREAKING OF THE POMEGRANATE

During the Christmas and New Year holidays, customs and traditions related to luck are revived in our country, such as the breaking of the pomegranate. Symbols of good luck, longevity, but also protection from all evil, appear at this time in every corner of Greece to exorcise evil spirits and bring luck and health in the new year.

Usually, the master of the house, is entering with his right foot and breaks the pomegranate behind the front door with force, saying: "with health, happiness and joy the new year and as many seeds as the pomegranate has, so many pounds in our pocket throughout the year". The numerous, red pomegranate seeds scattered on the floor symbolize strength, fertility and good luck that will fill the house and are a sign of good footing for the start of the new year.



Τα φαγητά των Χριστουγέννων

CHRISTMAS FOODS

The 12 festive days between Christmas Eve and Epiphany have been associated with a myriad of local foods. Today in the big urban centers we know almost exclusively turkey. There are still parts of Greece that have combined the festive meat-eating with the consumption of the domestic pig: Pork, sausages, smoked steaks, apakia and syglina are some of the fine mezes that have survived through time.

Traditional Christmas foods throughout the country: Vegetable dumplings, Pork with celery or celeriac, Lalaggia - the delicious traditional pancakes of Mani - are known in various regions .Vegetable dumplings, Pork with celery or celeriac, Lalaggia - the delicious traditional pancakes of Mani - are known in various regions of Messinia and Laconia and are not missing from almost any religious celebration.



Lalaggia



Vegetable dumplings

Τα γλυκά των Χριστουγέννων

CHRISTMAS SWEETS

In our country, the tradition is always generous in food and sweets, and at Christmas especially the tablecloths are filled with honey, syrup and powdered sugar in addition. We have :Melomakarona, Kurabiedes, king pie and baklava. Each with its own flavor.

Melomakarona is probably the most popular Christmas sweets. In Asia Minor they were called palm trees and their shape resembled that of dates.

They are usually made from flour, semolina, orange juice and oil. They are then doused in honey syrup which in ancient times symbolized prosperity and was used in various cultures to propitiate demons. The use of olive oil makes them healthier than sweets containing butter, but their caloric value is just as high.



Τα γλυκά των Χριστουγέννων

CHRISTMAS SWEETS

Kouramiedes are also a dessert associated with Christmas. Their name in Turkish is "kurabiye" and means "dry biscuit". Their origin appears to be from the Middle East. They are traditionally eaten during the Christmas season throughout Greece, while in some regions they are also made on other occasions throughout the year.

They are made from butter, flour, sugar and almonds. Their high content of butter and sugar gives them a high caloric value, while nutritionally they do not offer anything special. After they are baked, the kourabiedes are sprinkled with a lot of powdered sugar which reminds of the snowy mountain peaks. Because of the butter and almonds they contain, they become particularly aromatic and tasty.



Τα γλυκά των Χριστουγέννων

CHRISTMAS SWEETS

Diples are Christmas sweets, but they are not only consumed at that time. In many regions of Greece they are offered at weddings and other celebrations. It is a traditional sweet of the Peloponnese and Crete, with slight variations in terms of ingredients and shape. Other Cretan names are Xerotigana or Avgokalamara.

They are made from eggs, flour and sugar. A thin layer is created from the dough which is fried and then poured with honey or sugar syrup. They are sprinkled with cinnamon and walnuts for more aroma and taste. Because of the frying, they have a high caloric value



Η ημέρα των Φώτων

THE DAY OF LIGHTS - THE EPIPHANY

In The Feast of Lights we celebrate the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan river and is considered one of the most important holidays in Greece, it is also the last of the Twelve Festive Days. The priest on the day of the feast throws the cross into the water (sea or a lake, river) and sanctifies their waters. Then young men dive into the water to catch him. Whoever manages to catch it first is considered to have a lot of luck in the new year.

The water into which the cross has fallen is considered holy (the service is called "the sanctification of the waters"). The priest often goes to houses and sanctifies them with this water to bring good luck.



Ο μύθος των Καλλικάντζαρων

THE GOBLIN MYTH

According to popular belief from Christmas Eve to Epiphany, the demons Goblins come out of the earth, who "all year long chop with their axes the pillars that support the earth". They tease people and mess up their homes because they are mischievous and like games.

They live in the Underworld and they are usually imagined as dwarfs, but also tall, dark-skinned, with short and unkempt hair, red eyes, monkey teeth.

Fire was considered the most effective means of keeping goblins and every other demon away. That is why the fireplace was always lit throughout the Twelve Days and even with thorned wood so that the fire would have more power.

