



Nicolae Sfetcu

CHRISTMAS
HOLIDAYS

MultiMedia Publishing

Christmas Holidays

BOOK PREVIEW

Nicolae Sfetcu

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Christmas characters

Santa Claus



Santa Claus is a legendary, archetypal and mythic character, related to Christmas.

Although Santa Claus tradition has origins in northern Europe, it is popularized in the United States in the nineteenth century. It is called Father Christmas or Santa Claus in English, and Weihnachtsmann or Santa in German. His main function is to distribute gifts to children in homes during the Christmas night that takes place every year from 24 to 25 December.

Santa Claus name is itself a distortion of Sinterklaas (Saint Nicolas) Dutch. It is largely inspired by Julenisse, a Nordic elf who brings gifts during the holiday of the middle of winter, Midtintersblot, just under the Celtic god Gargan (which inspired Rabelais' Gargantua) but especially the Viking god Odin, coming down to earth to deliver gifts to Scandinavian children. It seems to be this one, the ancestor of all others, the starting point.

From Julenisse, Santa has kept the white beard, cap and clothing in red fur, from Gargan has retained the hood and boots.

Although the myth can vary greatly from one region to another, particularly because of the climate of December 25, which can range from early winter in the northern hemisphere at the beginning of summer in the southern hemisphere, he is generally imagined as a big man with a long white beard, dressed in warm red clothes with white fur edging; the elves help prepare gifts. He performs the distribution on a flying sleigh pulled by reindeer.

He enters the houses through the chimney and places gifts in shoes placed around the Christmas tree or by the fireplace (in France), in socks designed for this purpose hung on the chimney (in North America and the United Kingdom), or just under the tree. In Iceland, he deposits a small gift in a shoe that children leave on the edge of a window at the beginning of December. In Canada, the gifts under the tree are in order, in addition to "Christmas stocking" located on the fireplace where we put little surprises.

Some psychoanalysts consider Santa Claus as a ritual that would feed the imagination of children and help them build and explore the reality. According to the families, the tradition is that children write to Santa and send him a list of gifts he wants for Christmas, and Santa decides "itself" what gifts deserves the child.

Origins

Santa Claus, as it is commonly depicted, can be seen as a relatively modern syncretistic building with far-reaching origins: it is a cosmopolitan figure, the fruit of a mixture of many traditions and folklores. Sociologist Martyne Perrot says that "the idea that Santa Claus is American is partly true because the construction of this character is in fact related to the history of New York migrants; It is a migrant character, which took a little of all the countries where it passed and it is rich of various cultural borrowings."

Christmas refers to the day of the nativity, that is to say, the day of the birth of Jesus: Santa Claus is therefore primarily attached to a Christian holiday. For a long time they celebrated the nativity and the Epiphany - fixed on 6 January - the same day, and by the end of the 4th century they were distinct: the Christmas Day, 25 December, it was indeed a convention. Two millennia ago, there was a celebration in Rome at the time of the winter solstice, the return of the sun, the prolongation of the day, the "undefeated sun." There were organized festivals. In the same way, the first days of March, gifts were offered to celebrate the beginning of the year. For a long time, indeed, the year began with the first days of Spring, which also gave rise to rites. Symmachus wrote at the end of the 4th century that "in the first days of March, in the city, there was the custom to offer gifts in memory of King Tatius, who had been the first to read the signs of good auspices for the new year in the branches of the fertile tree that stood in the sacred wood of Strena." Some Jewish and Christian exegetes wrote that the feasts of Hanukkah and the Nativity were created to counterbalance the festivities of the "undefeated sun." In the Middle Ages, the feast of the fools gave rise to so many excesses that it was limited, even cropped.



("Ghost of Christmas Present", an illustration by John Leech made for Charles Dickens's festive classic A Christmas Carol (1843))

With the arrival of Christendom, there were several reforms to try to suppress the ancient rituals.

The legend of Saint Nicholas is established since the Middle Ages: it is celebrated on December 6, but according to the Julian calendar, the day falls on ... December 19. This rite comes naturally to be confused with those, older, celebration of the winter solstice. In the historiography, the "winter man" goes back to the Middle Ages, he is the worn-out man who comes to warm himself with the new fire (the consecrated fat log) and to whom presents are offered. In the eighteenth century, the idea of Christmas as the sacred day of the family made its way both in the aristocracy and among the bourgeois and artisans. During the first industrial revolution, a process was set up, combining

gifts, trade and moments of generosity with children: it was the invention of the toy-filled showcase and the deeply urban chimney myth.

