



# *Live your Myth in Greece*

*A tourist guide  
about our country...*

# *Chapters*



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## *Chapter IV. Customs and habits of Greek people*

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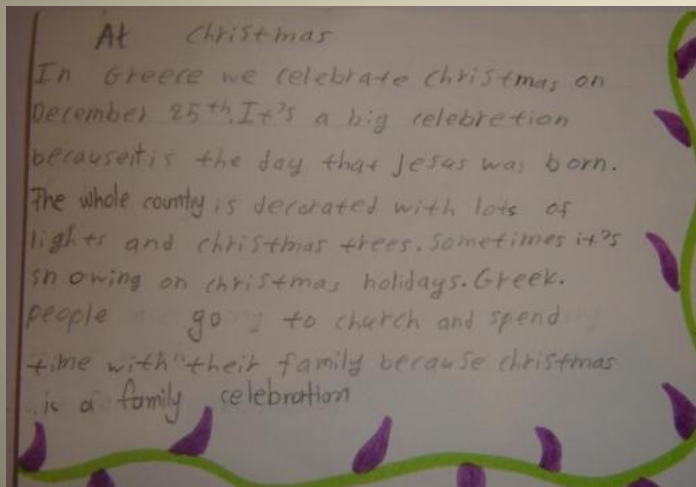
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Apokries “The Greek Carnival”

The Greek Orthodox Church is celebrating Christmas on December 25<sup>th</sup>. In Greece when we talk about the "holidays" we are referring to the holiday period of Christmas, New Year and Epiphany on January 6<sup>th</sup>. The Greek name for Christmas is Christougenna. When Greeks say Merry Christmas they say "Kala Christougenna". Also we say Kales Yiortes = Happy Holidays



Almost everyone buys and decorates a Christmas tree with tinsel and a star. The Christmas tree though is an "imported" tradition. Traditionally Greeks would (and still do) decorate a small boat due to Greece's close affiliation with the sea. The Christmas boats are made of paper or wood, decorated with lights and a few simple ornaments. They are usually placed near the outer door or by the fire.



### "Kalanda" or Carols

On Christmas and New Year Eve, children travel from house to house offering good wishes and singing kalanda which is the same as carols. Kalanda accompanied usually by the sounds of the musical instrument "triangle," but also by guitars, accordions, lyres and harmonicas. Until some time ago, children were rewarded with pastries but nowadays they are usually given money.



Click here   and listen

02 Kalanda Christougenon.mp3



### Greek Christmas Carols - English lyrics

Good evening noble men  
may I sing at your mansion,  
this day celebrating Jesus' holy birth, (that)  
Jesus is being born today  
in the town of Bethlehem  
The skies rejoice  
the whole nature is happy  
In the cave he is being born  
in the horses' trough  
the king of the skies  
and maker of everything  
A large group of angels sing  
Glory to God  
and holy be  
the faith of the shepherds  
From Persia three magi arrive  
with their gifts  
A bright star shows them the way  
without any delay



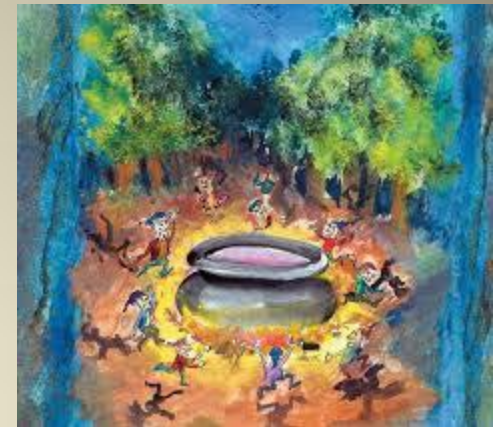


## Christmas Elves

Greece's hobgoblins are called "kallikántzari", friendly but troublesome little creatures which look like elves. Kallikantzari live deep down inside the earth and come to surface only during the 12-day period from Christmas until Epiphany. While on the earth's surface, they love to hide in houses, slipping down chimneys and frightening people. Throughout Greece, there are various customs and rituals performed to keep hobgoblins away. Kallikantzari disappear on the day of Epiphany when all waters are blessed, and they return to the earth's core.



Greek families leave a fire burning to keep away the Kallikantzari. The Kallikantzari are goblins that emerge from the center of the earth and slip into people's homes through the fireplace. They are more trouble makers than harmful. They are believed to do things such as extinguish fires, ride on people's backs, braid horse's tails, and sour the milk.



