

The National Herald

December 23, 2006

Merry Christmas
2006



The National Herald is once again honored to join you and your family for Christmas. In addition to the other contents in this issue, we have spotlighted two short and abridged stories written by Photios Kontoglou (1895–1965), a gifted and spiritual artist. These stories depict two unique celebrations of Christmas in Aivali, Asia Minor.

As the Christmas season draws near, many of us will be attending Orthodox churches and experiencing the spiritual power of Greek icons. Kontoglou was the foremost iconographer in Greece in the 20th century. He wrote extensively on the sacred art of iconography, in fact he is considered the man responsible for the revival of Byzantine iconography in the 1930's.

Kontoglou was born in 1895 in Aivali, Asia Minor. Together with his paintings and his writings, he published more than 3000 studies and articles, fighting for the eternal values of the Orthodoxy and the Greek Tradition. Although known primarily as an iconist and philosopher, Kontoglou was also nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature. He was awarded the Cross-of-the-Commander of the Phoenix and received the Distinction of Letters and Arts from the Academy of Athens in recognition of all his exceptional work.

We are also continuing our theme of Christmas past with a touching story, from the perspective of a Greek soldier, during the Albanian campaign of 1940-1941. Included in this insert is a lighthearted piece by Paul Papadeas about celebrating Christmas Greek style in North Carolina during the 1980's.

As for the story of Christmas present we leave it up to you, and from all of the staff of The National Herald we wish you "Χρόνια Πολλά."

Beverley MacDougall
Special Section Assistant Editor

**By Photios Kontoglou**

A rendering of Photios Kontoglou's short story by Costas and Helen Dedegikas

It was always cold on Christmas Eve. The wind felt like cold burning fire, but people were happy regardless and filled with good cheer. Night had fallen and the oil lit street lamps were burning. The stores in the market were bright with moonlight and well stocked with goods. People were coming and going, shopping, entering in one shop and leaving out the other. All the while greeting each other, chatting with smiles and joy.

The grand cafés were permeated with cigarette smoke. The Grand Silver Café was full of commotion - joyous commotion. There were two stoves and the windows were clouded with steam. Through them you could only see the shadows of the people. The customers had taken off their fur coats from the warmth of the cafe, privileged gentefolk and good people.

Now and then the doors would open and groups of children would enter singing carols. As one group left another entered. They would sing the carols from start to finish, and never off key, just like the voices of cantors. Not like today, singing only the first verse, and off key.

Across from the Grand Silver

Café there were some run down stores, shoe repair shops, rug stores and the like. Directly across from the café's large door there was a small coffee house, the poorest in the whole city, small as a mouse hole.

Although the Silver café was beaming with light and the windows were steaming from the heat, the little café was dark. The rickety lamp would brighten and dim as the cold air blew through the broken window. The wick was crooked and wrinkled like the face of the Café owner, old man Yiannakou, of Hatzzi.

The poor waiter, so that he wouldn't freeze, paced back and forth from bar to the door with his old coat thrown over his shoulder and to give courage to the customers. As he paced he would get the shivers and his teeth chattered as he pulled his old coat tighter and said "Oh! how warm our little café is."

Afterwards he would turn and point at the grand café, the chimneys belching smoke, and he would say "Die from the cold you old dog."

Outside the café people passed by hastily with smiles and joy; here and there you could hear the children singing carols in the shops.

As the time passed commotion on the street slowly died down. The shops were closing one by one. Only a few men remained in the barbershops getting shaved.

As the commotion ended in the market place, throughout the

were called "Yialika" because they were found in the "Yialo", in other words the shallow waters. The others were dock sweepers, one carried water and another coal. These, then, were the patrons.

The northerly wind entered the coffee house like a trumpet twisting and flickering the lamp hanging from the blackened ceiling. The old men were shivering and their hands trembled, they would place their hands over their cigarettes, as if to heat them.

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As the commotion ended in the market place, throughout the

neighborhoods young boys wandered with their lamps as they sang their carols from house to house. The house doors were open, happy gentlefolk there with their children welcoming the carolers and joining them in song like muezzins.

They would enter a house with joy and leave it with greater happiness. They would receive noble gratuities from the generous master of the house and sweets from the mistress, which they did not consume but saved for later in a basket until after the church service.

Those were courteous and urbane times. Now people have dried out, contemporary culture has made them empty vessels. Gone are those good years.

In those days things took place according to the old song. People fell asleep in their warm beds until woken by the sounds of bells from the twelve local churches. What sweat sounds made by those bells! (Not like those European, that sound like empty tin cans) Everyone dressed up in their best clothes and went to church. When the service was over they returned to their homes. The streets echoed with joyful voices. The doors of the houses were open and glittering. The tables were covered with white tablecloths and covered with all manner of food and drink one could imagine. Both rich and poor ate very well, because those well off always ensured that those less had plenty eat. And instead of singing at the table they would chant "Christ is born, be praised", "Today the Virgin is given birth to our Savior" and "Miracle, Strange and Inexplicable." Satisfied in body and soul, they went to bed blissfully and without a care like the sheep in the stable when Christ was born in Bethlehem in Judea.

Now, on same night, let us go to another land across the gulf raging from the blizzard, where one or two small lights flickered.

By the sea, on the edge of a hill, full of holly, there is a stable. This stable belongs to Yanni Vlogimenos. The sheep are quiet under their cloaks, and their bells can be heard, "ping-ping", as they grazed. Since the calves were being born, the shepherds would keep watch, and once one was born, they would quickly take it to the stable by the fire to keep it warm and alive. Outside, the ewes would bale for their young. The fire was blazing and the stable was like a hamun (Turkish bath).

In there were six or seven people

sat around the table. First, is the head shepherd, Yanni Vlogimenos, if you see him, you would think you are in the same stable where Christ was born. He is an old soul, innocent, with a black beard, like saint. His clothes were from the Far East, loose trousers with tied undergarments. His waistband has a leather sash with a pocket for pistols or knives, as well as tinder and steel for striking. The other shepherds dressed like Yanni, but only he had the shirt on, the others, since they had to care for the newborns, wore sheepskins, with the wool turned on the inside.

The others at the table are guests. One of them is Panagis Strigatos, smuggler, known for his bravery. He was hunting and the night found him at the stable. He

sweet and deep. He sang "Megali non, Psihi mou" with such melody that everyone was crying, even Yanni Vlogimenos. The stable was like a church, and one would believe that in there Christ was born. Outside the winter blazed and the straw roof was dismantling. Old Strigatos was sitting in the dark, lost in his thoughts, chewing on his moustache. He wore a cap made from fur, and although it was warm, he nestled his palms inside each opposite cuff.

For a moment, they stopped talking. Strigatos with his head lowered, looked at the dirt on the ground. He shook his head and opened his mouth and said:

"My friends, at least you celebrate His joy and you are good people. Where will my soul go, since I

