The Practical Guide to Latvian Winter Solstice Celebrations and Christmas

Introduction

Ten years ago, *The Practical Guide to Jāņi* was published. It introduced its readers to the essential elements of the midsummer solstice celebrations, gave practical advice on the preparation of the *Jāņi* feast, the fun of the *Jāņi* bathhouse, the preparation of the *Jāņ*i hilltop, explained the meaning of the symbols and motifs associated with *Jāņi* and shared the personal experiences of various individuals in celebrating *Jāņi.*

Our nation's understanding of *Jāņi*, its significance and celebration is far more cohesive than how we individually perceive Christmas. Over the centuries, the loud, pagan celebrations of the winter solstice have been overlaid by the Christian festival of the birth of Jesus with its own symbolism and emotional fulfilment.

From our childhood, we have all delighted in the twinkling candlelight of the Christmas tree while impatiently waiting for our presents; in many homes the Lutheran carols and Catholic hymns came from the radio tuned to catch foreign broadcasts. Hauling the yuletide log, the songs of the mummers and gypsy characters (depending on the region) with their magical *kaladū, totari* and *duido* choruses, the elaborate decorations make from straw and wood shavings – they all came later when we started to dig deeper and find out about how our ancestors once celebrated this festive time.

Does that mean that in the name of authenticity we should distance ourselves from our childhood experiences, from our parents and grandparents' memories? Perhaps we can incorporate them into our Christmas rituals creating an ecumenical harmony? As we take pride in how ancient the tradition of public Christmas trees in Riga are, it's worth remembering that little fir trees have since ancient times been an element of Latvian wedding and funeral celebrations. Let's remember that alongside the raucous Christmas celebrations, the *dainas* (Latvian folk songs) also speak of a moment when "quieten young ones, quieten old ones", and God himself calmly sits down at the head of the table.

While reflecting on the needs of a modern person, *The Practical Guide* invites us to remember the traditions of our ancestors, listen to stories of Christmas past and create our own festivities filling them with meaningful substance.

Merry Christmas!
Gita Lancere

Christmas Time

Māra Mellēna

Christmas celebration time at the end of the year is different for each of us, however, our latitude ensures that it is always a time when light is scarce and the darkness is deep; when night like a long black fir tree obstructs our path and the day is wrapped in grey rather than the bright light white. This is the time when the achievements and the unfished tasks of the year are assessed and new ones planned, when the friends forgotten in the frenzy of work must be remembered in Christmas greetings (cards, texts, emails with pictures, and then all those little gifts, etc.) and in the year end whirl, time must be found to celebrate with family and relatives, in a circle of friends, with workmates or alone – to prepare, to enjoy, to accompany. You must navigate your own course between the model offered by shopping malls and other, not so pervasive alternatives.

Latvian Christmas celebrations have developed along with history and each period has left its mark. Within them we find a communal memory, of western European traditions handed down through the Baltic German gentry as well as a Soviet legacy that includes a focus shift to New Year's Eve, Father Frost and Snow White, the song *A Christmas Tree Once in the Forest Born*, and there is no escaping *Jingle Bells* brought to us by pop culture. The traditions borrowed from elsewhere have integrated so deeply that for generations now, Latvians see these as their own. Let's not overstep the mark as censors by favouring our own over the traditions of strangers, and let the people decide. My grandmother decorated the tree with candles, baked bacon rolls (*pīrāgi*), and gingerbread, and was convinced that little performances in front of the tree were an indelible part of Christmas. I too am a grandmother now and I do exactly the same. My Grandmother wasn't concerned with which of these traditions was authentically Latvian and which ones came from afar, only insofar as from time to time she grumbled about the difficulty of finding a special spice that was essential for the gingerbread. I must admit that Christmas for me tastes of mandarins and gingerbread. I remember the Christmas packages for children from my parents' workplace. They would contain one or two mandarins but oh how I longed for more. At the time, *grūdenis* (a risotto-like dish made from barley) and pearl-barley sausage together with lingonberry jam to me seemed like the one of the craziest inventions of the adult world. In our family, barley porridge is popular as a simple staple, but it would never be considered as food for celebrations. That is why now, with a hundred years in-between, we look at Christmas traditions as a whole, and for good reason. They endure regardless of where this or that element, food or melody came from. Traditional Latvian culture evolved by history is as complex and as multi-layered as the history of our country itself.

Every new generation finds its own celebration model wherein the inherited, the original, the borrowed and the local intertwines in an indivisible ball, and each new experience of celebrating brings in new variations to an existing scenario.

When I posed a question about the most important elements of Christmas to folklore teachers (those for whom a significant part of their day is devoted to introducing children to Latvian traditions) and limited the list to seven items, the most popular were – the Christmas tree, candles, snow, gingerbread baked by children (the process as well as the result), going to church, lighting a tree in the forest, baking bacon rolls, silence, Christmas music, visiting, gifts, eating mandarins etc. etc. Each had their own order of words, their own motivation for listing specifically these things and each had their own childhood memories. Where, amongst this great diversity of experiences, morsels of memories and momentary flashes

could we find Latvian traditional culture? And what about those traditions that weren't mentioned at all – log hauling, going trick or treating, rituals and games, fortune telling, eating kūķis?

Christmas – the (re)birth of light

A family from Kurzeme, Ieva, Arnis and their two daughters from Liepaja, describe their Christmas celebrations for the *Latviijas avīze* newspaper. "we will decorate a tree in the forest, gather our relatives in our new house and celebrate as Latvians are want to do - with all those activities."

Ieva's experience with Christmas celebrations has developed via an active dialogue with Latvian folklore, not only with her family, but in a wider circle – helping to initiate celebrations in tertiary education institutions, schools and kindergartens by introducing the younger generation to Latvian Christmas traditions.

Ieva expresses her attitude and belief in folklore as follows: "My aim is to live, preserve and plant folklore into our children so that in the future they can continue to celebrate Latvian festivities together with their own children and this process would continue indefinitely. There is no way of expressing the atmosphere, the mystical miracle of Christmas better than it is said in this folksong:

The silver rain fell on Christmas Eve
All the tiny twigs sparkled in silver
The candles burnet all night in their silver lanterns
The moon lit a path for the Sun's daughters' escort
The Sun gave her daughter from the spirit world to ours.

We are very lucky that we have the opportunity to enjoy four separate seasons. Human lives also have four seasons, spring, summer, autumn, winter. A day consists of the morning, daytime, the evening and the night. Light follows darkness, darkness follows light. In folklore light is born on the 21st of December and around this time we all live in anticipation of this miracle." Beautiful harmonious Christmas thoughts, a perspective on folklore, and I believe that most people who work with folklore will agree with this stance both on heritage as well as with the interpretation of the song – ancient archetypical notions of the re-birth of light.

The battle between light and dark can also be found in Christmas games. According to Elita Olupe, an expert on Latvian seasonal rituals, the games that were played at Christmas time were also played at other times, however "Christmas had its own ritual games that later, when they had lost their original magical significance, developed into independent games, devoid of their Christmas connection. Firstly they are the Sun and Moon, Goat and Wolf and the Hawk and Partridge games."[1] The author also draws our attention to the fact that the Goat and Wolf game is well documented throughout Latvia as being linked to symbolic activities to ward off wolves in order to protect the household. It may also be a link to ancient rituals of sacrifice. Even more interesting is that the usual tandem in Baltic folklore is the wolf and sheep, but in the Slavic tradition - the wolf and goat. In Latvia, the wolf and goat pair appear mostly in the material found in Latgale.

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[1] Edīte Olupe, Latviešu gadskārtu ieražas. Rīga. Avots. 1992. Page 38

There are relatively few festive songs where we can see mention of the birth of Christ at Christmas. Academics point out that this is the direct influence of Christianity, but even these songs can be attributed to the symbolic depiction of the birth of light.

