



Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:



Christmas cribs on Crete

Christmas (Christoujenon) was formerly a minor feast in Crete. Some rituals such as putting up Nativity scenes and Christmas trees have today (imported or plastic) widely naturalized. Christmas cribs, which according to old traditions been kept until the 2nd February (Maria Candlemas), merge fantasy and piety. 2004 we have seen (mostly homemade) large cribs in many places on Crete who had a recognizable fascination to adults and children; Occasion enough for us to document and introduce some of them with pictures.

In advance some lines about the "crib stories" in brief, although you easily could fill pages. Its diverse manifestations are expressions of culture, religious practice, and way of life and not least the wishes and desires of people who make them. The supposedly first crib was arranged 1223 by the Holy Francis with living figures. The Baroque religiousness allowed to develop crib forms such as the Roman, Alpine and above all the colourful Neapolitan crib which even today form our view of Christmas. As a figurative representation it demonstrates the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. The "Star of Bethlehem" is shown as Comet on many cribs. The astronomer JOHANNES KEPLER (1571–1630) described him as "rare conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn"; but he also can be seen just as a symbol, as fulfilment of Old Testament promise: "A star from Jacob will rise and a sceptre of Israel arise".



Between Potamies and Kalo Chorio (Northern Crete) we saw a on the roadside growing, "decorated" conifer, which inevitably reminded every passing motorists that Christmas "is just around the corner"

Pictures (3): U. Kluge (12/2004)



Picture left shows a crib on the village square in Kato Metohi / Laasithi; it is designed with simple means and impresses with the life-size dolls made with much charisma. Picture right shows a crib on the main road of Kokkini Chani / North Crete, which is conspicuous by lavishly shapd figures.



Almost all cribs in the villages of Crete are close to the Church, on the squares, at fountains or the main streets. The upper series shows (left) a crib from Panagia at Zaros; despite low figurative effort the crib design is fascinating through the use of the materials. Right figure shows a crib from Anogia; the "inner life" made of papier-mâché is framed by physical (certainly lavishly manufactured) donkey and camel figures, giving the crib a voluminous flair. The middle series shows (left) a crib from Perama; painted clay figures (child size) show here impressive craftsmanship. Fig. right shows a crib in Pombia/South Crete; here are figures made of plastic dominating. Also the crib seen in Agia Vavara (bottom left) contains plastic figures; they "shine" and probably have full effect only in the evening.

Pictures: U. Kluge / H. Eikamp (12/2004)