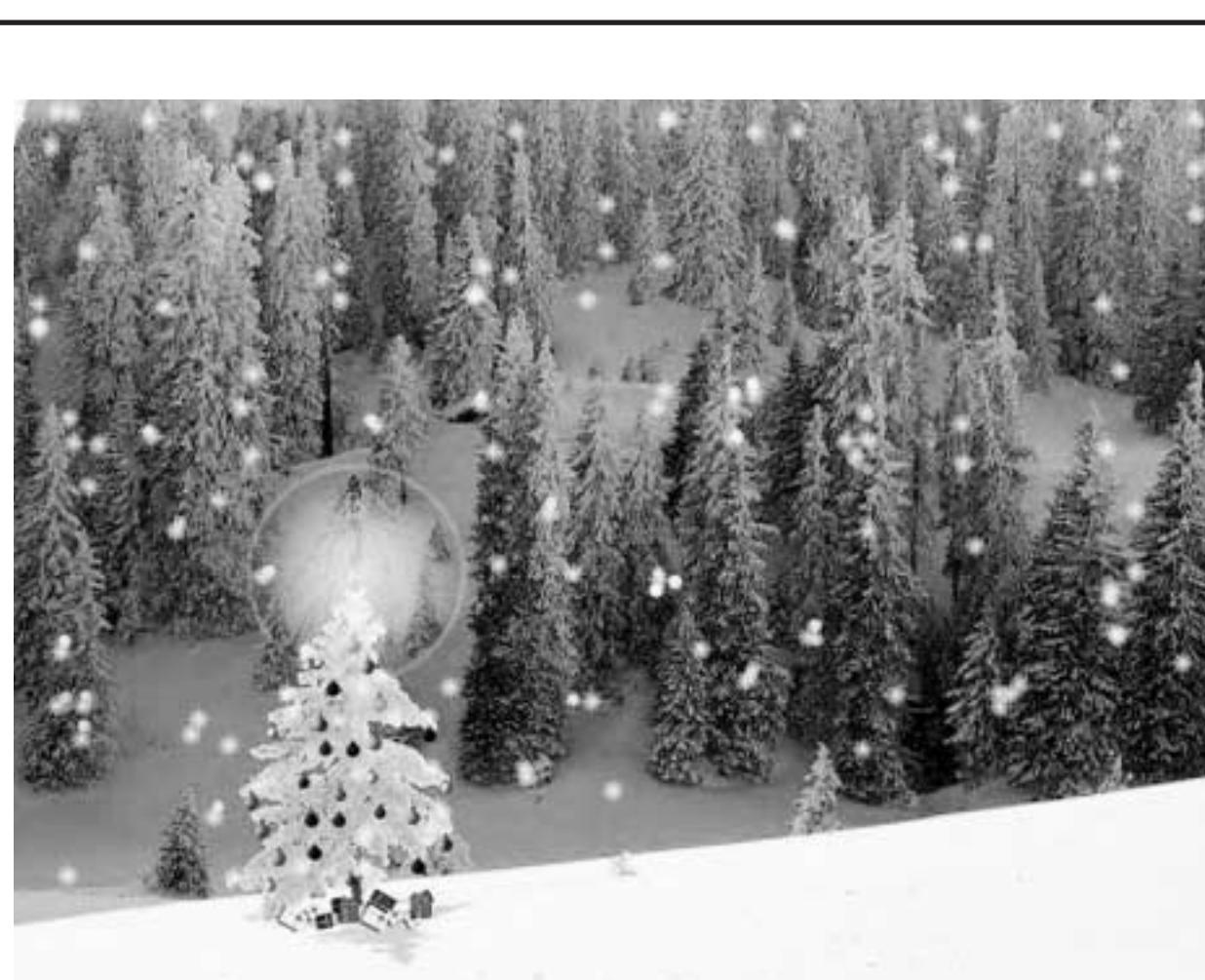


have killed a dozen or so people. I have even slain women and children."

No one spoke. After awhile, he shook his head again, exhaled, and said to no one in particular: "If heaven and hell exist?"

And he bit his moustache. He shook his head again and said under his breath, talking to himself: "It can't be. For sure something exists..."

And never spoke again.



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express their heartfelt appreciation for the Greek-American Community's
Support and encouragement over the years

And extend best wishes for a

**Blessed Christmas and
a New Year of Peace and Harmony**

— May the miracle of Christmas
be alive in your heart
this season and forevermore —



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*May the love and the blessings
of the incarnated Christ fill our hearts*



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JOHN and MARISA PAYIAVLAS

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*My best wishes
for Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year*



ΕΘΝΙΚΟΣ ΗΡΑΚΛΗΣ

THEODOROS KASSIMIS
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

Christmas in the Cave

A rendering of Photios Kontoglou's short story by Costas and Helen Dedegikas

Christmas Eve, Christmas and snow come together. But this year the weather was extraordinary. Snow did not fall. The atmosphere was angry, blowing a harsh northern wind with freezing rain accompanied by lightning. Within a week the weather became mild and the sea was so calm that you could travel; but by Christmas Eve the weather turned. From the morning the sky was black like lead and wet snow started to fall.

In a place named Skrofa by the side of the mountain, which overlooked the sea there was a corral with sheep. This spot was wild and barren with lots of beautiful evergreen bushes and red berries. The corral was enclosed by a primitive dry stonewall.

The shepherds were sitting in a cave set further up the side of the mountain. The cave was large and separated in three or four partitions with a height of three men.

The animals were resting under low harnesses so that one had to bend low to enter the cave. Piles of manure were scattered here and there giving off a strong sulphuric odor. However, the earthen floor was swept clean because the shepherds were good-spirited and they had the children sweep the cave often with brooms made of bushes.

The master shepherd was Yianni Barbakos, a half wild man who was born amongst the flocks of goats and sheep. He was dark and hairy with a beard as black as a crow and as curly as a ram's fleece. He was wearing breeches to the knee, a leather belt around his waste, a wide sash and heavy boots on his feet. His head was wrapped in a wide bandana like a turban, with lots of fringes - an ancient man! He had two "paragious" (young men who were a combination of apprentices and adopted sons) with him, Alexi and Odysseas, who were no more than 20 years of age. He also had three other boys who cleaned and tended the animals.

These six souls were living in that wild place all alone - hidden from God, seldom seeing another person.

The cave was covered in soot and the rock above it was blackened from the smoke that emanated from the mouth of the cave. Their beds were made from animal skins. The walls of the cave were lined with poles that sheltered their food, knives and guns. It almost seemed like it was a den of thieves.



Guarding the cave were their dogs, as wild as wolves.

The seashore was a cigarette's distance (the time it takes to smoke a cigarette) from the cave. The sea was calm and day and night you couldn't hear anything other than the crashing of the waves. Sometimes depending on the weather a ship would pass by, but other than that you wouldn't see a thing. From the corral you could barely see the mountains of Mytilini between the trees.

On Christmas Eve, as we stated before, the weather had turned for the worse and wet snow was falling. The shepherds started a large fire and gathered around chatting. The boys butchered two lambs and were skinning them for the meal. Alexis had fetched unsalted cheese from storage and some yogurt as well. Odysseas had pulled out an old Church book and because he could read a little as well as the fact that he had limited knowledge of hymns, he read from the Christmas Eve vespers.

At about the time for vespers they heard a rifle shot in the woods. They assumed it was some hunters. All the dogs started barking loudly and leaped out of the corral. Earlier one of the boys, while bringing fire-

wood on his donkey, had heard gunshots in the morning coming from the water towards Hagia Paraskevi.

Within a short time, two men with rifles appeared above the cave shouting at the shepherds to round up their dogs that were surrounding them. Skouris, one of the guard dogs, turned his attention from the hunters to one of their hounds and attacked it. One hunter shot at the dog, hurting it with buckshot forcing it along with the other dogs to retreat. Barbakos, the master shepherd, then appeared with the other shepherds and tied down Skouris and chased away the other dogs.

"Good Afternoon!" shouted Panagis Kardamitsas wrapped up in his cartridges and carrying a bag of game (birds he hunted).

The other hunter with him was his son Dimitrios.

"Welcome. Welcome." Exclaimed Barbakos and his party.

They then led the hunters into the cave.

"My God, what is this place? A Palace! A palace with princes." Exclaimed Panagis, pointing at the cheeses that had been prepared for dinner.

They asked the hunters to sit down and prepared coffee. The

hunters, in turn, offered the shepherds brandy.

"My brother", exclaimed Panagis, "who would think that we would celebrate Christmas in the cave where Christ was born! Just yesterday we passed Hagia Paraskevi to hunt a little. We figured we could sleep at the monastery, but due to the bad weather we couldn't get there with old man Manolis' boat. So here we are at your palace. What a dog you have! What a beast! Look what he did to my hound!"

Then he turned to the corner of the cave where his dog was lying, still shivering from fear.

"Come here Flox! Flox! Flox!"

Flox however was still afraid and receded further back.

After a little too much drink, Panagis started to sing in a mellow tone.

Later Odysseas started to sing the hymn "Christ is born, rejoice".

At that point they started to hear the dogs begin to howl again.

They sent the young boys to see what was happening. Outside it was unbearably cold with frozen rain.

The dogs stopped barking as the boys had reentered the cave with more company. They were three

men who looked like sailors accompanied by a couple of monks. They were drenched and shivered with the cold. The shepherds welcomed the men and asked them to sit.

As soon as the first guest, the captain, approached the light of the fire, Barbakos recognized him and joyfully greeted him. It was Captain Konstantis Bilektsis who was making his way to Constantinople. He had visited the cave in Scrofa before and they had become good friends. The other two were part of the ship's crew.

One of the monks, a handsome man with a black beard, was Father Sylvestros Koukoutsos. The monk was very thin with little hair on his beard like Saint John the Kalivitsi. His name was Arsenio Sgouri.

Captain Konstantis had come from Constantinople and brought along Father Sylvestros, who was visiting the city. He was from Mount Athos and he had wished to return home to celebrate Christmas. Father Arsenios, a Thessalian, was traveling with Father Sylvestros from the Monastery of Pantokratorous to Mount Athos.

They were traveling just fine until they had reached the Cape of Baba when the weather took a turn for the worse. The sky went black and the seas became violent making the journey back to their homeland to celebrate Christmas impossible. So the captain decided to set anchor where it was safe and he then remembered Barbakos's cave. Thus he, his crew and passengers made their way to the cave.

As they approached they saw Panagis with Dimitro (his son) and joyful communion ensued.

"Look" said Panagis, "we are just singing the hymn of Jesus' birth and right when we were talking about the Three Kings bearing gifts, you three wise men arrived with gifts because I see wine, caviar, breads and sweets (baklavades). Myrrh, gold and Frankincense"

"Ha, Ha, Ha", Panagis was laughing hard, drunk and slurring his words, he was rubbing his stomach as he liked to eat well.

At that time Father Arsenios Sgouri came alive, smiling and rubbing his hands he said "Thank Jesus Christ who saved us from the violent waves!" as he did the sign of the cross.

Father Silvestros then asked everyone to stand up and pray: "Christ is born".

Then they sat to eat. Such a table so blessed and lively had never existed in any palace. They sang and chatted. Their table even had bird's milk, well done lamb, cheese,

foods from Constantinople and other wild game, even wine.

Outside snow was blowing, and the trees and sea were moaning in the wind. In the cave, between the whistling and moaning wind you could hear the bells of the animals ringing in the distance. The cave was emanating a red glow from the flames of the fire and echoing with the singing and happy chattering. Panagis dozed off from time to time and when awoken by his own snoring he again took part in the singing.