The historiography of Santa Claus is therefore very complex: at the end of the seventeenth century, for example, there is a "Father Christmas" in English engravings, which refers to masquerades long established at the time of the winter solstice in all British islands. The tradition of Santa Claus therefore seems to have origins in Northern Europe: however, Santa Claus as we know it today is popularized in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century when it takes the name Santa Claus, directly inspired by the Saint Nicholas of Dutch Flanders.

Saint Nicholas



Nicolas of Myra, or Nicolas de Bari, commonly known as the "Saint Nicolas", was born in Patara, in Lycia, around the year 260, and died in Myra in 345. It was an Archbishop of Myra in Lycia, Anatolia, East of the Roman Empire. It was renowned for his charity and militant in faith. Tradition says he participated in the First Council of Nicaea.

Canonized, he was proclaimed protector of many nations and many trades. He is a popular character of Christian hagiography.

Historical character

Childhood

Nicolas was born in Patara, in Lycia, around the year 260 in a Christian rich family. His parents, Epiphanius (Ἐπιφάνιος) (original Greek) and Johanna (Ἰωάννα) according to some accounts, Theophanes (Θεοφάνης) and Nonna (Νόννα) according to others, according to some versions die during a plague epidemic when he was eight years old or, according to Claude Kevers-Pascal, when he was twenty years old. Nicolas would have been at the orphanage or raised by his uncle Nicolas, Bishop of Myra, Lycia still located in southwestern Anatolia. He gives generously to defend justice and disadvantaged people; he throws through the window of the house of his ruined neighbor three bags of gold to enable him to provide his daughters and avoid that they have resorted to prostitution.



(Saint Nicolas throwing gold to three poor girls, Palmerino di Guido, 1300.)

Archbishop of Myra

Because the successor of St. Nicolas uncle was dying, he was appointed bishop of Myra around the year 300. According to some versions, his uncle ordered liturgical reader and priest when nineteen old before naming him in top of his monastery called the Holy Sion. According to Kévers-Pascal, he was not a priest when he was appointed bishop.

In 311, he convinced a commander of vessels transporting grain of the Roman Empire to illegally transfer to the inhabitants of Myra part of its load to protect the population from starvation.

He is imprisoned with the rest of the Christian population by Maximin Daia, Egypt Governor, during the campaign against Licinius, governor of Lycia.

He is present in the first Council of Nicaea in 325. The bishop Nicolas particular struggle against Arianism.

Three major events are still to note: it saves three young men accused by a corrupt judge for having organized a riot in Andriake; he tears the executioner's sword and requires reversal of the trial, where he was pleading the innocent; he gets a tax cut of Myra after an audience with the Emperor Constantine in Constantinople; Finally, during the same visit to Constantine, he advocated successfully for the officers Nepotian Erpilion and Ursus, wrongly accused of conspiracy against Constantine.

A year before his death, he did destroy the temple of Artemis of Myra.

Relics

His bones are preserved in a church in Myra in Lycia until the eleventh century. According to legend, they have the particularity to ooze perfumed oil. This balm is known in Europe in the Middle Ages. This attracts celebrity and sixty-two sailors from Bari steal and bring his relics (some authors claim that they were wrong relics) in May 9, 1087 in Christian lands in Bari. A basilica is specially built for him between 1089 and 1197. An important relic arrives in Lorraine, from 1090, and then became a major object of pilgrimage with the traditional procession in the Basilica of Saint-Nicolas-de-Port.

Some fragments of the relic were also transferred to the St. Nicolas Cathedral Fribourg during the Renaissance. In fact, around 1420, Father Pierre Affry obtained permission to take a few fragments of the saint at the Cistercian abbey of Hauterive. The church in Freiburg, for the transfer of these precious relics, had to ask the help of the swage and of the Council of the city. "They had recourse to the authority of Pope Julius II. A papal bull of 2 July 1505 gave these relics in Freiburg. The transfer was made on May 9, 1506."

In the religious culture

It is difficult to find the oldest traces of the cult of St. Nicholas because of the Quarrel of Images which wiped almost all pictorial representations of saints dating from before the eighth century. However, we know that the saint enjoys very early great popularity; this is particularly visible in the ninth century by its omnipresence in the iconography of the Eastern churches. It is particularly venerated at that time in Crete, Cyprus, Greece, Macedonia and later in Ukraine, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Serbia. His cult is also developing in Western Europe after the arrival of his relics in Bari in 1087.

Hagiography

Birth

Nicolas, according to legend, would have received the baptism very young and would have stood alone in reverence, straight on his legs, to be baptized: this was his first miracle. Then he starts to fast by refusing to suckle the days prescribed by the Church (Wednesday and Friday).