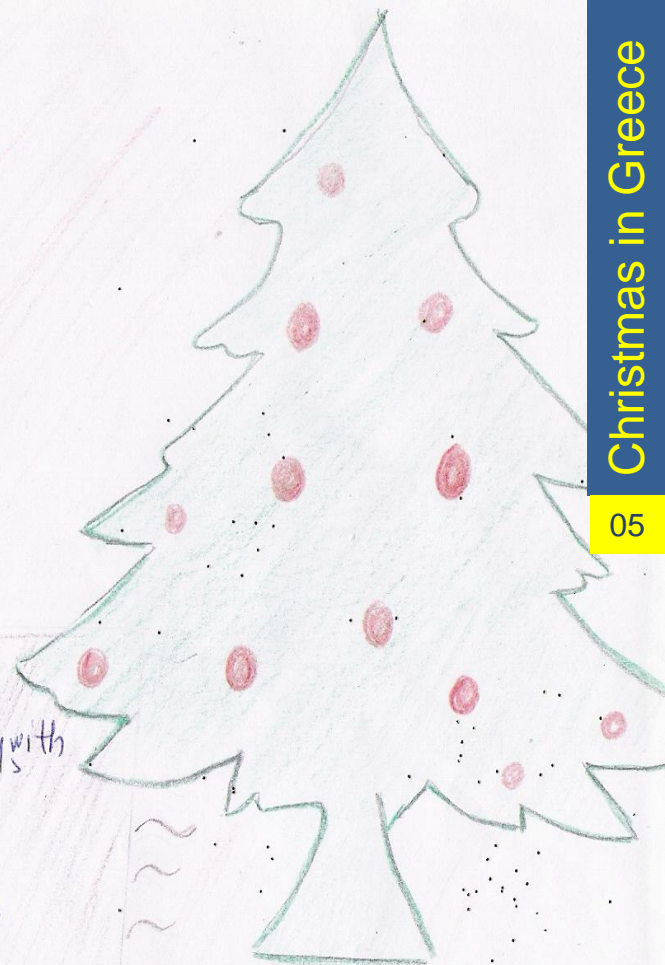
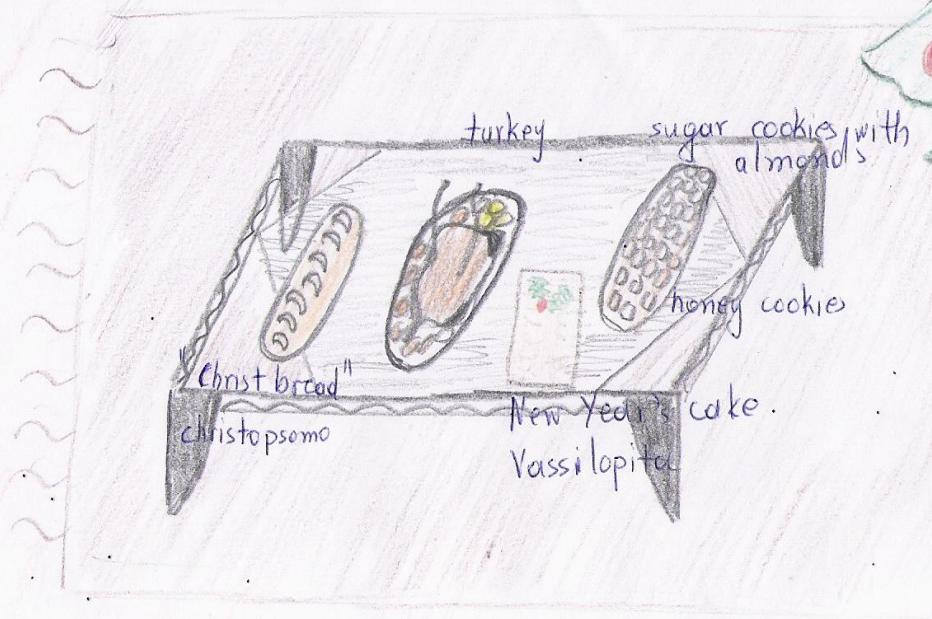
## Sweets & Treats

Traditional culinary delights symbolize good luck in the New Year and adorn the white-clothed tables. “Melomakarona” (honey cookies) and “kourabiedes” (sugar cookies with almonds) are the most characteristic and they characterize the beginning of Christmas festivity. Another traditional custom that dates back to the Byzantine times is the slicing of Vassilopita (St.Basil’s pie or New Year’s Cake). The person who finds the hidden coin in his slice of the cake is considered to be lucky for the rest of the year.





"The most typical dishes of Christmas"





Easter is a moveable holiday. Its celebration on the first Sunday after the full moon of the Spring equinox. All over Greece, a plethora of customs and traditions are observed during the week prior to Easter, the Holy Week. Resurrection start on Holly Thursday, when housewives traditionally prepare special cake named tsoyrekia, biscuits and red color eggs.



Friday is the most sacred day of the Holy Week. Women and children go to church to decorate the Epitaph (Bier of Christ) with flowers, while in the evening the Epitaph procession takes place. On Saturday morning, preparations start for the festive dinner and a special soup is cooked called 'maghiritsa'.