As we can see, the interplay of darkness and light in folklore has many forms. Duality, opposites, black and white, light and dark, the goat and the wolf – are so clearly divided in Latvian Christmas traditions that for a modern person it is unusual, impossible, even unacceptable, for the world is so diverse and everything is interspersed with everything else, the good inside the bad and the bad inside the good. It's only in fairy tales that there is such clarity and everything is happily resolved, it's only in a ritual game that the goat is torn to pieces by a head-spinning dance, however at times it's precisely this division that is essential to regain balance and equilibrium in order to be able to sing with conviction:

Go sun and moon
How beautifully you weave
Where the sun treads the winter
There the moon treads the summer
LTdz 10420

The View Over Pārdaugava
Vilhelm Purvītis
The 1910ies
The collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art

These are notions of an unchanging order, repetition, the sun's path in the heavens, annihilation and rebirth and its reflection in the sun's story. These are reflections on eternity without which it's hard to imagine Christmas. This is also the perfect time to tell these stories, guess riddles, sing songs, and do things together. The joy of collaboration is expressed in rituals and games.

Christmas – Yuletide

Christmas Eve is also called Log Night (Yule Night). This name is mentioned only a few times in the dainas, but there is a great deal of historical evidence about this tradition. It has been gathered in Osvalds Līdeks' book *Latvian Celebrations* (1940). The oldest evidence dates back to the 17th century. Paul Einhorn in his 1636 work *Reformatio gentis leticcae in ducatu Curlandie* says: "As far as we can tell from the remains of their elk gods, they served rude and impudent Gods and celebrated rude and impudent festivities for them. On our Christ's night and even the night before that, they have shameless celebrations with eating and drinking, dancing, leaping and shouting, where they go from house to house ferociously shouting about and calling this night a dance night, because they spend the evening and the whole night with dancing, singing and leaping. The same evening is also called Yule Night for they spend it dragging around a huge log accompanied by great shouting, which they later burn, thus showing their great delight."[2] This description indicates a living tradition apart from and in contrast to the Christian Christmas traditions. It has also influenced the writers that followed, Gothard Friedrich Stender and Jakob Lange. In his dictionary (1773), Jakob Lange notes that Yule Night is a pagan festivity where a log is burnt during hilarious celebrations. Stender, in his *Lettische Grammatik (1783),* writes: "Yule Night is around the time of our Christmas when they drag around a log as a symbol of hardship, accompanied by

[2] Osvalds Lideks. Latviešu svētki. Rīga. 1940. Page 9.

eating, drinking and leaping about. With comical festivities, the log is burnt as a sign that all the difficult work of the summer and autumn has come to an end."[3] This descriptive tradition continues in the 19th century press with publications like *Mājas Viesis* and *Latviešu Avīzes* in the 50ies and 60ies. A new aspect of hauling the log is proffered by Ludis Bērziņš who notes that hauling the log is a drive to mark the sun's turning in the direction of spring and a desire to alleviate this task for the sun. Rolling the log emulates the movement of the sun, its burning, the triumph of light over dark and consequently the return of both the sun and the warmth to nature. Līdeks research also points to the fact that many reports describe yuletide celebration every week during the autumn and winter period, but we will not go into this question right now.

These are the sources on which the reconstructions of log hauling by folklore ensembles at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century are based. The experience gained during revitalising rituals, beginning with the motivation and ending with the steps in the ritual itself, is a job for the future, however, observing this tradition for more than 20 years, it can be concluded that log hauling today is more of a public activity rather than a component of family Christmas celebrations. Log burning traditions throughout European history have been well documented. They were known in Germany in the 12th century, a little later in England, France and Scandinavia, however, it seems that the tradition of hauling the log from house to house is unique to the Latvians. Town and city living, let alone living in high rise apartments is a serious hurdle to performing this ritual.

Come Sister, Visit

In Latvian folklore, *Meteņi* (the Spring Equinox) features as the time for distant visitors, however if we go by Christmas celebrations depicted in classical Latvian literature, like Eduards Virza's *Straumēni,* Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš' *Baltā grāmata*, Pēteris Upenieks *Balandnieki* and my own experiences, then the Christmas holidays are the time for visiting, crazy overeating and the enjoyment of winter fun. Adult children with their own children go to visit parents. Those that spend their time in the scurry of the big city travel to the country farmhouse and grandma and grandpa travel to the city to see their grandchildren. Groups of friends go skiing and spending the night in the bathhouse by the lake. The usual and unusual variations on this formula for visiting are many. And the bird of Christmas joy feathers its nest in each of these meeting places – in each one, a tree is lit, a festive feast is spread, and somehow the time is spent in conversations, stories, games and performances. And, the parade of masks which is one of the most widely known Christmas traditions, and is really nothing much more than a special visit bestowing fertility, health and well-being, fending off evil and creating an exciting game of getting-to-know-one-another amongst familiar and unfamiliar neighbours. The ultimate prize for the masked one is to remain undetected, but after "a verdict of the old court" when all masks fall, everyone either sits at the table together, or, they all go on to the next house, thereby underscoring the importance of being together.

Kūķis and other Christmas Goodies

A rich feast is part of Christmas and although the characteristic dishes have changed over time, the idea of the special meaning of the many dishes has remained surprisingly intact. For a Latvian farmer, the ancient pig's snout which is cooked together with grains ground in a mortar and pestle and peas and beans was considered to be the most typical, healthy and prosperity–inducing dish. This dish was called *kūķis, kočs* or *Kīķas*. Sometimes Christmas Eve

[3] Ibid. Page 10.

itself was called *Kūķa* Night. Winding back the traditions of preparing the Christmas feast from the area I was brought up in, my memories as a small child and visiting relatives, friends and neighbours, I must admit that although the pig's snout was often mentioned, it was rarely actually put on the table. Even though it was done, it more often than not was smoked or baked rather than boiled. The peas were prepared separately and this dish often served as the table decoration rather than as the main dish, besides, for most, especially the children, it was deemed to be too heavy and fatty. Roast pork of various cuts, a fish with large scales (the scales need to be collected and put aside in order for prosperity to increase), chicken bouillon with bacon rolls, potatoes of various kinds, turnips, carrots, beets, marinated cucumbers and mushrooms, pickled cabbage and other vegetables and boiled grey peas with smoked meat morsels was the Christmas feast in my family. An essential part of this feast was (is) dessert which was "manna from heaven" layered ryebread, or, as grandma would say ambrosia, fruit compote or stewed fruit, fruit flan, coffee, a fruit bowl filled to the brim, a basket of home-made gingerbread, chocolate sweets and good red wine.

In the same manner as all festive occasions, the essential feature is the over-abundance of food and over indulgence of the guests which serves as a direct contrast to everyday frugality. At the heart of this excess there are ancient magical beliefs about encouraging fertility and prosperity by indulging in them. If the festive table is abundant and the guests are well fed and happy, then the next year will be fertile, healthy and successful.

Christmas Decorations

The rooms were decorated with *puzuri* – intricate special structures made from straw or reeds known by various names like *lukturi, puzuri, krīģi*, birds, etc. etc.

They hang from the ceiling and rafters. Today Latvians decorate the Christmas tree with decorations bought from shops based on their own taste. The decorations tend to be saved from year to year and the collection grows. The branches of the tree are lit with candles or electric lights. At the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, advent crowns have particularly grown in popularity. They are lit with candles or hung on the front door for a month before Christmas. Equally popular are fir trees in pots and window decorations that are reminiscent of candelabra. Private homes and gardens are decorated with strings of coloured lights. There are many other aspects that are essential to celebrating Christmas that we will leave this time. These activities include pouring lead for luck, giving gifts, greetings cards, performing by the Christmas tree, the Christmas tree in the family circle and the public sphere – at work, in town, in the city. The structure of these celebrations, and their historical context guides us on the road to an understanding of our Christmas as an enduring amalgam of a diverse range of inherited, derived, authentic and invented set of activities that are ours because they are the festivities that we celebrate here and now.

Christmas Diversity

Agita Misāne

Of all the Christian festivals, for non-Christians, Christmas is their favourite. Perhaps that's why there are a few popular misunderstandings. Firstly, although very important, Christmas is not the greatest celebration for Christians. The most important celebration is Christ's resurrection, or Easter. The New Testament says clearly and very directly – and if Christ hasn't risen, then our preaching is worthless and your religion is also worthless (1. Cor.15:14) So, if the message of Easter is not true, in the greater scheme of things, this religion would have no relevant purpose. Perhaps that's why in the early Christian communities, they weren't particularly interested in when Jesus was born. The second widely held misunderstanding is that it happened on the 25th of December (or on the night preceding this date). No-one knows the precise year, let alone the day.