Truly the scene of the nativity scene was complete. The cave, the shepherds, the wise men with presents and even Jesus himself with his two students, who blessed the food and wine.

**Photios
Kontoglou
(1895 – 1965)**

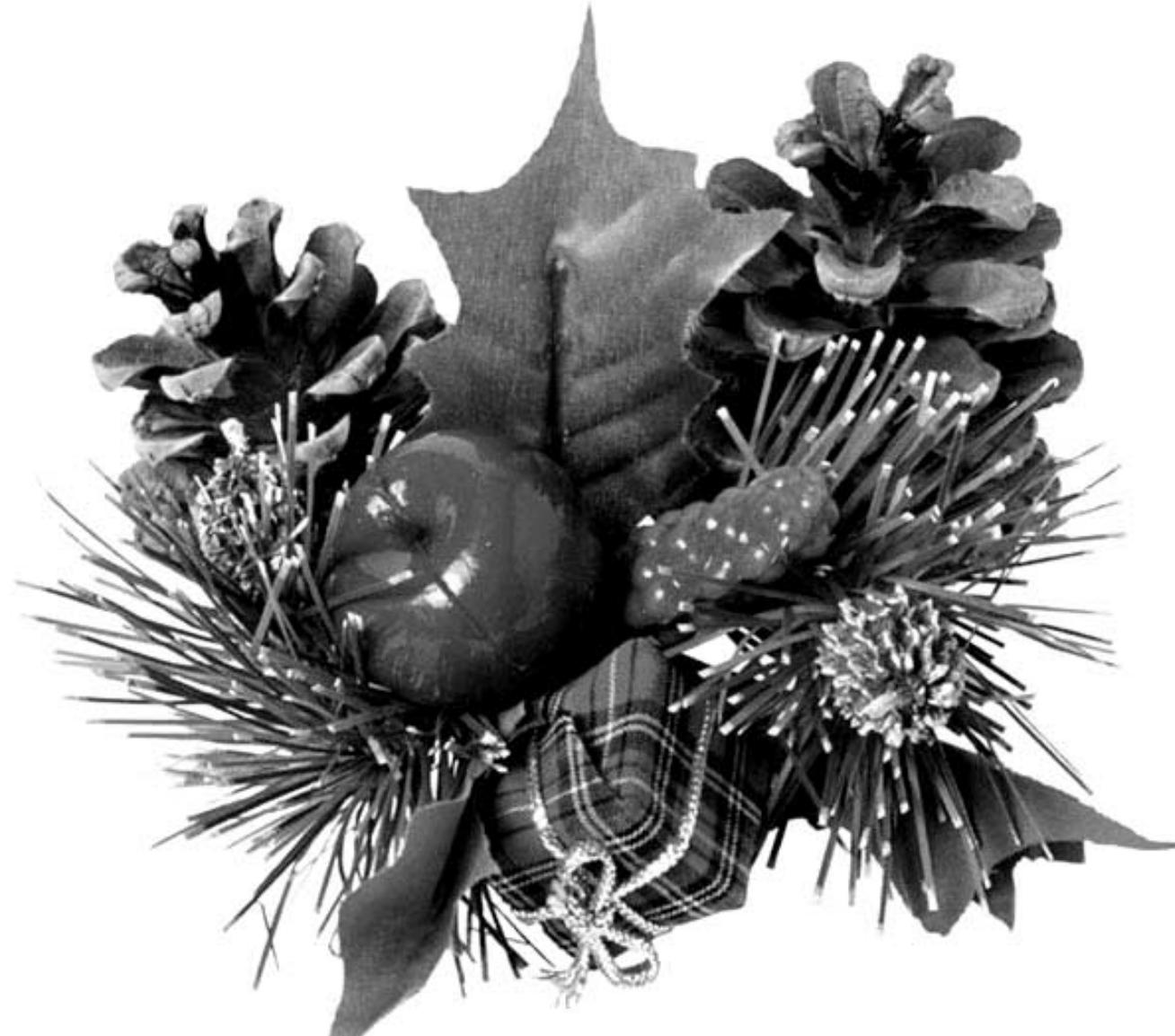
As the Christmas season draws near, many of us will be attending Orthodox churches and experiencing the spiritual power of Greek icons. The foremost iconographer in Greece in the 20th century was Photios Kontoglou. He wrote extensively about the sacred art of iconography, in fact he is considered the man responsible for the revival of Byzantine iconography.

Kontoglou was born in 1895 in Aivali, Asia Minor. Together with his paintings and his writings, he published more than 3000 studies and articles, fighting for the eternal values of the Orthodoxy and the Greek Tradition. Although known primarily as an ironist and philosopher, Kontoglou was also nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature. He was awarded the Cross-of-the-Commander of the Phoenix and received the Distinction of Letters and Arts from the Academy of Athens in recognition of all his exceptional work.

The National Herald has selected two stories written by this gifted and spiritual artist that reflect different celebrations of Christmas in Aivali, Asia Minor as a way of enhancing your Christmas experience.

NH

Merry Christmas



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με Υγεία*

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the Greek American Community

Law Offices of
Barbara H. Katsos, P.C.

777 Third Avenue, Suite 3200
New York, New York 10017

Tel: (212) 421-0307 • Fax: (212) 838-5026

E-mail: bhkesq@aol.com
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Merry Christmas
&
a Happy New Year



ΕΘΝΙΚΟΣ ΚΗΠΥΞ

KULAKIS & CHRISTOFORATOS, ESQS.

Attorneys and Counselors at Law

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wish everyone
a Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year

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Room 318A, Statehouse
District #33
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Res. (401) 397-2720, Bus. (401) 397-3344
Fax: (401) 397-6302
Statehouse (401) 222-4200
E-Mail: senraptakis@hotmail.com

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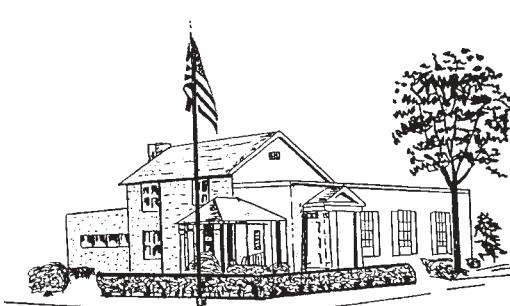
wishes
to the readers of
«The National Herald»

**Happy Holidays
and a Peaceful New Year!**

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Best Wishes for
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Happy and
Prosperous New Year



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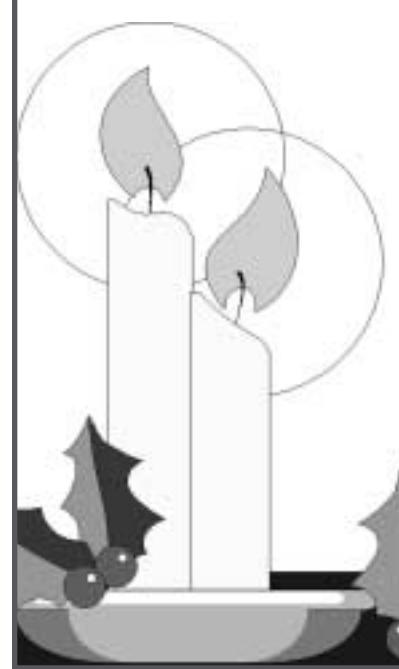
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The origins of Santa Claus

Edited by Adrian O'Sullivan

How on earth did North Americans end up with the mythical, gift-giving, obese boreal elf called Santa Claus? Well, it's a very long story, and it can be traced all the way back to early Christians in the Roman Empire.

COMMERCIALIZED SANTA

Clad in ermine-trimmed scarlet and often associated with toy-manufacturing elves, individually named reindeer, and jingling sleigh bells, our jocular Santa first shows up (any time after Thanksgiving) at social gatherings and shopping malls. There he miraculously appears, with god-like omnipresence, simultaneously in many different locations, taking orders for gifts from disingenuous tots, which he promises to fill on Christmas Eve ... if the toddler has been a good little girl/boy.

Then, on the evening of 24 December, our merry Santa takes flight on an implausible odyssey, careening through the night sky, crash-landing on suburban rooftops, miraculously squeezing his corpulent rotundity down furnace exhaust-pipes even narrower than nineteenth-century chimney pots, to deliver (secretly of course) his promised gifts to millions of sleeping, dreaming youngsters.

And so, thanks largely to business interests; North Americans are treated (or subjected, depending on your viewpoint) once a year to Santa's jolly but usually unconvincing "hohoho." Canned secular anthems telling the epic tales of reindeer, of snowmen, and of Santa's advent are looped seemingly without end, and nothing remains of the historical character: St Nicholas.

THE REAL ST NICK

The original, "real" St Nicholas (Greek: Νικόλαος [Nikolaos] = "victory of the people") was a fourth-century Christian Bishop of Myra, a town in the Roman province of Lycia, Asia Minor. (This is the site of modern-day Demre in the Turkish province of Antalya). Certainly, it seems extraordinary that the identity of this saintly ecclesiastical icon—patron of sailors and fishermen, clad in his cloth-of-gold bishop's cope and mitre—should have become muddled, at least in the English-speaking world, with Santa Claus, the now-familiar secular (and distinctly commercial) icon of a very different kind.

