

CHRISTMAS TIME IN ROMANIA

In Romania Christmas is one of the most important holidays alongside with Easter. Romanians spend the Christmas time in a special way, which is closely connected with traditions and customs that are deeply rooted in history. In a broader sense the winter holiday season lasts from December 20th to January 7th but is truly in full swing from December 20th to January 7th. The highlighting events throughout this period are Christmas Day and New Year.

The most important feature of these celebrations is their unique variety. Colourful Romanian customs, traditions, beliefs, and events make the winter holidays some of the most original and spectacular spiritual manifestations of the Romanian people.

Alexandra Crisan, 6th grade

COLINDATUL-GOING CAROLLING

The Christmas customs begin on Christmas Eve or the day before, and last till *Epiphany* (*Boboteaza*). The most important of them is that known by the name of "colindat" (carolling). Groups of "colindatori" -carollers- go from house to house and sing at the windows outside the house or in the houses, according to a variable ceremonial, ancient songs of greeting, called "colinde" (carols). These carols are sung by boys, young girls, adults or mixed groups, according to the region of the country.

Colinde/ Carols are performed in all parts of Romania with regional variations in terms of number of participants, and lyrics. However, the text of most carols is concerned with the events of the birth of Jesus. Others- fewer in number- have a profane content.

The "religious" carols contain popular legends of God and they are often imbued with pagan elements too. God and the Saints are personified. God is usually seen as an old shepherd with a white beard, playing the flute as he watches a flock of sheep

Children usually go carolling on the Christmas Eve evening, during the first dark hours just before going home to decorate the tree. The adults stay home to greet them. As they go carolling from house to house, the children receive treats like candy, fruit, baked treats and sometimes even money in appreciation of their performance and as a sign of holiday good will. In fact, nowadays, money is what they mostly receive.

In some regions of the country grown ups also go carolling on Christmas evening and night. They form groups and they choose a leader. After that they proceed to their hosts, performing their repertory: songs accompanied by dance. When the performance is over, the host invites the carollers inside the house for food and drink.

Steaua/ The Star Carol is probably the most frequently used carol children sing. They use coloured paper to make a star and then they put in its middle an icon of Jesus. Many children decorate their star using shiny tinsel. While holding the star in their hands they sing: *Steaua sus rasare / Ca o veste mare...* (The Star has appeared on high/Like a mystery in the sky...).

Other examples of carols which have a religious subject are: "*Astăzi s-a născut Hristos*" (Today Christ was born), "*Moș Crăciun cu plete dalbe*" (Santa Claus with white hair) and "*O, ce veste minunată!*" (O, what wonderful news!).

The aim of the carols is to greet and to praise in an allegoric way those to whom they are sung.



Andra Ene, 7th grade

Mădălina Pavel, 7th grade

CAPRA- THE GOAT TRADITION

Carol singers are sometimes accompanied by bogeys known as *capra*- impersonated by somebody wearing a mask or a whole costume, that is , men with the head of a goat and a long wooden beak/muzzle which claps now and again, when pulled by a string. The goat mask has a multicoloured appearance and a noisy performance: the goat jumps, jerks, turns round and bends, regularly clattering its wooden jaws. These carollers go from house to house dancing and reciting verses which have mostly a satirical turn.



URSUL- THE BEAR CUSTOM

Similar to *Capra*, *Ursul/ The Bear* custom is known only in Moldova, a region in the east of Romania and is performed on Christmas Eve. This time a person dresses up in a bear costume adorned with red tassels on its head. The bear is accompanied by several fiddlers and a procession of characters, the bear's cub being one of them, impersonated by a child. During the performance the bear character grumbles and imitates the steps of a real bear to the sound of drums and pipes.

Andrei Rusu, 6th grade

PLUGUSORUL- THE LITTLE PLOUGH

Plugusorul/ The little plough is a very ancient fertility rite performed in Romania on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. A long recitation in verse representing allegorically the whole work of the field, from the ploughing to the kneading and baking of rolls of pure cornflour is intoned against a background of sounds produced by the bellowing of a kind of drum called *bull* ("*buhai*"). In fact *buhaiu* represents a piece of wood (a wooden drum) with a string through it which, when pulled, produces a deep sound similar to the lowing of a bullock. The custom is thus a traditional procession with a decorated plough wishing for the fruitfulness of the fields and rich crops into the new year. The ploughmen are generally teenagers and children carrying whips, bells, pipes, flutes and other musical instruments in their hands.



6th A grade

SORCOVA

Another custom practiced by children individually on New Year's Day is the "**sorcova**". This is a small branch or stick adorned with differently coloured artificial flowers, called sorcova with which they touch rhythmically and lightly their elders, while congratulating them on the occasion and wishing them a long life and a Happy New Year: Sorcova, the merry sorcova/Long may you live/Long may you flourish/ Like apple trees/ Like pear trees/ In midsummer/ Like the rich autumn/ Overflowing with abundance/ Hard as steel/ Fast as an arrow/ For many years to come/ Happy New Year!

Mirea Ramona

7th Grade



BOBOTEAZA- THE EPIPHANY DAY

In our country The Epiphany Day is celebrated on the 6th of January every year. It is a religious holiday and its customs are related to the religious service which is aimed at sanctifying the waters. Thus the most important element on this day, besides the church ceremony, is represented by the carrying of the cross to the Danube or to another running water. First the priest makes a divine service in the church or by the river bank and then he throws the cross into the water. Young men dive into the water to catch the cross and the one who succeeds is said to be under the protection of God throughout the whole year.

6th A grade