Education

It is the bishop of Patara, Method, and his parents who care for his education.

On the death of his parents (death due to plague), he inherited their wealth.

Miracle of the three virgins



(The dowry of the three girls, marquee Saint Paul abbey of the twelfth century in the museum of the Augustins in Toulouse.)

Nicolas neighbor a man who, ruined, could not marry his three daughters without dowry. The latter considered the prostitute to raise money for their subsistence. Nicolas decided in secret to give three full scholarships to the young women.

The Christian legend is reported in the book the *Golden Legend* of Jacques de Voragine in the following passage:

"And it was so that one, his neighbour, had then three daughters, virgins, and he was a nobleman: but for the poverty of them together, they were constrained, and in very purpose to abandon them to the sin of lechery, so that by the gain and winning of their infamy they might be sustained. And when the holy man Nicholas knew hereof he had great horror of this villainy, and threw by night secretly into the house of the man a mass of gold wrapped in a cloth. And when the man arose in the morning, he found this mass of gold, and rendered to God therefor great thankings, and therewith he married his oldest daughter. And a little while after this holy servant of God threw in another mass of gold, which the man found, and thanked God, and purposed to wake, for to know him that so had aided him in his poverty. And after a few days Nicholas doubled the mass of gold, and cast it into the house of this man. He awoke by the sound of the gold, and followed Nicholas, which fled from him, and he said to him: Sir, flee not away so but that I may see and know thee. Then he ran after him more hastily, and knew that it was Nicholas; and anon he kneeled down, and would have kissed his feet, but the holy man would not, but required him not to tell nor discover this thing as long as he lived."

Nicholas was appointed Archbishop of Myra

The death of the Bishop of Myra pushes the bishop of the province to give him a successor. One night, while they were praying, the voice of God directs them to name Archbishop Nicholas. The next morning, the bishops Nicholas waited on the church threshold, called him by name and asked him, despite his reticence, the miter on his head.

Nicholas and persecution

After a long period of peace, persecution came befall Christians. The Roman emperors prohibit congregations, order the destruction of churches and holy books and condemned to exile, imprisonment or death, those who did not abjure their faith. The bishop of Patara, Method, is put to death and Niccolas knows the prison, torture and was only issued by the coming to power of Constantine.



(Saint Nicolas appointed bishop of Myra, painting made between 1580 and 1582 by Paolo Veronese and kept in the Gallerie dell'Accademia. Source: Didier Descouens, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Accademia_-_San_Nicola_riconosciuto_vescovo_di_Myra_-_Veronese_Cat.661.jpg, CC Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license)

Nicholas and the Council of Nicaea

A priest named Arius, sustained that Christ is not God as his Father. Nicolas, called to the Council of Nicaea, virulently defended the divinity of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. It takes so much that he hits Arius. Outraged by this action, the Council Fathers stripped of his function and Nicholas is taken to prison. But Christ and the Virgin would have appeared to their servant, giving him the pallium, the book of the Gospels and opening the door of his prison.

To defend his faith, Nicolas also addresses the pagan gods. He manages to convince his faithful to attack the temple of Diana. He built churches and shrines to martyrs on the ruins of the ancient temples.

Miracle of wheat



(Saint Nicolas and grain loading; Saint Nicolas and the miracle of the storm. Bas-relief of St. Nicolas church in Lesachtal, Austria.)

To save the people of Myra from famine, Nicolas goes to a nearby port learning that boats stopped to escape a storm. He manages to convince the owners to unload some of their precious grain in exchange for the promise that each boat would arrive safely. Upon arrival of the boats in Constantinople were measured wheat and there were the same amount at the beginning. Amazed, the sailors told the prodigy.

Rescue of sailors

Sailors about to die in a storm on the coast of Lycia, appeal to Nicolas to come to their rescue. The bishop appears on the ship. He reassures them and urges them to courage. Himself helps to maneuver the sails and seizes the rudder. He thus leads to the port and disappears before their eyes. The sailors then rush to get to Myre, there recognize their savior among his clergy and fall to his knees.

Nicolas saves three officers

Three officers of Constantine I had to lead a mission in Phrygia. Upon their return to Constantinople, these officers, initially loaded with honors, are being accused of a plot against the life of the sovereign. They are imprisoned and sentenced to death. The prefect of the palace, bought by jealous colleagues, ensures that no one believes in their innocence.