This historical character was the



inspiration for a mythical figure known as Sankt Nikolaus in Germany and as Sinterklaas (a contracted form of Sint Nicolaas) in the Netherlands and Flanders, where the saint's day is a major traditional festival. Among Eastern Orthodox Christians, the historical Saint Nicholas is also remembered and revered. St Nicholas is the patron saint of sailors, merchants, archers, children, and students in Greece, Russia, and Serbia.

Nicholas was born in Asia Minor during the third century in the Greek colony of Patara at a time when the region was Hellenistic in culture and outlook. He was very religious from an early age and devoted his life entirely to Christianity. It is said he that he was born to relatively affluent Christian parents.

As the patron saint of sailors, Nicholas is claimed to have been a sailor or fisherman himself; however,

in view of his social class, it is more likely that his family owned a fishing fleet which he ultimately managed. When his parents died, Nicholas still received his inheritance but is said to have given it away to charity.

Nicholas's early activities as a priest are said to have occurred during the reign of the co-ruling Roman emperors Diocletian (284-305) and Maximian (286-305), from which we can roughly estimate his age. Diocletian issued an edict in 303 authorizing the systematic persecution of Christians across the Empire. Following the abdication of the two Emperors on 1 May 305, the policies of their successors towards Christians were different. In the Western part of the Empire, Constantius Chlorus (305-306) put an end to systematic persecution; in the Eastern part, Galerius (305-311) continued the persecu-

tion until 311, when he issued a general edict of toleration from his deathbed. This persecution of 303-311 is considered to be the longest in the history of the Roman Empire.

Nicholas survived this period, although his activities at the time are uncertain.

Following Galerius' death, his surviving co-ruler Licinius (307-324) mostly tolerated Christians. As a result, their community was allowed to develop, and the various bishops who acted as their leaders managed to concentrate religious, social, and political influence, as well as wealth, in their hands. In many cases they acted as the heads of their respective cities.

It is apparently during this period that Nicholas rose to become Bishop of Myra. Judging from tradition, he was probably well loved and respected in his area, mostly as a result of his charitable activities.

As with other bishops of the time, Nicholas's popularity would serve to ensure his position and influence during and after this period.

The destruction of several pagan temples is also attributed to him, among them one temple of Artemis (also known as Diana). Because the celebration of Diana's birth is on 6 December, some authors have speculated that this date was deliberately chosen for Nicholas's feast day to overshadow or replace the pagan celebrations.

Nicholas is also known for coming to the defense of the falsely accused, often preventing them from being executed, and for his prayers on behalf of sailors and other travelers. The popular veneration of Nicholas as a saint seems to have started relatively early. Justinian I, Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire (527-565), is reported to have built a temple (i.e. a church building) in Nicholas's honor in Constan-

tinople, the Roman capital of the time.

DEEDS AND MIRACLES

St Nicholas is the patron saint of sailors and is often called upon by sailors who are in danger of drowning or of being shipwrecked. According to one legend, as a young man Nicholas went to study in Alexandria, and on one of his voyages from Myra to Alexandria he is said to have saved the life of a sailor who fell from the ship's rigging in a storm. In a colorful version of this legend, Nicholas saved the man on his voyage back from Alexandria to Myra, and upon his arrival he took the sailor to the church. At that time the former bishop had just died, and the church fathers were instructed in a dream to choose for their next bishop a "man of victory" (Greek: *nikei*). While the saint was praying, the talkative sailor went around telling everyone how courageously he was saved by the man *Nikei-Laos*. The church elders had no choice but to appoint Nicholas as their new bishop.

One legend tells how a terrible famine struck an island, and a malicious butcher lured three little children into his house, only to kill and slaughter them and put their remains in a barrel to cure, planning to sell them off as ham. Saint Nicholas, visiting the region to care for the hungry, not only saw through the butcher's horrific crime but also managed to resurrect the three boys from the barrel. Another version of this story claims that there were instead three clerks who wished to stay the night. The man murdered them, and was advised by his wife to dispose of them by turning them into meat pies. Nicholas saw through this and brought the men back to life. This latter version is thought to be the origin of the English horror legend of Sweeney Todd, the barber.

In St Nicholas' most famous exploit, however, a poor man had three daughters but could not afford a proper dowry for them. This meant that they would remain unmarried and probably, in the absence of any other employment, would have to become prostitutes. Hearing of the poor man's plight, Nicholas decided to help him but, being too modest (or too shy) to help the man in public, he went to his house at night and threw three purses of gold coins through the window onto the man's floor. One version has him throwing one

Continued on page 14



**With warmest wishes
for the Season and the New Year**

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To my fellow
Greek Americans
&
other Orthodox Christians

**MERRY CHRISTMAS
HAPPY NEW YEAR!**



CHARLES MOSKOS
Northwestern University

Author of
“Greek Americans:
Struggle & Success”

200726/171

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wish all
a Merry Christmas
and a
Joyous New Year



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*Merry Christmas
Happy Healthy New Year*

from

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Dr. and Mrs. James Doundoulakis
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send their best wishes to their friends, patients
and all the readers of the «National Herald»

MERRY CHRISTMAS • ΧΡΟΝΙΑ ΠΟΛΛΑ

200053/143



*On behalf of Leadership 100,
we extend to you and your loved ones
our warmest and heartfelt Best Wishes*

***for a most
Blessed Christmas
and a New Year***

**filled with Good Health
Peace
and much Happiness**

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George D. Behrakis".

George D. Behrakis
Chairman



Andrew E. Manatos
President

*May we celebrate Christmas and the New Year
by re-dedicating ourselves to the promotion and protection of
Hellenic and Orthodox issues in 2007.*

*And a special thank you to the National Herald
for all it does in this regard.*

**Andy and Mike Manatos
and the Manatos & Manatos family**

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201116/730

**PANRHODIAN SOCIETY
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wishes all Rhodians
and all Hellenes of the Diaspora

**a Blessed Christmas
with Peace in the New Year!**

Phillip G. Yamalis, President
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3629/482

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for
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and
a Happy New Year**



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3167/559

A Greek Style Christmas in Fayetteville

By Paul Papadeas

I remember getting bundled up in two sweaters, a Members Only Jacket, scarf and boots. This was the appropriate attire to deal with the bone chilling cold of a North Carolina winter. My mother, ecstatic as ever corralled all of the younger Greek-American children in my hometown into a caravan of old 80's relics as we headed out to sing Christmas carols to other Greek families throughout the city. Of course, there was no rehearsal – so the uneven cacophony of adolescent voices filled the dining rooms, kitchens and front porches of over gracious hosts as we belted out such lines as "Erthe O Cristos, hara pantou, sti yee erthe Christos" and then proceeded to have our frozen fingers thawed by a warm baklava or dipla as well as the obligatory money roll that would always find itself hovering toward the box that I usually carried like a shield.

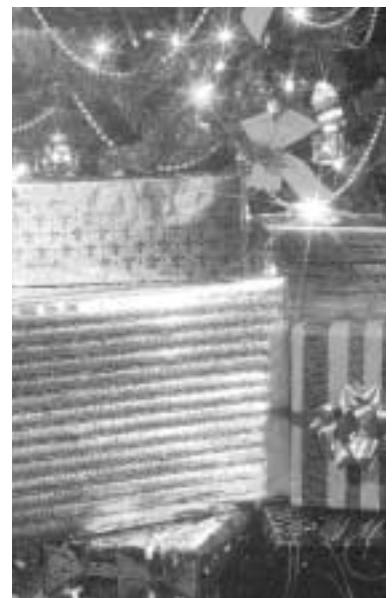
My Christmas as a Greek American, living in the bible belt of the Southeast was always an esoteric occasion. Materialism was not really our focus – I mean, we did have presents under the tree, yuletides, eggnog, Santa Claus and banal lightshows to attend – but the special part of it that I always remembered was the sense of community within the church – which acted as a kind of vanguard for the Diaspora in an otherwise homogenous town of evangelicals.

And yes, in case you're wondering, we were viewed as aliens – different – those strange dark skinned European people who enjoy cooking entire lambs in their backyard and speaking a form of English that is only understood by their children!

Heck, most would even ask me if

I were a Christian! Yes, I'd say and our church is the oldest and truest to the real teachings of Christ. Man, would that ever get the typical North Carolinian in a tizzy. Some smart ones just listened and learned to read Greek for astute theological purposes.

Maybe they found us odd be-



cause we did not appear to be a stoic or repressed people. I guess screaming maniacally to express a point and kissing one another during formal introductions might be deemed a step away from some sort of sexual depravity or weird custom that posed a sacred infringement of their way of life.

I guess they eventually had to learn to live with us, the tribes of peasants, farmers and pirates after all. We needed a film that caricatured us, like MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING to make Greeks consumable and accessible to the

American public, who for years I dreaded viewed us as some kind of Euro-Arabic hybrid oddity.

But back to Christmas where my fondest memories were the anarchistic parties in the church hall, the impromptu nativity scene reenactment in front of the altar (I lament never playing Joseph, some guys get all the luck) and the week long marathon of partying at each Greek friend's house which would consist of a steady diet of Kanzatzishes' bell thundering voice, the consumption of a smorgasbord of Grecian prepared delights and a tiny bit of spontaneous dancing in someone's living room.