Shortly before midnight, people gather in church holding white candles which they light with the 'Holy Light' distributed by the priest. When the latter chants 'Christ is risen' (Christos Anestis), people exchange wishes and the so- called 'Kiss of Love' . With the 'Holy Light' of the candles they make three times the sign of the cross on the door post over the front door of their houses for good luck.

Then they all gather around the table, they crack red eggs and wish one another Christos Anesti.



The most typical Easter dishes are whole lambs on a spit, slowly roasting , red-dyed eggs; braided sweet breads (tsoureki) ; Easter soup (magiritsa) and grilled tripe roll (kokoretsi)





On Sunday morning, mainly in Greek countryside, lamb is prepared on the spit and people eat and dance usually until late at night.

*Click here*  *and listen*

*Greek Traditional Music*



The Ionian island of Corfu during Easter is ideal, since the town hosts the most splendid and melodic celebrations in the country, with the city's philharmonics in full action. On Holy Saturday morning, one of the highlights is the dropping of ceramic pots "botides" full of water from the windows onto cobblestone streets.



In the Aegean island of Chios, another custom takes place where residents of the village of Vrontados revive the tradition of "the rocket war". After Resurrection, Vrontados breaks into a pandemonium of fireworks lighting up the midnight sky.





Greece's Carnival season known as "Apokries" is mainly a period of masquerading, but also eating, drinking and dancing. Traditionally, it begins ten weeks before Greek Orthodox Easter and culminates on the weekend before "Clean Monday," (Ash Monday) the first day of Lent. "Apokria", literally means "goodbye" to the period of meat-eating, or abstinence from meat (Apo-kreo, meaning away from meat).



Carnival officially begins on a Saturday evening with the "opening of the Triodion," the Lenten Triodion, as it is called - which is a liturgical book of the Orthodox Church that contains hymns with three odes and begins to be chanted on the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee through Holy Saturday.



The following week is a fast-free week until Meatfare Sunday which is the last day before Easter for eating meat. On Thursday of this week which is known as Tsiknopempti- Charred, Smoky or Barbeque Thursday - because of the smell of the grilled meat in the air, family and friends gather in taverns or homes to eat large quantities of charred meat and celebrate, just ten days before the beginning of Lent.



Clean (or Ash) Monday is a public holiday in Greece which marks the end of the carnival festive season and the start of Lent or the period of fasting until Easter. Weather permitting, people spend Clean Monday outdoors, organizing picnics while children fly kites.



The last Sunday of the Carnival period is known as Cheesefare Sunday or Tyrofagos as only dairy products can be consumed on this day. Cheesefare Sunday is the final day of pre-Lent, as the Monday following -known as Clean or Ash Monday- marks the beginning of Great Lent. During the weekend preceding Clean Monday, carnival celebrations around Greece culminate with vigorous parades, masquerade parties, reviving many traditional customs in different parts of the country, and proving that carnival in Greece is closely related to the cultural heritage of each region.



Patras: The King of Greek Carnivals  
The port city of Patras hosts the biggest carnival in Greece, and one of the biggest in Europe. The "king" of Greek carnivals begins in January with an announcement by the town crier, and reaches its peak in the last weekend of carnival. Patras carnival features a variety of events: balls, parades, street theatre, and much more. The carnival reaches its apogee on the last weekend of Triodion: Saturday evening brings the walking parade (with participants taking the streets holding torches), while the phantasmagorical floral, artistic, and satirical floats parade on Sunday, with the Carnival King and Queen in all their splendor. But Patras carnival is mostly the thousands carnival-goers of all ages, participating spontaneously to the events taking place everywhere in the city -homes, bars, streets - turning the whole city into a gigantic party.





Xanthi: The Folk Carnival  
The Thracian city of Xanthi hosts one of the most popular carnivals in the country. Xanthi carnival started in 1966 as an urban event but has incorporated many traditional elements, based on the city's multicultural character that renders it the most folklore of urban carnivals. The highlight is the Folk Parade on Saturday before Ash Monday: bringing together cultural associations from all over Greece, the troupes go singing and dancing through the neighborhoods of the picturesque Old Town and merge in an all-night Balkan folk music fiesta in the main square. Cheesefare Sunday leads to the custom of Burning the tzaros, a human effigy placed on top of a pile of brushwood.





The Greek Independence Day is celebrating the declaration of the Independence War against the Ottomans on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1821. Apart from a national celebration, this day is also a religious celebration dedicated to the Annunciation of Virgin Mary.





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Ο Χ Ι



ΠΑΙΔΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΟΣ ΠΑΙΔΙΑ



On October 28<sup>th</sup>, the Greeks celebrate the day when the Greek dictator Metaxas refused to let the Italians invade the country during World War II. It is the celebration of the heroic OXI (NO): most Greeks put a Greek flag on their windows and balconies, while a parade takes place with the participation of school students and the army.