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According to the New Testament, it happened in Judea during the last years of the reign of King Herod the Great. Herod died in 4 BC, therefore, a few years before Jesus' "official" birthday, which is the cornerstone of our system of counting time. Before this miscalculation was revealed, there have been many attempts at a more precise calculation, like, exactly when did Kireny rule in Syria as Luke writes, the year in which Cesare Augustus proclaimed the census, the reason why Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem; as well as which star exactly was it that the Magi followed to pay homage to the new-born King of the Jews. A conclusive date hasn't been found, but at a guess, Jesus came into the world sometime between 8 and 4 BC.

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As far as the date is concerned, the evangelists didn't know anything about it either, or, it didn't seem important to them. Christian churches began to be interested in the date that Jesus could have been born around the 3rd century but the winter solstice for the date of Jesus birthday was chosen by the church in the middle of the 4th century. This was a time when the church grew rapidly in size and became consolidated. Christian doctrine was being formalised and its political influence grew.

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It's also not clear whether Jessi was born in a barn. Luke says that Joseph and Mary had no place to stay, they put the new-born in a manger and animals were grazed nearby. Therefore everything happened in a place where animals were kept and fed – in a barn, a shelter or a cave.

Was there not one woman in Bethlehem, who, having given birth herself would not have given Mary, by all accounts little more than a child herself, succour at such at time? It seems that "quiet little Bethlehem" was no idyllic village and Jesus was born into a heartless world, just like it is today.

The commemoration of Jesus' birthday took hold rapidly. Even though the core message of the scriptures would remain the same if the saviour of the world had been born on any day of the year, linking this date to the winter solstice can be seen as a wise move and not merely church politics. Widely spread opinion purports that the church tried very hard to add a Christian content to ancient festivals that were linked to the sun cult. The sun cult and its associated activities was a serious "competitor" to Christianity in the Roman Empire, reaching its greatest popularity precisely in the third and fourth centuries when the winter solstice festival *Dies invicti Solis* of the invincible sun (God) was celebrated in Rome.

However, the sun and light metaphors in the context of Christ's persona in the bible are used quite often, both in the New as well as the Old Testament which, chronologically is considerably older. "Darkness wraps the earth and deep dusk wraps its peoples but Our Lord rises like the sun over you and his magnificence appears in you" says the prophet Isiah (60:1) predicting the birth of Christ. Christ's coming to earth in human form is mercy "shining on every person", and on the other hand, at the time of his death, "the sun was darkened." In early Christian iconography, the sun was widely used as the symbol for Christ.

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Today many would contend that the 25th of December is not the astrological solstice. With time, the calendar gap continues to widen. It has developed due to the summation of the minutes that differ from the precise time of the earth's cycle around the sun in 365 days and 6 hours (that creates the 366th day every four years). It seems that the advocates of traditional culture celebrate Christmas and Jāņi a few days earlier not only for astronomical accuracy, but also because they want to distance themselves from Christ's birthday celebrations. Whilst there is no reason to particularly dwell on the differences between Christian and traditional religion's festivities, we shouldn't pretend that we don't see them, either. They are simply different celebrations that share however, a cultural space, somewhat similar symbols and a rhythm of time as outlined in the introduction – the division of festive time from everyday time, a culmination from sliding back into normal "non-festive" time. This rhythm is common for practically all religious and many secular celebrations. Traditionally preparation for Christmas begins with "spirit time" (veļu laiks) in November, but for the Christians, with Advent.

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The first mention of Advent in the Christian church is from the 4th century. From the 4th to the 6th century, it was considerable longer – at different times in differing parishes, it stretched from six to even eight weeks. In the year 567, The Council of Tours set Advent as four weeks of fasting before Christmas. Every week symbolises a 1,000 years of humanity as at the time, it was thought that there were 4,000 years between the creation of Adam and Eve and the birth of Christ. Many lovely symbolic traditions are associated with the time of Advent.

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Today the Advent crown with its four candles that are progressively lit each Sunday is very popular. The precise origin of the Advent crown is however, unknown, but likely to be in eastern Germany just before the reformation.

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This tradition reached the height of its popularity in the 20th century. As the commercial crowns today can be made from any material possible, there is a risk of losing its original symbolic function entirely. It should be made from evergreen plants – pine, fir, cedar that symbolise eternal life. Its form is round, with no beginning or end, symbolising the eternity of God and the immortality of the human soul. Now the Advent crown has candles of many colours, especially red and white, but in ancient times, as well as in many churches still today, on the first, second and fourth advent, a purple candle is lit, in accordance with the decor of the altar (the liturgical colour purple symbolises repentance for sins and the majesty of Christ), but on the third advent (*Gaudate*), a red candle is lit. *Gaudate* signifies the middle of the Advent time and the joy that the imminent arrival of Christ brings – a reference to the bible in the epistle to the Philippians: "Rejoice! . . . . . the King is nigh!" (Phil.4:4)

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In a consumer society, everything that should happen after Christmas – parties, markets, carousels, takes place in Advent. The logic of a festive cycle is to at first reflect on the

cardinal questions and/or prepare for the rituals, then receive the answers (the proclamation) or share stories and perform the main activities of the ritual, and only then, submit to wild celebration to your heart's content before returning to everyday routine.

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The study of comparative religion leads to conclude that there aren't "religious questions", rather there are religious answers. These answers to the same, or relatively similar questions (creating a false and superficial impression that all religions teach the same), are what make religions different.

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What is our problem and is there a solution? How can we deflect, or even defeat evil (in ourselves, in the world)? Is this possible cyclically or once for all time? Can we defeat the annihilation of man (and nature)? Will the sun ever die? Can we know the future – in the short term and the long term?

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All of these are Christmas related questions. Each of us gets our own answer. Just like *the Wolf and the Goat*, the group of mummers and the grim reaper. All the bad luck and unhappiness of the past year will be concentrated in the Yuletide log, and then it will burn away. The sun won't die and as each day grows lighter and lighter, it will be proof of this. See, we did everything right!

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The Christian church should also have its good news day. It could begin with a story about how Caesar Augustus once decreed that there should be a census. The "good news" of Christmas is that you won't receive on your merits, you will receive a majestic gift, for with the birth of Christ, the world has radically changed now and forever. "Every year anew, the Christ-child comes again" is just a song, but it's a reminder. There will be no more death, and you can inherit eternity. It will be totally free and therefore it has no price. It cannot be compared to anything else in any calculation. The sun will die sooner or later. You can either believe or disbelieve this message of course. But it cannot be compared to any of the aforementioned answers. They are just different celebrations by different religions that the march of history has brought together in time, space and language. Each celebrates something different. Besides, if neither of these messages, be it Christian or pagan rings true or acceptable to you, then Christmas truly is a festival of family and relatives, like a birthday, Mother's day and father's day all rolled into one, or it leads you to think of a larger community that is united by a common ritual. And finally, even those that say these festivities are for children, are not mistaken. A Christmas card once read: Yes indeed, God is a small child!

Traditional Latvian Winter Masked Parades

Elīna Kūla-Braže

What would Christmas be without the carnival of masks, the tinkle of metal and the crazy antics of the masked folk? How will you prepare for the parade of masks? What is the order of actions that should be performed on entering a home that welcomes us? What to do if the door isn't opened? A parade of masks is one of the most interesting Christmas activities, besides, it fits nicely into a modern context – home visits or visits to public places, to workplaces, educational institutions, masked parades in villages, as well as performances with audience participation in organised public events. Here the primary function of wearing the mask is exactly the same as in ancient times - to be unrecognizable with magical powers of tearing down the barrier between the real and the sacred world, and to perform imitation and fertility magic.

There are many explanations for the historical development of masks for Latvians and other nations. Animal masks have come from the totems of ancient tribes and from hunting and initiation rites. Agrarian and herding cultures have enriched masked parades with harvest and fertility symbols. Paradoxical characters represent the mystical world and the spirit world. Furthermore, urban life and carnivals have given an impulse to replicate different classes and professions.

In Latvia, in the 1980ies the folklore movement began to popularize masked parades that grew to become a staple part of city celebrations. Now we can observe the unification of these traditions as the scenarios, the visual look and the characters depicted by the masks have become very similar. Society too calls them by generalised names – the mummers (ķekatnieki, budēli) or gypsies.