My mother would literally run around, quietly averting a disaster as the subsequent stomping would produce an inner earthquake that would shake the foundations of the house, sending her China in a free fall.

Here, a cultural anthropologist studying our habits one hundred years from now, would see that things within our environment did not center on the typical prescription of alcohol, mindless gossip, a football game or wage slave war stories and business related schmoozing but the uncensored sharing of time together in an idle, Epicurean type revelry. In today's over hyped corporate dominated world, our Greek style Christmas would be deemed as a subversive act.

Here's to my Greek Christmas – may it last for generations!

Paul Papadeas is a Greek American freelance writer and independent film maker based out of Los Angeles, California. He is currently the Hollywood correspondent for M magazine, a Greek Canadian publication.

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and Happy New Year*



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ΕΘΝΙΚΟΣ ΚΗΠΥΞ

*The residents of the Philoxenia House of the Holy Metropolis of Boston
wish a Blessed Christmas and a healthy New Year to all.
Most respectfully, they send this message to His Eminence Metropolitan Methodios:*



Your Eminence,

During this Holy Season when we celebrate the Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we who currently constitute the Greek Orthodox family which resides in the Philoxenia House of Your Holy Metropolis take the opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to You for providing us with a "home away from home, and Orthodox Christian Home of Hope", and for comforting us during very difficult times.

We thank You, Your Eminence, and all the faithful You have inspired during the last 21 years since You established this home, to assist You in this most meaningful and touching Greek Orthodox Christian ministry through their volunteerism, their donations, their unconditional love.

Your Eminence and dear volunteers and supporters of this Orthodox Christian Home of Hope,

ΕΘΝΙΚΟΣ ΚΗΠΥΞ

*We are most appreciative for all you do.
We thank you very much and pray that the Joy of the Christmas Season remain in your hearts throughout the New Year 2007*

201103/610

AS APPEARED IN THE "NEW YORK TIMES"

APOSTLES OF PEACE



Pope Benedict XVI, the 265th successor of the St. Peter, joining hands in solidarity with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the 269th successor of St. Andrew, the first called Apostle and the older brother of St. Peter, at the Patriarchal Cathedral of St. George, Istanbul, Turkey, November 30, 2006 during the historic Papal Visitation to the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS OF AMERICA THANK POPE BENEDICT XVI FOR THE CONTINUED SUPPORT OF HIS FELLOW APOSTLE OF PEACE, ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW.

In this season of goodwill, we are thankful that two of the most revered spiritual leaders of the Christian world, Pope Benedict XVI and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, at their historic meeting last month in Istanbul provided such a moving and powerful demonstration of the desperate need for peace and understanding in the world today.

Their efforts to bring Christians closer together, to reach out to Moslems and to show that violence in the name of religion is violence against religion itself, proved that they are vital forces for peace and reconciliation between different faiths and cultures.

We appreciate the support the Pope declared for Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the spiritual leader of the second largest Christian communion in the world. The efforts the Pontiff made to relieve painful pressures on the Ecumenical Patriarchate exerted by misguided forces in Turkey who do not understand the great asset the Ecumenical Patriarchate is in the efforts of the Turkish people to achieve a place in the family of European nations.

We call on the leaders of Turkey, our NATO ally, to prove that their country deserves recognition as an enlightened and compassionate nation - by ending the harassment of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, by recognizing his ecumenical status (as do all other countries), by recognizing with legal personality the Orthodox Church, as well as the Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian communions and Jewish community, by returning confiscated church property belonging to the Patriarchate, by respecting the right of Apostolic succession in the Orthodox Church and ending all interference in the selection of future Patriarchs, and by allowing the reopening of the Halki seminary, which has trained Orthodox clergy and religious leaders in Turkey and around the world for generations.

We call on the President of the United States to show his commitment to religious freedom by doing everything in his power to convince the leaders of Turkey that it is in their country's best interests to end the discriminatory restrictions on the spiritual leader of 300 million Christians, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. We call on you, Mr. President, to join Pope Benedict and many other religious and political leaders throughout the world who have raised their voices in support of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which stands at the crossroads between the Christian West and the Moslem East and can be a crucial bridge between these two great faiths.

WE THANK THE FOLLOWING 73 U.S. SENATORS WHO DEMONSTRATED, IN THE SPIRIT OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS, THEIR SUPPORT OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE & FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN TURKEY:

Daniel Akaka (HI)	Lincoln Chafee (RI)	Richard Durbin (IL)	Ted Kennedy (MA)	Bill Nelson (FL)	Olympia Snowe (ME)*
George Allen (VA)*	Hillary Clinton (NY)	Mike Enzi (WY)	Herbert Kohl (WI)	Barack Obama (IL)	Arlen Specter (PA)
Max Baucus (MT)	Norm Coleman (MN)	Russ Feingold (WI)	Mary Landrieu (LA)	Mark Pryor (AR)	Debbie Stabenow (MI)
Evan Bayh (IN)	Susan Collins (ME)	Dianne Feinstein (CA)	Frank Lautenberg (NJ)	Jack Reed (RI)	John Sununu (NH)
Robert Bennett (UT)	Kent Conrad (ND)	Lindsey Graham (SC)	Patrick Leahy (VT)	Harry Reid (NV)	Craig Thomas (WY)
Joe Biden (DE)*	John Cornyn (TX)	Chuck Grassley (IA)	Carl Levin (MI)	Pat Roberts (KS)	David Vitter (LA)
Jeff Bingaman (NM)	Mike Crapo (ID)	Judd Gregg (NH)	Joe Lieberman (CT)	Jay Rockefeller (WV)	George Voinovich (OH)
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Sam Brownback (KS)	Mike DeWine (OH)	Tom Harkin (IA)	Mel Martinez (FL)	Rick Santorum (PA)	Ron Wyden (OR)
Norm Coleman (MN)	Chris Dodd (CT)	James Inhofe (OK)	Bob Menendez (NJ)	Paul Sarbanes (MD)*	
Richard Burr (NC)	Elizabeth Dole (NC)	Daniel Inouye (HI)	Barbara Mikulski (MD)	Charles Schumer (NY)	
Maria Cantwell (WA)	Pete Domenici (NM)	Tim Johnson (SD)	Patty Murray (WA)	Jeff Sessions (AL)	
Thomas Carper (DE)	Byron Dorgan (ND)	John Kerry (MA)	Ben Nelson (NE)	Gordon Smith (OR)	

* Letter originators

SINCE 1936, 7,000 ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN PROPERTIES HAVE BEEN CONFISCATED BY THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT, INCLUDING CHURCHES, ORPHANAGES, CEMETERIES AND SCHOOLS, 1,500 IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS.

THE 300 MILLION ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD ASK WHY THE FOLLOWING 27 UNITED STATES SENATORS HAVE NOT SIGNED ON FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, AND URGE THEM TO RECONSIDER THEIR POSITION:

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Wayne Allard (CO)	Saxby Chambliss (GE)	John Ensign (NV)	Jim Jeffords (VT)	Mitch McConnell (KY)	John Thune (SD)
Christopher Bond (MO)	Tom Coburn (OK)	Bill Frist (TN)	Jon Kyl (AZ)	Lisa Murkowski (AK)	
Jim Bunning (KY)	Thad Cochran (MS)	Orrin Hatch (UT)	Trent Lott (MS)	Richard Shelby (AL)	
Conrad Burns (MT)	Larry Craig (ID)	Kay Bailey Hutchison (TX)	Richard Lugar (IN)	Ted Stevens (AK)	

TURKEY MUST UNDERSTAND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND ADMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION GO HAND IN HAND. ONE CANNOT OCCUR WITHOUT THE OTHER.

Archon Anthony J. Limberakis, MD
National Commander



Archon John A. Catsimatidis
Chairman, Religious Freedom Committee

The Order of St. Andrew / Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in America is comprised of the leading Orthodox Christians in the United States whose mission is to support and defend the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the first See of the Orthodox Christian Church comprised of 300 million faithful worldwide.

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Merry Christmas from Albania, 1940

By Andre Gerolymatos

October 1940 was a month of euphoria in Athens, according to my father Sotirios. Athenians were jubilant and swarmed the streets to see and throw flowers to the soldiers as they headed out to fight the Italians in Northwestern Greece. My then twenty-six year old father had just been demobilized from the Greek army after serving for three years in the cavalry. As an Athenian merchant, the closest he had been to a horse was to the pulling the water truck, which came by every other morning to deliver ice. It took dad a while (and hundreds of tumbles) until he finally mastered riding a horse. But by the end of his stint he was a "cavaliros": man and beast had reached an accommodation.

The Italian attack was anticipated by the government of Ioannis Metaxas as early as August, and the wily Greek dictator had secretly already partially mobilized the armed forces. He had recalled thousands of young men, like my father, who had just been released from military service right back into the military service. Sadly, dad had only enjoyed a few weeks as a civilian, before a telegram ended his life of freedom.

For his second junket with the Greek army my father was posted to the mountain artillery. "No more noble horses," he lamented to me years later, "but now stubborn mules that had to be coaxed to carry 75mm artillery pieces over the practically pathless rocky mountains near the Albanian Greek border."

