

CHRISTMAS TIME IN MINOR ASIA

Good afternoon lords and if it's your command the holy birth may I say in your house...

On Christmas Eve, children went from door to door and sang "kalanta" (traditional Christmas carols) carrying drums and metallic triangles to accompany their song as well as bells and lanterns hanging on a pole. Housewives used to give them money, fruit and "melomakarona" (Greek traditional honey flavoured cookies).

Older children used to sing the carols holding a handmade, paper or wooden, lighted ship (karavaki), which was about three metres long. The mast of the ship was decorated and had a Greek flag on its top. The cost of its preparation usually "demanded" a bigger tip.

Children finished singing with a wish: *we wish you a long life! We hope New Year will bring you joy and happiness!*

Days before Christmas housewives started doing the laundry and whitewashing their houses. They used to decorate ships.

The residents of Pontos used to decorate Christmas trees, using golden pine cones, golden candies, tangerines and cotton. They also prepared Virgin Mary's table with icons and Christmas sweets next to the Christmas tree.

The neighbourhoods were bustling with activity as housewives carried flat baking trays full of tasty Christmas dishes to the local bakeries' ovens.

Fine tin-glazed potteries, plates made of brass, shallow copper dishes, sugar, molasses, dates, honey, walnuts, chestnuts, almonds, fruits were laying down ready to "welcome" Christmas traditional sweets and pastries such as "saragli", "baklavas", "foinikia", "kourambies", "seker lokum", "kantaifi".

In many areas of Minor Asia, especially in Cappadocia, people began slaughtering domestic pigs, days before Christmas.

On Christmas day, they prepared pork marinated in bitter orange juice. Christmas meal began with boiled meat soup. Family, warm ambiance and unbreakable tradition was the setting for the Christmas meal.

Saint Basil is coming, and he does not dignify us, he comes from Caesarea...

On New Year's Eve children started singing New Year traditional carols.

In Smyrna, on New Year's Eve they used to decorate a table with dried fruit and sweets to treat Saint Basil when he would visit the house.

Housewives sprinkled the house with dried fruit and wished prosperity.

In the morning of the New Year's Day, the whole family went to church. The father took a pomegranate with him and kept it in his pocket during mass to get it blessed. When they returned, he smashed the pomegranate behind the front door of the house, said "Good morning" and wished "long life". The pomegranate had to be firm with crunchy seeds, because if it was rotten, something bad would happen

In Smyrna, they threw the pomegranate with force so that the seeds would spread all over the floor.

According to the custom of the first footing, the first person to cross the threshold of the house had to set his foot on a piece of iron.

The head of the household made the sign of the cross, cut the sign of cross three times on the cake and then cut as many slices as the numbers of the family. The first slice was for Jesus Christ, then for Virgin Mary, for Saint Basil, for the house, for the poor...

One of the most distinctive traditions was the coin in New Year's cake. The person that found the coin would be lucky and blessed for the rest of the year. Housewives left pieces of New Year's cake, with dried fruits and sweets next to the public water taps of the city for the passers by and the poor

people. After that, they came home silent, carrying some water in order to attract abundance in their houses.

For the New Year's dinner, housewives usually prepared rooster in tomato sauce, kebab with rice and dishes with rice, so that New Year would be full of happiness.

The Twelve Days of Christmas ended with Epiphany.

They called Epiphany "Photogenna" or "Phota Olophota" (bright lights), because the water is blessed and the world gets lighted.

The older people used to narrate stories about "kallikantzaroi" (the Greek version of goblins). They used to speak about those creatures who were singing, screaming and grizzling. Actually, they believed that if they didn't burn incense on Christmas Eve, these creatures would get in through the chimney to torture the family.

Fairy tales that sounded real and real life that was like a fairy tale.

Extract from Efi Gregoriadou's book.

ΕΦΗ ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΑΔΟΥ(2003) : ΕΔΕΣΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΟΝ ΣΜΥΡΝΗΣ, ΑΥΘΕΝΤΙΚΕΣ ΣΥΝΤΑΓΕΣ ΜΑΓΕΙΡΙΚΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΖΑΧΑΡΟΠΛΑΣΤΙΚΗΣ, ΕΘΙΜΑ ΚΑΙ ΠΑΡΑΔΟΣΕΙΣ ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΜΙΚΡΑ ΑΣΙΑ, εκδ. Κοχλίας

Translated into English by the students of Γ1 and Γ2 English classes.