The mummers try to get their public involved in their activities by singing ribald songs about them, dancing with them, playing games or poking fun at them. The following are widely known: spanking with a mummer's staff or juniper twigs, being poked by a *stebere* (a huge carrot to which two onions have been tied), fumigation by juniper, hauling the Yuletide log and burning it in the ritual fire, common games and dances, song fights and giving greetings of luck and good tidings. With a wealth of ethnographic material at their disposal, and utilizing the creative imagination of mask makers, Latvian masked parades have become a new element of traditional culture that is growing fast. As the participants make their own masks, they grow into the characters ahead of time and learn all the required habits. All the detailed descriptions in folkloric materials about the behaviour of the various characters are now easily accessible. Shorter descriptions about masks and activities are also available.

***Kaļadas* – One Form of Mummery**

In ancient times, the masked paraders were called *kaļadnieki*. They were active around Christmas time. In the beginning, these were the masked Christmas mummers who sang songs with a chorus of *Kaladū, kaļadā!* Etc. These mummers are quite similar to the gypsies and the *budeļi*. They sing and dance and walk about with long canes, just like the *kujinieki*. In a 17th century book called *The Old Dictionary*, a Yule Night is described as follows: "The Log Night was part of the Winter Festival. They blow the horn to gather, and then to play and dance. They would say to each other – lets go *kaļadā*!" Paul Einhorn described a 17th century Christmas evening that he saw with his own eyes where the central activity was log hauling as a great and bawdy celebration.

In the 2nd half of the 19th century, the *kaļadnieki* were described as follows: "the wives and daughters would dress up as gypsies and go from house to house, just like gypsies, reading your fortunes from the palm of your hand, or, they would dance and sing banging the ground with long canes *'Ļu, ļu, kandaļu* ...' after that, they would be given treats and they would move on to the next house."[4]

***Suitu Ķekatas* (The Suitu Mummers)**

In the Suitu region (the Alsunga, Gudenieki, Base and Jūrkalne parishes) the was a tradition to go mumming (*iet ķekatās*) from Christmas to the New Year. "Later they would only do this at Christmas, in the evening. To turn up at Christmas without an invitation was considered to be very rude and most were afraid to do so, but to walk around as mummers was allowed. The mummers were always welcome and always given treats. The mummers, or mummer children as they were called, had to be masked. They would dress up as a bear, a goat, a horse, a crane, a stork, or some other kind of animal. Often they would dress up as gypsies. They would take *kokles* (a zither-like Latvian stringed instrument), and later, harmonicas and violins with them. For Christmas, everything was prepared for the mummers. A horse's head and neck was made from a tree stump, and its back from two pieces of wood. That was covered with a sheet and the horse was ready. Two people were under the sheet where they weren't seem, and steered it in the right direction. The third person was the horse's owner. The mummer's horse also had a mane and tail (made from real horse hair). Bears and goats were made from unfinished furs and hides and a crane was easy to imitate. When the mummers would arrive in a strange place, one of them would go inside and start a conversation with the mistress or master of the house. The visitor would ask for lodgings, being very tired. Then he would say that he has a horse that is also tired and could be put up in the barn. Finally the visitor would say that his horse could dance beautifully and would the master let him bring the horse inside. There would be something for everyone to see, how well the animal danced.

The master shakes his head in disbelief and asks the visitor to show the horse's passport. One must be sure that he isn't a fraudster or thief. The visitor pulls a piece of paper from his pocket and gives it to the master. Having read it, convinced that he is no trickster, the master allows the horse to be brought inside. Bringing the horse inside a fracas ensues. The horse snorts and kicks, refusing to come inside.

At first the children shriek, but soon quieten down. Finally the horse submits to its owner and is led into the room by its reins. Now the animal starts to do tricks, kicking, neighing, hopping on its hind legs, running around the room, If there's a small boy, he is sat on the horse's back.

Not all children will agree to this. Finally the horse is "led to the barn." After that the visitor tells the master that he also has other animals. They agree that those too can be brought into the room and shown. The owner of the animals brings in the bear on a chain who starts to summersault, growl and do various tricks. The crane and goat also come into the room. The goat walks around the room and threatens to jab someone with his horns. The crane walks around the room twisting its neck and trying to peck someone with its beak. Finally the animals leave the room. The mummers take off their masks and the music and dancing begins. The mummers are given beer, white bread, meat and sausages. When the mummers arrived they were greeted with a song:

[4] Literary supplement to the Mājas Viesis newspaper. Nr. 52., 22nd December 1870.

Please mother
Let the children inside
The mummers' children
Have very cold feet.

There were also the mummers that didn't have animals. They would "do" many houses in one night. They came wearing masks, danced about, drank some beer, and went on to the next house still wearing their masks. As mumming took place only at Christmas time, then the mummers songs were associated with Christmas (…) The mummers arrived singing Christmas songs."[5]

***Budēļi* – Another Form of Mummery**

In Zemgale and Kurzeme (Courland), where the mummers were called *budēļi*, mummers singing and mumming songs were wide-spread. Descriptions about mumming can be found with a programme of activities and a succession of songs, as well as descriptions of their appearance.

"Mumming songs were spread throughout the western part of Zemgale and in Kurzeme, especially in Saldus, Tukums, Talsi, and also the Dobele region. Most of the mumming songs were collected during folklore expeditions in the 1940ies and 60ies. The songs that are sung in succession with the same melody make mention of the mummer's activities – arrival and greetings songs, jeering songs, feasting, songs for various activities and goodbye songs. In between the songs, scary shouts or shrieks are performed, sometimes the song ends with boo!, Oooo!, urrr!, brrrr! The narrator says: now and then shout boo! Now and then angrily growl brrrr! One woman says the words, the others walk around in a circle growling bb! Vv!"[6]

In Džūkste there is mention of the *štāts-budēļi*, a term derived from the word to dress-up. "they adorned themselves, as much as they could and knew how with paper; the men dressed as bears, as horses, hung alarm clocks around their necks, and all sang mummers' songs, danced jigs, polkas, the *francaise*, the reilender, the *Hackenspitz,* the waltz*,* the *kreuz polka* and the one-legged waltz – yes, that's what the dances were like*! "*[7]

In Blīdene, at the end of the 1880ies, there is an account of the activities of the mummer's night. "Wear the fur coat inside out, put on the straw hat, decorate yourself, and go out with the crowd to the neighbour's house. The mummers have a club in one hand and a birch switch in the other. On arrival they mess about, jumping, dancing, playing the fool, growling, ringing the alarm clock, singing mummers songs. Having arrived, the mummers poke you with the club and sing:

Good evening, good evening,
Has the wound from last year's poke healed yet?

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[5] Šperliņš, Jānis. *Senās suitu kāzas un ķekatas*. Rīga, 1937.

[6] Jēkabs Vītoliņs. Latviešu tautas mūzika, gadskārtu ieražu dziesmas. Rīga 1959.
[7] LFK 880, 2228, Džūkste

All year I've slept in the shadows,
Now it's my night, I'm coming out.

Oh uncle mummer, where did you get your switch?
In the green grove, on amber hill.

On the silver hill, in the green grove,
Ķikata lept into the cabbage patch,

Let the white cabbages grow,
Mummer uncle, raise your children.

When the children grow, you will be hung
Folks will ask, where's the mummer from.

From Riga, from Riga, the burgher's son

Lazy girls in that house there.
An upswept room,
The mummer got tangled
Like a chick in chaff.

Mother wake your daughters
Go to check the cow,
Will she have lambs, or little kids,
Or maybe little colts.

Oh uncle mummer
Make fun of my daughter-in-law.
I'll give you some mittens
For a jolly jape.

I want meat, I want meat, I've got a long nose,
I hung all the meat from the end of my nose.

He who gave meat, will have healthy cows,
He who gave herrings, will have healthy cats [8]

At the end of the 1890ies, a different version of a visit from the mummers was published in a supplement to the *Dienas Lapas* newspaper. "The first job of the mummers on entering a house is to spank each member of the household in turn with the switch they've brought along. They also ask: "were you waiting for the mummers, were you waiting for the mummers?" If the answer is yes, they get off lightly, if the answer is no, they are not let alone until they answer, yes, yes! Sometimes, even though they strike lightly, the switch may fall harder than usual for a joke, but you can't be angry with a mummer, you must take everything as a joke, for as they say, if you haven't been spanked by the mummers, next summer you'll be eaten by horseflies and mosquitoes.