My father was a quiet and decent man who despised violence, and it had taken him a long time to get over the war, occupation, and civil war that he and all the Greeks of his generation had had to endure and then spent a lifetime trying to forget. He did not look back on the war with the hindsight of nostalgia, so all the trinkets of his military life (medals, commendations, etc) he had kept hidden. The only vignettes we had of him in the war were old and faded photographs that depicted a much younger man who looked far too serious to be my father.

Every now and then, after considerable prompting from me, my father would yield and share with his family some glimpses of that part of his life that he kept in his pocket. One such event took place during a cold and snow-covered Christmas in Montreal. Perhaps it was the snow and the howling wind that prompted him to remember,



Above: Sotirios Gerolymatos in September 1940.
Left: Sotirios Gerolymatos and other wounded in Athens 1941.

hours they were able to shut out the war. Besides, the blizzard conditions made it impossible to carry on the business of killing. Sitting in the warmth of his living room in Montreal, my father re-called that once in the cave they had started a small fire and all huddled around it for warmth. My father produced the raisins he had kept for Christmas, while others brought bread, cheese, and a variety of stale—but to starving men luxurious—commodities.

As they consumed their loot, one of them in turn had to keep watch at the entrance of the cave in case an Italian patrol stumbled onto their sanctuary. My father was the second man to stand watch, and after a few minutes he heard, over the howling wind, a faint voice calling out in Italian. Like most Kephalonians my father had a working knowledge of Italian. As he braced for a possible attack, he understood the voice to say: "Hey there, we do not want trouble. We want to start a fire like yours, and if you do not shoot at us we will not shoot at you." My father brought the Italian proposition to the rest of the men, who decided that since it was Christmas and very cold the proposal was acceptable, and a truce was declared until morning.

Later in the evening the Italians offered to trade coffee and brandy for bread, and by midnight my father and his friends had almost forgotten the war. Soon they could hear the Italian soldiers singing and laughing. Perhaps it was the Christmas spirit or contact with the enemy, but after this experience my father really suffered each time one of his shells killed or maimed an Italian. After this extraordinary Christmas Eve, he could not find it in his heart to hate Italians for the war.

Earlier in the month my father's regiment had destroyed the Julia Mountain Division, the pride of the Italian army. My father did not say this, but during the last stages of the battle against the Julia Division, my father's artillery unit had run out of shells. In fact most of his regiment lacked bullets, so they attacked the Italians as they were winding their way around one of the mountain passes, with rocks. Soon most of the Julia had surrendered, and the Greek regiment happily appropriated the supplies of the Italians. My father's share of the loot included much-needed ammunition, and also a bag of raisins.

On December 24, 1940, my father and the dozen or so men left in the mountain artillery found refuge in a cave, and for the next few

hours they were able to shut out the war. Besides, the blizzard conditions made it impossible to carry on the business of killing. Sitting in the warmth of his living room in Montreal, my father re-called that once in the cave they had started a small fire and all huddled around it for warmth. My father produced the raisins he had kept for Christmas, while others brought bread, cheese, and a variety of stale—but to starving men luxurious—commodities.

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My father continued to fight for almost the duration of the Greek-Italian conflict. He took part in dozens of battles and when his unit ran out of shells, he fought in the infantry. He told me that the usual ration was one shell per hour, as such that shot had to count. Towards the end of March 1941, he succumbed to frost-bite and was ordered to receive medical attention. In practical terms this meant that my father, like thousands of other Greek wounded, had to walk from Albania to Athens (no other transportation was available).

Andre Gerolymatos is Professor of History and Chair of Hellenic Studies at Simon Fraser University and a frequent contributor to the National Herald.

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3271/691

We wish to our Archbishop **Demetrios**
our Metropolitan **Methodios**

and to all our Greek American friends
and acquaintances

Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year



George, Margo
Rania, Lily and Alex
CHRYSSIS

3789/617

The Christmas dishes of the Greek cuisine

Greek gastronomy has a variety of dishes for each occasion and especially for festive periods like Christmas and New Year's. Some of them are references to ancient worshipping customs, some others are dictated by home economy and the production of the season. The stars of these days are the breads (Christopsomo and Vasilopita) and the pork that after the slaughtering is consumed after being cooked in every possible way.

The Christopsomo is the bread that is made on New Year's Eve all over Greece. They decorate it with agricultural or farming symbols and in this way try to affect positively the development of things and bring good luck to the family. The Vasilopita is the symbol of the pursuit of good luck for the new year; in some regions it is a sweet bread and in regions that have a tradition with pies like Macedonia and Ipiros it is a sweet or salty pie. The ingredients of course are always seasonal, like pumpkin, pork and lamb. In every corner of Greece there are differences in the ingredients and the method of preparation. For example, in Zakynthos the Christopsomo is kneaded with leaven, almonds and spices, while in Crete with raki (strong spirit) and mastic. In northern Greece the Vasilopita is a pie with sesame or a sweet pumpkin pie, in Lesvos it is made with myzithra cheese, in the Ionian and Ipiros they make it with meat (lamb or pork), feta cheese and plenty of spearmint. A typical and almost forgotten sweet is the small vasilopites, small sweet pies from Smyrni that on their surface have a stamp with the two-headed eagle.

Speaking of sweets, the festive table always has melomakarona (Christmas cookies) and kourampiedes (traditional almond cookies) that are considered more sweets for the celebration of Fota (6th January), dipes (a deep-fried pastry served with walnuts and honey syrup) and many more. These too are made with varieties depending on the local customs and habits. The "lalagia" is a typical sweet that is connected with the arrival of a new life in the world. It is a pancake of gruel or rice, with honey and nuts and its variations are the "xerotigana" (fritters with honey) and the "loukoumades" (honey puffs).

During older times this was the season they slaughtered the pigs. Each household bred a pig from the beginning of the year and a little

while before Christmas they slaughtered it and used every little part of it. Nothing was wasted, from the blood to the bones. This whole procedure was a ceremony that is repeated even today in many places. This way each household had its own meat, sausages and salted pork for most part of the winter. This is why it is customary to eat pork meat these days. Typical dishes are "pihti", a jelly made from the head and feet of the pig with small pieces of meat and vegetables, roast piglet and sausages stuffed with flavorings, orange and greens. Also the "sygino", the "luntza" and the "apaki" which are pieces of pork preserved in salt or smoked.

Pickled cabbage is another basic ingredient that is present all winter long in northern Greece and espe-

cially during Christmas. "Lahanotolmades" or "sarmades" in some regions are pieces of pork and rice wrapped in pickled cabbage. In Thraki the festive menu includes the "tsaruhia" which are pieces of chicken wrapped in pickled cabbage. Before the predominance of turkey, geese, ducks and game (wild boar and hare) were the main dishes for these twelve days.

These are some of the most typical festive dishes, but if you search through the traditions you will be surprised by the variety of combinations, aromas and flavors.

CHRISTMAS PORK

Although some might argue in favor of the New World turkey, pork is really the traditional meat of the Greek Christmas table. All over the Greek countryside, winter is

marked by the festive ritual of the hirosfagia, or pork slaughter. Farmers slaughter their yearly pig, and, by smoking it, air-drying it, salting it, turning it into sausages, and preserving it in its own fat they can savor its meat straight through to Easter.

There are many regional pork preparations, from myriad local sausages and salamis, to confit-like dishes prepared with various small cuts pork. Traditional pork recipes are even more plentiful.

ROASTED AND STEWED PORK

Whole roasted suckling pig is probably the king of the holiday table. It is usually seasoned simply with lemon and oregano, but there are also recipes from the north of the country for sucking pig stuffed with chestnuts, pine nuts, cheese,

onions and spices.

Dozens of stewed pork dishes are found on our winter table as well. Among them are pork stewed with white beans from Macedonia, as well as pork with greens or with leeks and avgolemono, which is made all over the country, but is more prevalent in the north. A rich dish of pork with walnut sauce is also found in certain of the colder parts of the country. In Lesvos, one recipe called Christougeniatisko is an unusual combination of pork stewed with chickpeas, chestnuts and tomatoes. And in Cyprus, we find Afelia, or pork cooked with red wine and coriander.

CURED PORK PREPARATIONS

It is difficult to put a number on the cured pork recipes, including sausages and other charcuterie,

found around Greece. Many have been lost over time-with refrigeration it is no longer necessary to worry about how to keep meat through the winter. But here and there you can still find the odd farmer or housewife who goes to the bother of making, say, kavourma or singlina from Macedonia and Crete, respectively. The two dishes are similar -pork preserved in its own fat- and resemble the French confit.

Sausages and salamis have a long tradition in Greece, too, although they might be considered a little pedestrian for the festivities of Christmas. Sometimes they are made with a combination of pork and beef. All around Greece they are seasoned differently, sometimes with leeks, or with leeks and orange rind, sometimes with pepper, with wine, mint or oregano, and, in rare instances-as with the fresh, fat sausages found in Volos, with allspice.