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The thought of unfortunates turns to the Bishop of Myra. That night, the emperor and his prefect see in dreams St. Nicholas ordering them to release the slandered officers, otherwise terrible punishments await them. The innocence of the condemned convinced Constantine which, giving them their freedom, sends them to Myre with presents and a letter asking Nicholas for prayers and forgiveness.



(Saint Nicolas and the three officers. 1485 painting, Church of St. Mary of Muhlhausen, Germany.)

According to Emile Male, the rescue of the three officers of Constantine I is misunderstood by Christians, particularly because of Byzantine iconography that represents the great saint disproportionately compared to other men; these are then taken for children. This gives rise to the legend of the resurrection by the saint of three children, previously killed and cut into pieces by a butcher, prison tower becoming a salting.

Death of Nicolas and the miracle of the prodigious oil

Having had the revelation of his coming death, Nicolas gave a final papal Mass, then retired to the monastery of the Holy Sion where he was made abbot. This was a small fever having seized, he was administering the sacraments and died 6 December 343. He was buried in a marble tomb. A new then spread among the faithful: from the body of the bishop a fragrant oil flows, preserving him from putrefaction. This oil, called manna, has a reputation for curing the ill.

Seven centuries later in 1087, Bari marines remove the relics of Saint Nicolas taking back in their city. Legend says that the manna continues to flow.

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Book



Discover the Magic of the Season – *Christmas Holidays* by Nicolae Sfetcu

An enriching journey through traditions, history, and the joy of Christmas

About the Book

- **Overview:**
 - Published by MultiMedia Publishing in 2016
 - ISBN: 978-606-9041-40-6
 - A comprehensive exploration of Christmas, blending its origins, traditions, cultural impact, and global celebrations.
- **Why This Book?**

- Rich in cultural and historical insights
- Perfect for readers passionate about Christmas traditions and history
- A blend of scholarly research and accessible writing

Key Features

- **Historical Depth:** From pagan winter solstice celebrations to the Christian holiday commemorating Jesus' birth.
- **Cultural Insights:** Explore diverse traditions from around the world, including Christmas markets, carols, and foods.
- **Iconic Characters:** Learn about the evolution of Santa Claus and other Christmas figures.
- **Art & Literature:** Discover how Christmas has inspired art, music, and storytelling over centuries.

Who Should Read This?

- History enthusiasts and scholars of cultural traditions
- Families looking to enrich their holiday traditions
- Educators and students exploring religious and secular aspects of Christmas
- Anyone intrigued by the universal appeal of Christmas

Unique Selling Points

- **Universal Appeal:** Goes beyond Christianity to explore Christmas's global and secular dimensions.
- **Beautifully Detailed:** Captures the festive spirit with vivid descriptions and engaging storytelling.
- **Perfect Holiday Companion:** Ideal for cozy reading by the fire or as a thoughtful holiday gift.

Reader Benefits

- **Educational Value:** Gain a deep understanding of the roots and evolution of Christmas traditions.

- **Enhanced Festivities:** Inspire your celebrations with fresh ideas and perspectives.
- **Connection:** Strengthen family bonds by exploring shared traditions and histories.

Highlights from the Book

- **Chapters:**
 - The Origins of Christmas
 - The Nativity Story and Christian Traditions
 - Festive Symbols: Trees, Lights, and Decorations
 - The Evolution of Santa Claus
 - Global Christmas Foods and Feasts
- **Visual Appeal:** Includes illustrations and examples of traditions like Advent wreaths and Christmas stars.

Praise for the Book

- “A treasure trove of Christmas traditions and history. Perfect for holiday enthusiasts!” – Mary C. Garcia
- “Richly informative and beautifully written – a book that makes the holidays even more special.” – Roslyn Mothé

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Perfect Gift for the Season: Share the joy of learning and tradition with your loved ones!

Thank You!

Happy Holidays!

Second to Easter, Christmas is the most important feast of the Christian liturgical calendar. That is why Christmas is a public holiday in most countries of Christian tradition. This holiday allows family reunion around a festive meal, shared worship (masses and religious services), and the exchange of gifts.

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Christmas is celebrated during the night of December 24 to 25 and December 25 all day. As a Christian festival, it commemorates every year the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Originally, it was at that date that pagan festivities marked the winter solstice, symbol of the rebirth of the sun. The Christian festival was positioned on the same date in order to replace these parties and, symbolically, to associate the birth of Christ to the notion of increasing light.

The period around Christmas is called "holiday season" and it includes the celebration of the New Year. Since the mid-twentieth century, this holidays is losing its religious aspect while keeping alive the tradition of the festival. In this spirit, Christmas has a folk connotation, preserving the grouping of family units around a meal and exchange gifts around the traditional tree.

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