[8] These activities were recorded in June 1897 in the Blīdene parish from the Mistress of the Kalēdeļi farm. *Ķekatās iet (lēkt)* // Filologu biedrības raksti. 2. sēj. Rīga, 1922.

When all have received their fair share of the switch, the mummers stand in line in the middle of the room and the oldest one, the one who sings the best, stands at the front and slowly marching forward, starts to sing various songs.

As the main mummer greets the mistress of the house, he starts singing and the others join in.

Good evening, mistress of the house
Is the room warm?
If the room's warm
Then we'll have a good time.

After that, the main mummer, seeking to prove he has many followers, starts to sing:

A great calamity has befallen
The leader of the mummers
A metal girth has broken
A bunch of mummers has fallen out.

Impatient to get some refreshments from the hostess, they try to secure such by singing:

We want meat, we want meat

And more:

I know, I know, but I won't tell
Father killed a baby goat
The hide is in the barn, under the tub
The meat is in the shed, in the bucket.

Seeing that their singing is not to the hostess' liking, they continue with satire:

The mistress scratches her ear
Not wanting to give us meat
Whether you scratch or not scratch
You'll still have to give us meat.

If the hostess is not listening and doesn't provide refreshments, the mummer is emboldened to resort to threaten to leave.

I ask mistress that you give us drink
I'm not inclined to linger
I have fields to plough
With my silver ploughshares.

Having subjected the hostess to their jeering songs, they're still not ready to leave and wait for the daughters of the house – as was the custom – to give them mittens and sashes for providing entertainment, but they too are stingy. The mummers don't like this and they start to sing:

Let's go boys, to that house yonder

There where the smoke puffs blue
There the girls are knitters
White wool spinners
They'll give us mittens, they'll give us socks
They'll give us white shawls.

If the girls protest by saying the mummer is just clumsy and hasn't entertained them well enough which is why they're not getting anything, the mummer is not short of an answer and tries to prove that it's the fault of girls that he is like he is, by saying:

The girls drove me 'round
In that tin wagon of theirs
The wagon squeaked – the axel broke
I fell forward and broke my neck.

Whilst they argue, a little old lady sitting by the oven asks the mummers to make fun of her shameless daughter-in-law, good an' proper!

You there, big man mummer
Give my daughter–in-law a good thrashing
I'll give you some mittens
For your trouble.

The lazy mistress gets the following song:

Sleep, sleep, mistress fair
Your work is done
The chicken's done the weeding
And the cat's churned the butter.

But for a diligent prosperous one:

What's that shining, what's that sparkling
Underneath the mistress' bed
The mistress's shoes they sparkle
With their diamond buckles.

For the lazy ones:

That house has lazy girls
They don't look after their animals
Little lambs bah in the barn
Little goats in the field.

Having given their jeering songs to each one in turn, the mummers depart for the next house where they sing and joke anew. However, if they encounter a kinder hostess who gives them more food and drink, and even a pair of mittens or a headscarf, then the flattery is never-ending. At first they sing about the hostess:

There was a mistress, and what daughters she had
She knew how to bring them up

Born on a Friday, grown on Saturday
On Sunday the suitors arrived.
They ate milk, they drank milk
They washed their faces in milk.

And more:

There was a mistress, and what daughters she had
They knew well how to make a trousseau
Five men and six horses
Couldn't move the trousseau chest.

Even the generous host is complimented for his strong beer as follows:
Oh you Miķelis from forest's edge
What a sweet beer you brew
Once I took a drink
All the hair on my head squeaked.

And so, well-fed and having drunken his fill, the mummer goes home and the mummers' festivities are brought to a close.[9]

Jaunpils Budeļi (The Juanpils Mummers)
In earlier times, when songs were a-plenty, the people of Jaunpils had been great mummers. The mummers were dressed in various costumes – as a devil, a dog, a goat, a boy as a girl, a girl as a man, as hunters, as beaters, and there was no shortage of dogs. The mummer's main accessory is a bundle of twigs with which the household is spanked. Once the ritual is over, they join forces. The songs are selected for each individual. Then the mummers are given food and drink, and after that there is dancing. When they have had enough of one house they pack up and go to the next, where the same awaits them. If they meet someone walking or riding along the way, pity help them if they don't just abandon their journey and join in with the merry band of mummers.

The first job when arriving at a new house is to scrape and rattle the twigs along the windows for that is the sign that the mummers have arrived. The windows are rattled until they are let in; once they are in, someone who knows goes ahead and rounds up mainly the youg'uns; if there's a good singer among the oldies, those too – then those jeering songs are sung depending on who deserves what, for it's a pretty painful twig that the mummer wields, grabbing here and there and listing all the good and bad deeds of everyone. If they are not let in somewhere, then the mummers get "angry" and try to break in. Usually a helper from inside lets them in through some other hole. Then "a great punishment" awaits the culprit. He is surrounded by the mummers and they go at him "let the skin smoke" with their switches. In-between, other things can happen, like water pouring. Sometimes a mummer pours water over a farmer, or a farmer throws a full bucket of water over a mummer's head, but its cold outside! In such cases you have to dance so hard that you dry off, or better, to keep mummering "*jābudulē"* while your poor fellow mummer dries off or is given dry clothes with which to continue the trek. Often, the mummers set out in a group pf

[9] DLp 1887, 104.

two or three, but by the end of the night a crowd has gathered. This would happen especially when the servants' quarters of large manor houses were close together.

This parade would continue until the morning when they would all disband to their own homes, agreeing where to meet in order to visit the remaining "un-mummered" houses. This mummering would go on for about a week. Mothers would frighten their errant children by saying: "the mummers are coming!", an effective threat as children were scared of these creatures who were strange and given to fighting.[10]

The Masks of Vidzeme

Historically, masking wasn't very wide-spread during Christmas in Vidzeme as it was more usual around Martins-day, Katrine-day, Andrejs-day, the spring equinox and weddings. We suggest those folk of Vidzeme preparing themselves for masked parades at Christmas, should learn from the traditions of others. In the Cesis area, Martins-day, Katrine-day, Andrejs-day revellers would go "maskos". "They smear their faces with coal, put on raggedy clothes – because the motlier and the shaggier the better. (…) The masks dance, play music and jokingly predict the future. They have a dancing bear and sometimes put on a mime show. The mime show consists of one conducting and beating time while the others open and close their mouths in silence.[11]

In Koknese there were a special kind of maskers, the *skultelnieki* who walked around during Shrovetide. "The mummers that were called *skultelnieki* tended to look as follows: men wore women's clothes and women wore men's clothes, their faces were smeared with coal, or they attached the long moss from pine trees to make thick beards so as to be completely unrecognizable even to their closest neighbours. Each has a soft broom with which to spank those that hadn't done what they were supposed to."[12]

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[11] LFK 1640, 7388, Līgatnē, Vecpiebalgā, Cirstos, Zaubē
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Winter Solstice or Christmas Decorations

Māra Kuplā

Latvians didn't have many opportunities to celebrate in the seasonal year. Joyous weddings full of hope, a new life coming into the world and a send-off to join one's ancestors were the key events of family life. However, as for every agrarian nation, the summer and winter solstices that signified important changes in nature were equally important. The pagan rite of hauling the yuletide log around the buildings, the homestead as well as the fields and then burning it which symbolised the beginning of a new cycle of life, slowly flowed together with Christian traditions and Christmas came into the Latvian home. It adopted the joy of decoration from the wedding traditions, but the fir tree, for Latvians, since time immemorial, had always been associated with the notion of eternal life.

Tiny decorated fir trees (30, 40 and 60 cm) had always been used to embellish the top of the horse collar of the cart that carried the newlyweds at a wedding. Having arrived at the celebration venue, this fir tree was often placed on the roof gable or tied by its tip to the rafter over the wedding table above the wedding couple. At other celebrations, a little fir tree with goose feather stalks alternatively threaded with acorn caps and paper cut-outs, served as an interesting instrument of sound and rhythm as its stalk was pounded on the table. However, as the cornerstone of Christmas traditions, the Christmas tree came into Latvian domestic life only in the 19th century The Christmas tree was decorated with the same elements that were used as decoration for other celebrations. Little *puzuri*, either flat or three dimensional made from golden straw brought out the green of the fir tree, some coloured wool added brightness, and straw chains stretched from the very top to the

bottom or encircled the tree many times. The long bright aspen plaining wood curls turn the tree into a unique gift of nature and a celebratory focal point.

