

SOCIAL INCLUSION OPPORTUNITIES

INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

collection of ideas

CHRISTOPSOMO - THE SWEET BREAD OF CHRISTMAS

A holiday tradition that has its roots in ancient times, 'Christopsomo' is generally called the loaf of bread baked in Greek homes 2-3 days before Christmas. The difference from other breads is that this one has a lot of (dough) decorations, called 'plumidia'.



Christopsomo is by definition round and has a decorative cross in the middle. In Thessaly, the bread is made from thin screened flour, anise and sugar and decorates it with walnuts, almonds, sesame seeds and pine nuts, that symbolize rich harvest, fertility, abundance, good luck and family union. There are also decorations with symbolic meanings depending on the occupation of the household; these can include animals, harvests, fruits, haystacks, houses, vines, trees, a plow, etc. The Christmas bread of the Sarakatsani, that are nomadic shepherds depicts an entire flock and sheepfold.

The Christmas bread is blessed and cut by the eldest male, usually the grandfather, and only by hand; you can't use iron (that represents the power of evil) to cut into the bread since it represents the power of good and the body of Christ.

Also, in many parts of Greece they make buns, called "Christokouloura" that look like Christmas bread, but are smaller, which hang next to the icons for the whole year, strengthening the wishes of the family.

Although nowadays the Christmas bread is traditionally connected with a Christian holiday, the roots of preparing such a sweet bread can be traced in ancient times. At the end of the year (as we now measure it) the daytime starts to increase. For the ancient people this meant that the circle of life, sowing fields, harvest time, birthing for flocks was starting again. So it was only fitting to offer thanks to the gods for the gift of light and the sun after the period of darkness. Many ancient celebrations took place during this time of the year: Saturnalia of the Romans, the feasts for the Egyptian sun god Ra or the Mesopotamian god Marduk, the celebrations of ancient Greeks of Adonis and Dionysus.

Food production and good harvests are also related with sunlight; for ancient people grain was the most important harvest of all. Bread was one of the most important elements of everyday diet, so an enriched bread, from the finest grain, with honey or petimezi, nuts and spices and elaborate decoration was a most appropriate offer to the gods.



Workshops



During the Christmas Theme Park “Park of Wishes” that is organized by the Municipality of Larissa - among other activities - children and elder visitors participate in baking Christopsomo and learn about this tradition through organized visits for schools, special needs schools and refugees.