PORK OFFAL

Greeks eat a fair share of pork offal, too, many of which seem to have remained unchanged over millennia. Like the ancient Greeks, for example, today's Greek cooks still make elaborate stuffed dishes with pork bellies, intestines, and other organ meats. There are a number of recipes from the islands, for example, that call for pork intestine stuffed with raisins, rice, onions, and greens and herbs. The dish, found in the Cyclades and in Crete, goes by the name maties, amathies, or omaties.

Pihti-jellied pork or head cheese as it is known in English-is another preparation that makes its appearance throughout Greece on the Christmas table. The head and hooves of the pig contain an extraordinary amount of gelatin. Pihti in various renditions is something found on the old agrarian tables all over Europe, and everywhere it was one more way of obtaining as much to eat as possible from the animal.

While the holiday table is still centered around pork and all its byproducts, urban cooks have adopted the turkey as their holiday specialty. Turkey became popular among the upper classes in Greece around the turn of the century. But rich and filling pork seems more apropos of the Christmas feast. It is among the few animals that are really delicious all over, from head... to foot.

Source: Gourmet

Christmas pork with chestnuts, legumes and spices from Lesvos

1/2 cup dried chick peas, soaked overnight to swell
2/3 cup olive oil
3 pounds boneless pork, cut into stewing size pieces
4 cups chopped red onion
Salt and pepper to taste
2 cups chopped tomatoes
1 heaping teaspoon ground cumin seeds
1 tsp whole allspice berries
2 bay leaves
8 small potatoes, peeled and quartered
1 cup whole chestnuts, boiled and peeled

Drain the chickpeas. Bring to a boil in a large pot, skimming the foam off the surface. Simmer over low heat for 35-40 minutes, until slightly softened. Remove and drain.

While the chickpeas are cooking, heat 1/3 cup olive oil in a large flame-proof casserole dish or Dutch oven and brown the meat over high heat, stirring frequently in the pot. Remove with a slotted spoon and add the onions. Cook over medium heat, stirring, until wilted and lightly browned, about eight minutes.

Place the meat back in the pot, season with salt and pepper, and pour in the tomatoes. Bring to a simmer over low-medium heat. Add the spices, and pour in enough water to cover the meat. Cover, bring to a boil, and reduce heat to low. Simmer for about 40 minutes.



Add the chick peas, stir, and pour in additional water if necessary to keep the mixture covered. Simmer, covered, for about one hour, or until the meat and chick peas are very tender. Add water if necessary as the

stew simmers. Adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper and serve warm.

Source: Gourmet

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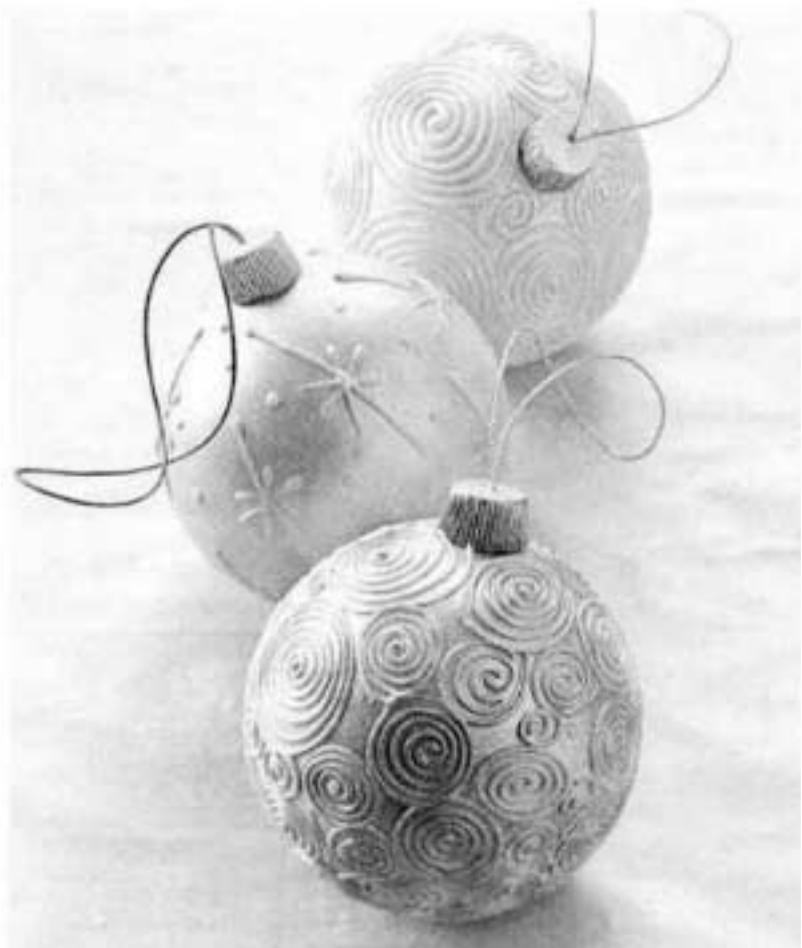
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The origins of Santa Claus

Continued from page 14

Day on a scale similar to German custom. In accordance with a tradition unique to this American city and its surrounding communities, children usually awaken on the morning of 6 December to find that their previously empty Christmas stockings have been filled by St. Nick with candy and small presents (if the children have been "good") or coal (if not). For these American children, the relationship between St. Nick and Santa Claus is not clearly defined, although St. Nick is usually explained as "one of Santa's helpers." The tradition of St. Nick's Day is firmly established in the Milwaukee community, with parents often continuing to observe the day even with their adult children.

FATHER CHRISTMAS AND SANTA CLAUS

Most American children, however, and most Canadian, British, Australian, and New Zealand children—"good" or "bad"—know nothing of St Nicholas the bishop; neither the saint of early church history, nor the fancy-dress figure of traditional, partly folkloric European pageantry. Instead, their stockings are filled on Christmas Eve by a merry old soul called Santa Claus. In Britain the older term "Father Christmas" is often preferred, although less and less so, it would seem. There too, American-style marketism reigns supreme, and, just as non-commercial Guy Fawkes' Day is gradually being supplanted by the new-world Hallowe'en tradition, with all its associated merchandizing opportunities, so too Father Christmas, generally a rather impressive, silent figure in a long red tunic, is being supplanted by Santa. Similarly the British custom of wishing people a "Happy Christmas" is now often replaced by the American "Merry Christmas" (and of course the politically correct "Happy Holidays").

It is said that it was Clement Clark Moore's 1823 children's poem "The Night before Christmas"

(which bore the subtitle "A Visit from St Nicholas") that provided the first modern description of the secularized saint. No longer wearing episcopal robes, "St Nick" had now been transformed into a "jolly old elf... dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot" (no mention of scarlet here):

"His eyes—how they twinkled! His dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;

"The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a little round belly,
That shook when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly.
He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf...."

A long trail leads us from the arid mountains of Anatolia to the snows of the North Pole, from early Christian legends surrounding the historical and religious figure of St Nicholas in Asia Minor—via pagan practices and myths, via Catholic and Protestant traditions in Europe, and via early Victorian family celebrations—to the modern secular figure of Santa Claus found in our shopping precincts and department stores, on our Christmas cards and rooftops, and in the imaginations of our children. Commercially motivated or not, the evolution of St Nicholas into Santa Claus cannot possibly be seen as rooted in a spirit of religious devotion, but undoubtedly celebrates the spirit of human imagination and the enchantment of children.

(Reference information and content from "Saint Nicholas, Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 14 December 2006, Wikipedia Foundation, Inc. 15 December 2006)

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Melomakarona

2 cups of olive oil
1 cup of brandy
1 cup of orange juice
225 gr of sugar
grated rind of 1 orange
1 kg of soft flour or 750 g of soft flour and
250 g of semolina
2 tablespoons of baking powder
1 tablespoon of baking soda
1 cup of crushed walnuts
cinnamon
2 cups of honey
2 cups of sugar
2 cups of water
cinnamon sticks

Combine the olive oil, brandy, orange juice, sugar and grated orange rind, and beat well. Add the baking powder and soda to the flour. Transfer the oil mixture to a large bowl and add gradually add the flour. Knead and then form the melomakarona into small rounds or oval shapes. Once this has been done, gently press each melomakarona against the surface of a grater in order to leave a decorative pattern on each one. Put the melomakarona in a baking pan and cook in a pre-heated oven for half an hour, at 160 C. Allow to cool in the pan.

In a saucepan, add the honey, the sugar and 2 cups of water. Boil the syrup for about 5 minutes. Skim the foam off the top, add the cinnamon sticks and then pour the hot syrup over the cold melomakarona. Sprinkle with the crushed walnut and a little cinnamon.



Christmas spice breads

Christopsomo & Kouloura

2 pounds (1 kg) flour
1 ounce (30 g.) fresh yeast or 1 tablespoon dried yeast
1/2 cup (120 ml) warm water
2 cups (480 ml) warm red wine
1 cup (150 g.) currants
1 cup (150 g.) sultanas (raisins)
1 cup (150 g.) walnuts, roughly chopped
peel of 1 orange, finely chopped
peel of 1 tangerine, finely chopped
1/3 cup (50 g.) pignolia nuts (pine nuts)
2 cups (400 g.) sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup (120 ml) olive oil
2 teaspoons cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon powdered cloves
1/2 teaspoon anise, optional

For the decoration
sesame seeds
whole walnuts
sugar
colored sprinkles, if available

These two sweet breads are eaten at Christmas. Christopsomo or Christmas bread has been compared to the Italian "panettone", which it also resembles in appearance.

