

Information om traditionerna, engelska

Further information on the traditions

Denna fil är ett komplement till ”Manual för utställning om föränderliga traditioner”, som kan laddas ner från KulturÖsterbottens materialbank, www.kulturosterbotten.fi/materialbank. Grundtexterna har gjorts på svenska, och även en fil med finska översättningar kan laddas ner. Där kan även filen ”Österbottniska sägner om tomten” laddas ner, för den som vill veta mer om berättartraditioner om tomten.

Innehåll

Utvecklingslinje 1: julgåvor

- The Christmas heap pp. 2
- Throwing in Christmas gifts, older tradition pp. 2
- Homemade Christmas gifts pp. 3
- Throwing in Christmas gifts, newer tradition pp. 3
- From mass consumption to intangible gifts pp. 4

Utvecklingslinje 2: Tomten och bocken

- The brownie in Ostrobothnian folklore pp. 5
- The skråbock – local mumming traditions pp. 6
- Julbocken – the skråbock evolves to involve gifts pp. 7
- Present day Santa Claus pp. 8



Europeiska jordbruksfonden för landsbygdsutveckling: Europa investerar i landsbygdsområden

The Christmas heap

In the beginning of the 19th century, heaps of food became part of the Christmas celebrations in many homes

- The base of the heaps consisted of flat bread cakes, larger underneath, smaller on top.
- The top of the piles were made of buns, cheese, apples and butter

The bread heap was a form of Christmas gift to all occupants on the farmstead

- The content of the pile depended on the wealth of the family and on how the year had been
- Common meals were an integral part of the Christmas traditions

Throwing in Christmas gifts, older tradition

The tradition of throwing in objects through the front door at Christmas was introduced in Sweden in the 17th century

- A common thrown in object was a piece of firewood with a rhymed verse, often mocking the receiver
- The thrower would knock on the door, shout the name of the receiver and throw the piece of firewood into the house
- The thrower wished to remain anonymous and ran away before anyone would realize who he/she was

In Ostrobothnia, the throwing in was practiced on Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve, on Epiphany and St. Knut's Day.

- In the 1920s small gifts, for example a pair of mittens, were attached to the piece of firewood
- The gift could also be tied into a scarf

Homemade Christmas gifts

Parents would give their children necessary items for Christmas, for example clothes, shoes, toys.

Courtship gifts were often given at Christmas

- Especially nicely decorated homemade gifts, for example distaffs or suspenders

Until the end of World War II, the Christmas gifts were normally homemade

- With the start of mass production in the 1950's, children started making wish lists for Christmas

Throwing in Christmas gifts, newer tradition

During the second half of the 20th century, throwing in Christmas gifts on the Saturday before Advent Sunday became popular in Ostrobothnia

- The gifts were small trinkets

Neighboring children would throw in gifts for one another, and then hide for a while (but part of the game was to be found out)

- Advent Sunday is also known as “Little Christmas” in Ostrobothnia
- Santa Claus could also throw in small gifts through the front door on Little Christmas.

From mass consumption to intangible gifts

Christmas commerce grew during late 20th century

- In some places, the ideal was lots of Christmas gifts

In the 21st century, intangible gifts are becoming popular

- For example: gift cards to shops, for services or trips
- Giving time spent together with important people in the form of mutual experiences

Gifts for charity, a counterweight to unsustainable shopping

- Christmas has, of old, been a time to be generous and make sure that everyone – including animals – will fare well
- The Christmas gift of the year 2018: the recycled garment



Europeiska jordbruksfonden för
landsbygdsutveckling: Europa
investerar i landsbygdsområden

The brownie (a type of elf) in Ostrobothnian folklore

Was thought to be a keeper or warden of a particular location or landform, in this case a farmstead.

- Believed to live in the attic, under the floor or in a building.
- Tried to avoid showing himself to the human occupants of the farm.

Some people also believed in female brownies, and the brownies could be married and have families of their own.

Was considered to be friendly to people and the farm animals.

- Took special care of the horses and was often associated with the stable.

Before the beginning of the 20th century, believes in the brownies were widespread in the Nordic countries.

The brownie was thought to be a short old man

- Was said to be dressed in gray, with breeches and a knitted red cap.
- In Ostrobothnia, the brownie was often described as having only one eye.

The warden of hard work and diligence

- It was dangerous to make the brownie angry – many legends about how he took revenge on person(s) that had offended him.

As a reward for his work, it was customary to give the brownie porridge at Christmas.

- It was also assumed he liked strong alcohol.

The brownie could also be given other Christmas gifts, for example shoes and clothes.

- Several Ostrobothnian legends warns against giving him clothes that were too nice, though –he would then become too vain to work.

The skråbock – local mumming traditions

A very old Nordic tradition connected to Yule and midwinter

- Presumably practiced already during the Viking Age.
- The word "skråbock" means a mask made to hide your identity.

In Ostrobothnia the skråbock mumming took place from December 21st (the day of St. Thomas) to January 13th (St.

Knut's Day, the end of the Christmas holidays).

- Popular days for mumming were for example Boxing Day, New Year's Day and Epiphany.

Groups of young people disguised as *skråbock* went from door to door in the village.

- The neighbours tried to guess who was behind the masks.

The *skråbock* did not deliver Christmas presents

- The visiting groups of *skråbock* could be quite rowdy – the visit was not always pleasant.
- Children were sometimes threatened with a beating (e.g. the traditional figure of "Whipping-Paavo" in Nedervetil and Kokkola)

The *skråbock* tradition more or less disappeared after World War II, although there are exceptions

- For example in Pedersöre the tradition continued to the 1990's

The masks were made of simple materials – pieces of cloth, straw, cardboard, bark...

The Yule goat, still widely used as a Christmas ornament, is related to the skråbock tradition

Julbocken – the skråbock evolves to involve gifts

The skråbock-tradition developed into julbocken as someone was needed to deliver Christmas gifts

- *Julbocken* was introduced among the upper classes during the first half of the 19th century
- One early documented occurrence in Ostrobothnia is from the vicarage in Lappfjärd around 1840.

Was still a common figure in Ostrobothnia in the 1980's.

- Introduced the question: "Finns det några snälla barn här?" (Roughly meaning "Have you been good this year?" – still a question asked by Santa in the Nordic countries)

Traditional clothing for julbocken included a coat that was turned inside-out, furry lining showing.

- Fur hat and furry gloves. The clothes were generally dark in colour.
- Julbocken wore a simple mask with a beard, or a plain fake beard.

Present day Santa Claus

A jolly fellow dressed in red and white, Santa Claus knows how good (or bad) children have been during the year.

- Strong influences from American popular culture
- Unique trait in the Nordic countries: Santa visits in person on Christmas Eve

Walt Disney's cartoons have been a big source of inspiration

The Coca Cola Christmas ads are considered to have been trendsetting

- The American artist Haddon Sundblom, with roots in the Åland islands, was influential in creating the Coca Cola take on Santa Claus

Pictures from the 1880's show a red and white Father Christmas – with German influences

- Saint Nicholas of Myra is portrayed in the German tradition
- Der Weihnachtsmann appears in stories translated from German starting in the 1880's in Finland

Today, different layers of traditions make up the local perception of what “a true Santa Claus” is