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One of the simplest and most wide-spread forms of decoration were the so-called “straw chains” that were made from 3 – 4 cm long pieces of straw threaded onto string interspersed with coloured squares of paper cut-outs or pieces of fabric. Goose feather stalks were also used instead of straw. These chains of links rolled into balls were saved by girls and used from time to time for different celebrations. Equally simple strings of ringed links made from rye and wheat straw that were soaked in water and flattened were also used. But how these strings and chains made from straw and hung from corner to corner below the ceiling or rafters, or hung in loops along the walls could transform a room!

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In pride of place, above the festive table a *puzurs* or lantern, made by various techniques, was hung. The simplest method was to take a potato or some other root vegetable and stick rye straws into it like the rays of a star. They would then be adorned with shiny pieces of paper or even paper flowers. The straws could be used with their heads of grain intact, as well as pieces of kindling to which bunches of feathers could be tied. Hung under the usually dark ceiling in twisted strings, like little suns they would slowly turn in the warm air created by candles or people.

Without trying to analyse whether the elements included in the composition of the *puzurs* can be related to the family – mother, children, children’s children which are connected by unseen but strong ties; or whether the spatial design of the *puzurs* represents an understanding about a model of the world, the sun and the stars that anyhow are both connected and at the same time not, and can be seen and explained as a whole; in any case, the grand *puzurs* was the central element of a room’s decoration. The *puzurs* or lantern consists or many consolidated figures, which are based on four, six or eight-cornered crystal forms. Each crystal is made by threading together straws or reeds and adding a bunch of coloured wool, feathers, plaining curls or empty egg shells at the top.

In order to make the decorations, the materials must be collected well in advance. Therefore, here is some advice on how to do that. Plants must be collected when they begin to ripen so that when they are dried, they will retain their tone and shine. Baltic Rushes (*pļavu doņi*) are collected in June. Reed tips, grasses, rye and oat straw with the heads of grain intact, and immortelle (*salmenes*) are collected when they begin to flower as then during drying, their flowers will fully open and not fall apart.

The reeds and straw that will be cut into piece should be collected when they are fully grown as they will be more durable. They should only be collected on sunny days as raindrops or dew will leave blotches. Pick the leaves off all plants and dry them just like teas, laying them out in a thin layer in the shade in a draught. The dried plants should be stored in a dry space. Birds’ feathers (turkey, goose, duck) should also be collected. The small ones for decoration, the large ones for their stalks. Don’t forget the acorn caps, chestnuts, rose hip berries, and coloured wool and paper and fabric off-cuts. Also prepare the egg shells, emptying the strongest ones by gently blowing out the contents. If you want coloured eggs, you must immerse than in a hot onion skin brew or any kind of liquid fabric dye. You can also dye the feathers and heads of grain in the same way.

Having chosen the right elements, cut the stalks of the rushes, grasses, straw and reeds with a very sharp knife to the right length and cut away any bits containing knots. If the stalks split when cutting, soak them in warm water for 20 minutes. It's also advisable to soak the acorn caps too, so that they don't break when you pierce them.
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Flattened straws are made by ironing them with a warm (in order to retain the colour and not burn them) iron, or by pulling them through your fingers whilst wearing leather gloves. Cut the fabric off-cuts along the straight thread into 3 – 4 cm pieces and unravel 0.5 cm from the edge to make fringing.
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Paper stars or "flowers" are made from 4.5 and 5 cm diameter paper circles. Fold the circles three times along the diameter and cut 0.5 deep grooves.
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You will still need: coloured wool, smooth linen or cotton thread (there is still a possibility that it may tear the straw) and a thin darning needle. For threading the long portion you will need a thin sturdy piece of wire with a bent end in which to tie the thread.
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We must remember that the decorating materials are always the simplest and the most accessible; the form is not limited but the general traditional principles should be followed.

Auseklītis (the morning star)
This is to be made from four 7 cm pieces of grass and four pieces of 5 cm long straw. Place the grass in pairs in a cross and wind them with the thread. On each side, place a pair of straws and wind them with the thread. Cut the tops of the straws at opposing angles. Hang them vertically.

Straw Ring Chain

The chain is made from flattened rye straw. The proportion of length to width is 15 : 1.Each straw ring is pulled through the previous one and the ring is folded as in the diagram.

Threading and tying

Take 2 lengths of thread and tie them together. Thread one 4 cm reed on thread A, and two reeds on thread B. Tie the threads together. Continue, by making triangles above and below, tying off each as you go.

A garland from 7 cm long reed sections interspersed with 2 paper flowers with the coloured side facing outwards.

In between each piece of reed, place a piece of coloured fabric or an acorn cap. Alternatively, you can also use 4 – 6 cm long goose feather stalks and embellish them in the same way.

The Lantern
The lantern is a component of the *puzurs*. Prepare 12 sections of equal length reeds and thread them according to the diagram above: Start by threading a “square” and continue as if you making a “triangle” above and below.

The Puzurs

Thread the sections according to the above diagram. To make larger lanterns, increase the length of the sections by 30% OR 50%. When they are ready, thread the smaller lanterns inside the bigger ones, and tie them to the apex in such a way that they can move freely. The corners of the outer lanterns can be decorated by adding feathers, coloured wool or eggshells with clumps of feathers.

Suns and Spheres
This decoration has an uncooked potato, turnip or swede at its centre. It is hung by a string that has been pushed through the vegetable using a thin wooden stake or skewer.
a) stick the potato all over with birds’ feathers. Prick the potato first with a skewer so that it is easier to insert the feathers.
b) cover the potato with reeds, grasses, sheaves of grain, straw flowers and other dried plants to make a pleasing range of colours and forms. Slice the bottom of each stalk diagonally and attach in the same way as the feathers.
c) In the same way, you can use any thin wooden sticks or skewers and cover them in little pieces of coloured paper or fabric and stick them into the potato.

Tīkliņš **(net, lacy cone)**
Take a square piece of paper and fold it twice to make a smaller square. Fold it diagonally. Cut into the triangle along the folded side with scissors alternating first one side, then the other. Carefully unfold the paper and holding the centre, pull the sides downwards. A lacy cone will be the result.

Snowflake
Affix a sun (made from 3 pieces of 7 cm straw tied together in the centre with coloured wool) at either end of two 27 cm long pieces of straw, 3.5 cms from the ends.. In the same manner, take two 14 cm long pieces of straw and affix suns (made from three 5 cm pieces of straw) at 2.5 cm from the ends. Tie the long pieces of straw together in the centre in a cross. Tie the shorter pieces of straw in a cross at a 45 degree angle to the long pieces of straw and fix them together in the centre with coloured wool.

Star
This object is made from 2 pieces. For each piece, take 7 pieces of Baltic Rushes and tie them together in the middle so that they fan out on either side. Take 2 pieces and tie them together in the middle to form a cross. Trim the edges at an angle. Hang them horizontally.

Butterflies
Take 2 squares of paper and pleat them. Place them in a cross and secure the centre with thread. Now they can be hung from the ceiling.

Roses
Take a pleated piece of paper, its proportion of length to width being 3:1 and tie it tightly in the middle. Fan out the ends so that the object forms a circle. Hang it horizontally by the centre point.

Latvian Christmas Cuisine
I will not be able to tell you anything new about the Christmas table of the ancient Latvians because at the time that Krišjānis Barons was collecting folksongs, there were no fans of ancient Latvian cuisine who could have written about it. I will simply repeat some of the popular staple dishes that have remained in the nation's memory so that they don't disappear in the onslaught of global cuisine. Over the last 10 – 20 years, we have become very familiar with the great diversity of international cuisine. As a result, even in the countryside where a chicken, cow or piglet can still be found, we have forgotten how to make home-made dishes like boiled half pig's head and snout, blood sausage or pastry wrapped ham etc.

Before we get to the food, I hope that everyone also wants to create some memorable moments for the eye in their homes.