The Zakynthians, however, are convinced that their recipe is in-



comparably more interesting. The "kouloura" is made of the same dough but in the shape of a large ring; it is in here that the cook places the lucky coin to be found on Christmas Eve.

When Private Wheeler was teaching school in Cephalonia, each of his scholars brought a large loaf made of the best flour, covered with almonds and walnuts, in shape resembling a child in swathing bands and weighing from 6 to 14 pounds. The Ithacan kouloura tastes of anise rather than nuts and spices. It is made of two rings of dough, braided with a cross and twisted and sculpted to represent the Virgin holding the baby Jesus in her arms.

At Easter they cut the dough into concentric rings with spikes to look like an artichoke, with a red egg in the center and little dough birds perched on the rim.

Place the flour in a large bowl and make a well in the center. Put the yeast in a glass with the warm water and leave for a few minutes. Stir the yeast and water until the yeast melts and then pour it into the flour together with the warm wine. Mix and knead well. Cover and leave to rise in a warm place for about 1 1/2 hours. Then mix in the rest of the ingredients.

It was in the East that the Christmas story began and yet most of us are not aware of how the eastern world celebrates the Birth of Christ. There are no Christmas trees with garlands and blinking lights and stockings by the chimney waiting for Santa Claus to arrive after midnight. And, by the way, Santa, or Saint Nicholas, came from the East—a city in Turkey called Myra in the area of Lycia. Even the food is quite different, with regional delicacies that have been feasted on long before roast turkey and glazed ham made its way to the table. Let's take a quick look at some of these customs and dream of bonfires, and Saint Basil and "kubbeh"...

The city of Bethlehem celebrates Christmas on three separate dates because of the differences of the calendars used by the Western Church (December 25th), the Orthodox Church (December 25th, or January 7th for the Russians) and the Armenian Church (January 6th). All three churches celebrate their separate services in the Church of the Nativity where a Silver Star marks the site of the Birth of Jesus. In Iran, the land from where the Wise Men came, Christmas is not a legal holiday.

But for the 1% of the population that is Christian, the traditional Christmas dish is chicken stew called "harasa". Christmas Eve in Iraq finds Christian families gathered together, holding lighted candles, to hear the story of the birth of Jesus. On Christmas day a large bonfire is lit in the churchyard where the bishop, carrying a figure of the Baby Jesus, inaugurates a service called the "touch of peace" where each person touches the person next to him. Bonfires are also traditional in Syria where the family gathers around the fire singing hymns and making wishes as they jump over the embers. Christmas delicacies in Syria include such items as roast stuffed duck, baked kibby (meat mixed with bulgur), stuffed cabbage leaves, and pastry delights.

Moving on to Lebanon...here people plant seeds, chickpeas, wheat grains, beans and lentils in cotton wool. They water the seeds so that by Christmas the shoots are high enough to be used in the nativity scenes to surround the manger. For the most part in the Middle East, people who visit friends on Christmas morning will be offered

coffee, liqueurs and sugared almonds whereas Christmas dinner may consist of chicken and rice, and "kubbeh", which is crushed bulgur mixed with meat, onion, salt and pepper.

Now we'll make our way up to East Europe where Christian traditions are more apparent. It's worth noting that in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, it's Saint Basil, who lived in Caesaria, Cappadocia in eastern Turkey that brings the gifts and not Saint Nicholas. And also, the day set aside for gift giving, traditionally, is January 1st, which is the feast day of Saint Basil.

Some of the delicacies served in the various East Europe countries include meat dishes such as goose or turkey, but in Lithuania fish and poppy seed dishes are popular for the Christmas Eve dinner. And traditionally twelve different dishes are served before heading out to Midnight Mass. Some of these dishes include beetroot soup, pierogi (crepes filled with sauerkraut or mushrooms), stewed fruit, and a variety of cakes. In contrast, the Orthodox Christians fast from both meat and dairy products in preparation for receiving communion during the Christmas liturgy very early the next morning. In Russia there is also a twelve-course supper in honor of each of the twelve apostles. The delicacies include fish, Borsch, cabbage stuffed with millet. Then on Christmas day goose and suckling pig are served.

In the Czech tradition the father of the family dips bread in honey and passes it out to all before starting the meal. Then the family sits down to a meal of fresh water fish carp. Fish is also served in Hungary for the Christmas Eve dinner, along with "Beiglie", soft rolled cookies with walnuts and poppy seeds.

Lastly, on the way down to where we started our journey, is Greece. By nature of its geographical position Greece can be considered part of the Middle East, East Europe, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean. As and Orthodox country Greece follows a period of fasting before Christmas. For the feast day, culinary traditions include stuffed poultry or pork, cabbage rolls, which symbolize the Christ Child in swaddling clothes, and syrupy sweets and sugar cookies. But two of the most notable holiday foods are the holiday breads: the "Christopsomo", a skillfully decorated bread which is eaten on Christmas Day, and the "Vasilopita" (Saint Basil's Bread), a sweet bread or cake in which is hidden a coin. On New Year's Day the Vasilopita is cut into pieces and given out to family members and visitors present at the time. Of course, the one who finds the coin will be blessed with good luck the rest of the year!

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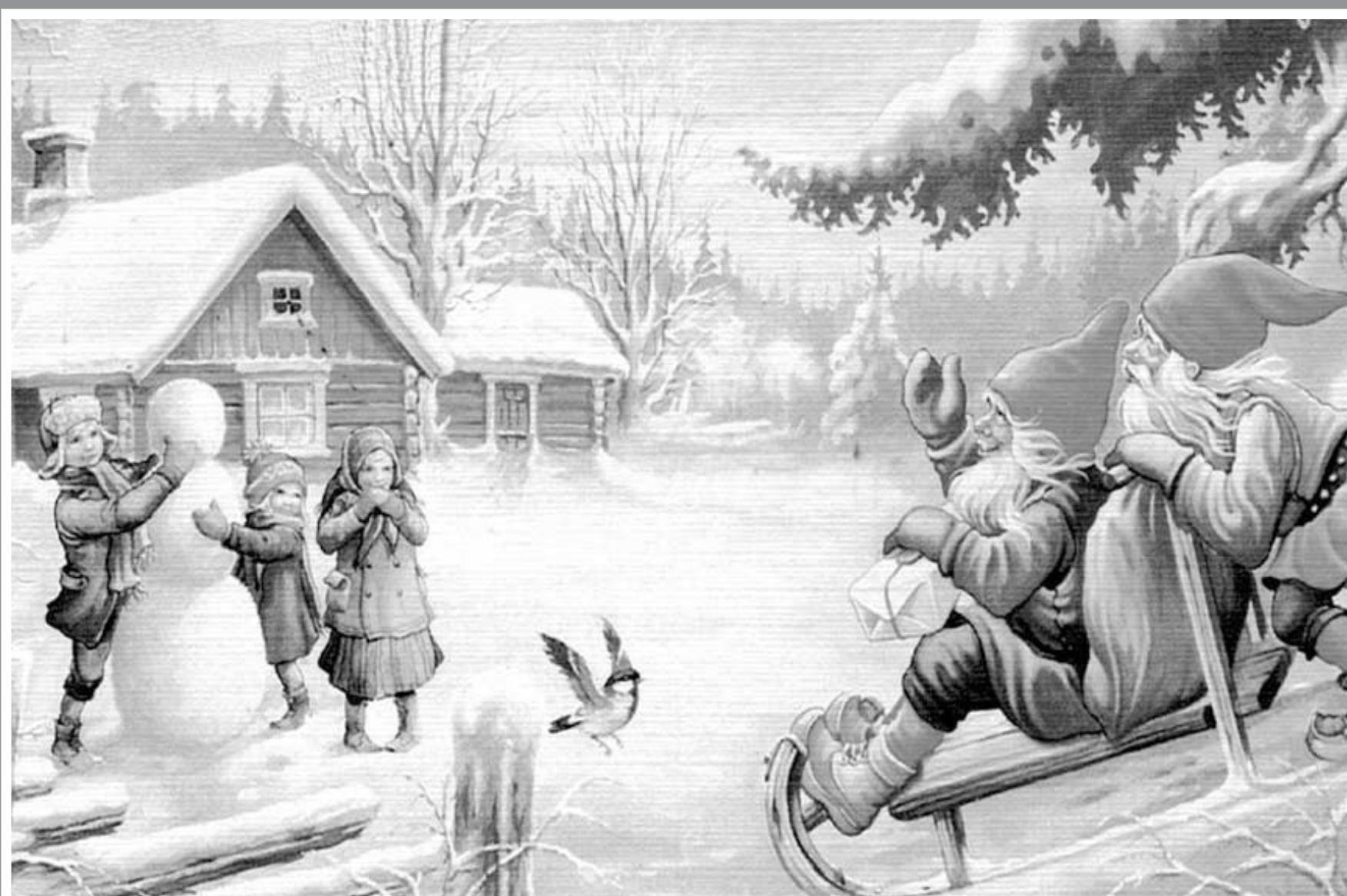
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