White, the colour of peace and lucidity that prevails at Christmas, has always been apparent. It is accented on the table by candles, greenery, and if the home was affluent, then by good quality tableware like glass and silver. But these are not the only accents with which to catch the eye. A branch of *irbeņu* berries, rowanberries, sea-buckthorn, or hawthorn berries will have been found, or even a Christmas cactus that had just come into flower to create atmosphere. And it's the atmosphere that is the most important element to ensure that everyone feels happy and friendliness prevails. We can play with cranberries, red billberries, and rowanberries not only in the food but also in the table decoration, for example by pouring some of those coloured berries into clear glass vases, high glasses or even laboratory test tubes. Berries can be strung like beads, used to decorate *puzuri* or to create a contrast to the green fir fronds.

In putting together your festive menu, at first check the ingredients you have at home. Often there is a selection of frozen berries, mushrooms and prepared conserves that are saved right up to the next harvest. Use them, be generous! Remember the dried legumes. Not only the dried peas and the traditional pea dumplings, but also their use in hot dishes and dessert, like bean cake. Use products that fit your resources, be they time or money. Even small fish like little herrings (*renģes*), sprats or sardines can used for a cold starter or a hot dish.

Each region has its own peculiarities. There's no arguing here, for even the popular *sklandu rauši* are make from rye dough here, but from wheat elsewhere, and one cook may use the potato "lining" but another, without, opting for just the carrot filling.

Recipes change, creating variations from changing products and new kitchen appliances. Using only the ancient dishes is appropriate if the evening is planned in a traditional style featuring just wood, wicker, or clay dishes on the table, straw decorations for the Christmas tree and national costume for the guests.

Expectations also change. You may expect precise amounts of ingredients and cooking times, but as the women who made these dishes simply "felt" what was right and certainly

never wrote anything down and cooked on stoves and ovens that were fired by wood, in the spirit of tradition, we encourage to you to use your imagination and common sense and experiment yourself until you find the "right" proportions for your modern kitchen.

Living Grain
Dishes made from whole or sprouted grains, including those that have had the outer layer of the grain removed were very popular. They were eaten sautéed. They were a snack for children, especially if covered by honey and supplemented by an apple that had been frozen. For certain recipes or dishes, pearl barley was used. The same dish could have various names, depending on the region – *grūdenis, Kuča, koča.*

Grūdenis
This is a thick or thin soup made from grain that has had its husks removed by grinding in a mortar and pestle, like pearl barley. Grey peas would have been soaked, then baked and fried and lightly browned. Half a pig's head that has been smoked or salted would be boiled. After ½ an hour, the pearl barley, the soaked peas, onions and carrots would be added and it would be cooked in a pot with a tightly closed lid on a low flame, or sautéed in the oven until all ingredients are soft.

Half a pigs head is covered in cold water, brought to the boil, skimmed. The pearl barley is added, and boiled until the meat and the barley is soft. Add onions and peeled potatoes cut into cubes. Prepared with little water, this dish has the consistency of porridge. It's eaten with buttermilk and cream is added to the soup.

Koča, Kūķis
Previously this dish was made from barley. The husks were removed in a mortar and pestle and sieved. In those, the times of wind and water mills, flour for baking was abundant, but this ancient dish was prepared for the festive time.
Heat the barley in a dry pan, stirring constantly until it becomes yellow.
Lightly fry some bite-sized pieces of speck together with onions cut in rings in a saucepan. Add the toasted barley and add boiling water (approx. 3 times more water that the amount of barley). Add salt and boil until the barley swells. Place the saucepan with a tightly fitting lid in the oven and let it cook until it is completely ready – when the barley is soft and the *Koča* is not sticky.

Čirpuļi, Skranči
Čirpuļi were often used as an aizdars for koča and other dishes.

These are the left-overs when the pork fat has been drained away, fried together with the liver, kidneys and meat.
Translator's note: *Aizdars* is a type of food that is in-between a side serving and a sauce. A small serve is added to existing dishes to add substance (meat or fat) and/or a richer flavour.

Sklandu rauši

Sklanda for the people of Kurzeme is "a fence".
Pastry: 2 cups (by European standards, a cup is a little over 200 ml) of coarse rye flour, I cup of water, 2 tablespoons of butter, salt.
Filling: I cup of mashed potato, 2 tablespoons of melted butter, I egg, salt.
Carrot filling: I cup of mashed boiled carrots, I egg, 1 tablespoon of sour cream.

Make stiff pastry dough from the flour, water and butter, and roll it out thinly. Cut or press 12 – 15 cm circles. Fold up the edge of the circle to make a 1 cm crust. One cook will make hers scalloped, another will add a “rope” made of dough. These casings are then placed on a greased baking tray and filled with a thin layer of potato filling and a thicker layer of carrot filling.

Add the salt, butter and egg to the mashed potato. The carrot filling is made in the same way, however, instead of the salt you may wish to add sugar or honey. The sklandu rauši are baked in the oven until the pastry is dry and the carrot filling has turned a yellowy-brown colour. These pastries are eaten cold with honey and milk.

Sautéed Pork Snout

The pork snout or the half-head is covered with water, boiled and skimmed. Then you add a swede cut in halves, carrots, onions, sliced celery and parsley root, pepper and laurel leaves. Simmer. If the level of the liquid gets too low, add boiled water. If the meat is still tough but the vegetables are soft, take them out. The cooked snout is then placed in the oven where it is basted with the fat skimmed from the top of the boullion until it is brown. Serve in a bowl surrounded with the vegetables.

Taukšķēti Zirņi **(Toasted Peas)**

Soak the grey peas overnight. Boil them until they are almost soft, but avoid them sticking together or turning floury. Drain and dry and pour on a greased baking tray. Bake until they are light brown and slightly crunchy. They were initially made for children but men tend to like then very much with their beer.

Sauerkraut (Kurzeme)

This dish requires “sour cabbage” or sauerkraut that has already been “soured” by you or bought as such from a market, or packaged, from a store.
Place the cabbage in a large pot and cover with water. Add onions, carrots, salt, sugar, peppercorns, laurel leaves, dried dill or other herbs. Cook in a closed pot. Halfway through the cooking add finely chopped, fried smoked bacon and sauté until the cabbage is soft and there is no liquid.
For the cabbage to develop a nice brown hue, allow it to “burn” a little or add some brown fat from a roast. It’s important for the taste to be just right. The cabbage must be slightly sweet. This is achieved by adding a little sugar. If the cabbage is very sour, press it down and pour off the extra liquid (this can be used for drinking, or, as a marinade for, for example, beetroot). The cabbage is less sour if you replace some of the sour cabbage with fresh cabbage.

Sauerkraut (Vidzeme)
The smoked bacon is cut into pieces and fried. When the fat separates, add the onions cut into rings. Place the cabbage in the pot, press it down and add water to cover the cabbage. Sauté. When the cabbage is half soft, add the cracked barley and cook until ready.

Translator's note: In Latvia, there are two distinct grain products, *grūbes* and *putraimi. Grubes* are pearl barley, but there is some difficulty in the right word for *putraimi, and they are smaller.* In America they are called grits. In Europe I have chosen to call them groats, but I don't know if you can buy such in a supermarket. Essentially, *putraimi* are sort of like cracked wheat or bulgar but from the barley grain. They may also be called fine pearl barley. I hope this helps you find the right product.

The amount of groats you add is variable. Add a little to give body, or add a lot for a real cabbage – groat stew. This cabbage is most often sautéed together with fatty pork.

Pīrāgi **(Bacon Rolls)**

Standard yeast dough: 50 grams of yeast or 1 packet of dry yeast (14 grams). I litre of milk, I kilo of flour, 1 teaspoon of salt, 3 tablespoons of sugar, 300 grams of oil or fat.
Filling: 600 grams of bacon, 2 onions, ground pepper.
Glazing: 1 egg

Crumble the yeast into a bowl and mix it with a teaspoon of warm water and a little sugar and put aside in a warm place. Take half of the flour and add the sugar, warm milk (35"C) and the activated yeast. Gradually add the rest of the flour and the melted (but not hot) fat. Knead the dough until it no longer sticks to the side of the bowl or the spatula. When it's ready, sprinkle with flour, cover with a cloth and leave in a warm place to rise. When the dough has risen to twice its original size, knead it down (to release the carbon dioxide inside) again, cover, and let it rise once more.

Grease the baking tray and prepare the glaze by beating the egg. Make the filling by cutting off the bacon's rind and dicing it finely. Dice the onions, add the bacon, sprinkle in the pepper and mix well.

Sprinkle the board with flour and roll out the dough to a thickness of ½ cm. Press out circles. Place a teaspoonful of the filling in the middle, put the edges together and press very firmly (to prevent them opening during baking). You can make either straight or horseshoe-shaped *pīrāgi.* Place them on the balking tray and let them sit for 15 minutes, in order to finish rising.
Before placing them into the oven, brush them with the beaten egg. Bake in a hot, pre-heated oven until they turn golden brown. Place the hot bacon rolls on a cake rack and cover them with a cloth so that they don't dry out as they cool. If the bacon rolls are made from dough that hadn't risen sufficiently, they will be dense and the tops will crack. If they're made from dough that has risen too much, they will be pale and dry with a thick crust.

Pīrāgi **(Bacon Rolls) from Kurzeme**

Fine or coarse yeast dough.
Filling: smoked bacon, salted herring that has been thoroughly soaked, onions. The marinated herrings are cleaned and chopped into pieces or minced. The bacon and onions are finely chopped. Fry some of the bacon and onions, cool. Mix the rest of the bacon with the herring. Use the dough to make large version of the bacon roll using this filling.

Pīrāgi **(Bacon Rolls) from Vidzeme**

Yeast dough.
Filling: smoked bacon, onions, cottage cheese, 1 egg. Fry the finely chopped bacon and onion and leave it to cool. Once cool, add the cottage cheese and beaten egg. Instead of the onions, you may use shallots, chives or dill, without frying them. Instead of using onions, you may use caraway seeds for flavour.

Pīrāgi **(Bacon Rolls) from Latgale**

Yeast dough.
Filling: bacon, salted mushrooms, onions and hard boiled eggs.
Fry the finely chopped bacon and onions. Mix the well-drained, finely chopped mushrooms with the chopped eggs. The filling can be used for bacon rolls as well as making *slokatnis.*
Slokatnis is a large pie covering the whole baking tray. One layer of dough is used for the base which is covered with the filling. A Second layer of dough is laid over the filling.

Honey Pie

Dough: 500 grams of coarse wheat flour, I cup of milk (or other equivalent milk product that you are welcome to experiment with), 100 grams of butter or fat, I tablespoon of sugar, 25 grans of yeast, ½ a teaspoon of salt.
Glaze: 300 grams of honey, 100 grams of butter, I cup of nut kernels, 1 – 2 eggs.
Prepare the yeast dough. Cover the greased baking tray with a finger's depth (1 cm) of dough and turn the edges upward. Let the dough rise.
Chop or mince the nuts and mix with the butter, honey and beaten eggs. Cover the dough with the filling and place it in a pre-heated oven, bake.
You can also use grated rye bread or minced bread crusts as part of the filling.

Pladas
Pladas are made from risen rye flour dough shaped into circles approx. 8 – 10 cms in diameter about the depth of your finger (1 cm). Place them on the baking tray or on maples leaves that have been collected in the autumn.
Form an indentation in the middle of each dough round with your finger. Fill the hole with a dob of butter, caraway seeds or some chopped bacon. The top can be smeared with sour cream. Bake in a hot oven. These pies are tasty eaten hot or cold.

Karaša
Dough: ½ a cup of milk or water. 700 grams of coarse wheat flour. I teaspoon of salt, I tablespoon of sugar, 30 grams of yeast, ½ cup of sour cream. Add a teaspoon of sugar and water to the yeast and leave the bowl in a warm place, let it rise.
Warm the milk. Put the sugar, salt, warm milk and half of the flour as well as the activated yeast in a bowl. Beat the dough well and add the cream and the rest of the flour. Sprinkle flour over the dough and cover with a cloth and let it rise. Form round loaves, place them on maple leaves or on a greased baking tray and bake in a hot, pre-heated oven. You can cover the top with cottage cheese, cream, caraway seeds or a sweet mixture made from egg, cream, honey and poppy seeds.

Malt and Nut Pies

Dough: 100 grams of butter, 1 egg, I cup of sugar, some vanilla, I teaspoon of ground cinnamon, 2 cups of flour, I cup of malt extract, I cup of crushed nuts, I teaspoon of baking powder.
Mix the beaten egg together with the sugar, spices, malt extract, and the sifted flour together with the baking powder. Leave the dough in a cool place for a few hours.
Place spoonfuls of the mixture on a greased baking tray (or a baking tray covered with greased baking paper). Bake in a pre-heated oven at 180 ° C
Stored in an airtight tin, the biscuits / cookies can be kept for a few weeks with no loss of the original taste.

Biguzis

Biguzis was a winter desert, made from dry rye bread soaked in hot water, cranberries, red billberries, the juice of these berries, honey and sugar.
Cut the bread into cubes and crush the berries. Dilute the berry juice with water and sweeten with honey. Pour the berries and juice over the bread and leave in a cool place to soak. Serve the mixture with a dob of whipped cream.

Gingerbread
Gingerbread and other sweet nibbles joined the range of Latvian Christmas fare already in the 19th century. They baked it from dough they prepared themselves, a month in advance, thereby ensuring that the aromas and atmosphere of Christmas would pervade the house ahead of time.

Dough: I cup of sugar syrup, honey or malt extract, I cup of sugar, 200 grams of butter, I egg, 2 egg yolks, 2 tablespoons of sour cream, 1 teaspoon of baking powder or soda, 2 tablespoons of gingerbread spice mix, 5 cups (600 – 700 grams) of wheat flour.
Glazing: 1 beaten egg
Decoration: nuts
Heat the butter in a pot, add the syrup, sugar and spices with ½ of the flour and beat the mixture. When the dough has cooled, fold in the cream, the beaten eggs and egg yolks and the rest of the flour mixed with the baking powder. Knead the dough until it starts to shine, is even and can be smoothly cut. The prepared dough can be stored in plastic food wrap or in a covered container.

Roll the dough very flat and thin with a rolling pin. Press the shapes out with a cookie cutter or dough wheel into squares and rectangles. Glaze with the egg and sprinkle with nuts or decorate in some other way of your choosing.

Gingerbread can be decorated with:
Shine – by brushing with a beaten egg
An opaque layer of “snow”- by beating the egg whites stiff and folding in icing sugar (1:1).
Colour – with a coloured glaze added to egg whites
Variety – by sprinkling icing sugar, nibs, almonds, chopped nuts or a chocolate coating.

The following 2 recipes have been created recently, but that are very suitable for the Christmas table for with their rounded form they symbolise the seasonal theme.

Stuffed Apples
Firm sweet/sour apples are ideal for filling. They are suitable both for sweet as well as savoury dishes. The apples can be prepared in many ways, peeled or left with their skins intact, hollowed out, cored or even halved, scrapped out and used like little bowls.

Baked Apples
Preparing the baked, stuffed and peeled apples, they must first be coated with the beaten egg and rolled in a mixture of crumbled biscuits, chopped nuts or oat flakes. After they are coated, place them on the baking tray and fill them with the chosen filling and bake. To surprise your guests, just before serving, coat the baked apples with sugar moistened with alcohol and set them alight as you serve them.

Cooked Apples
For a cold meal, serve cooked, peeled apples. Remove the core and lightly boil them in slightly sweetened water. The cooled apples are stuffed with various pates, mixtures, finely chopped salads, rice and fish; but for sweet dishes, filled with whipped cream or sweet creams of various kinds.

Stuffed Pumpkin
Pumpkin, just like apples can be filled with either a sweet or savoury filling.
The base of the filling can be made from sautéed pearl barley, rice, or a boiled white bean mixture. Take a half or whole pumpkin, remove the seeds and coat the inside with oil or soft butter and then fill it. A savoury filling can be made from poultry and rice mixed with fried onions, various greens and grated nutmeg, chopped nuts or almonds and eggs.
Sweet filling: Separated eggs. Boiled rice mixed with butter and a mixture of whipped egg yolks and sugar as well as raisins, prunes, dried apricots and nuts. To finish off the mixture, add beaten egg whites. The baking time depends on the size of the pumpkin. The roasted, filled pumpkin is put on the table whole.