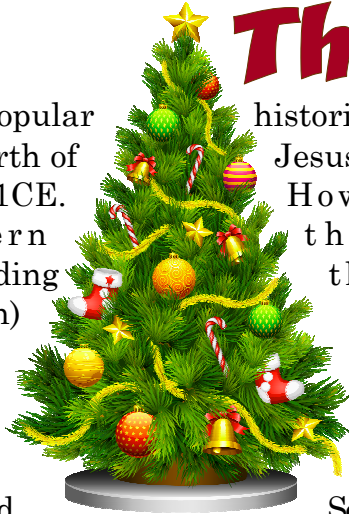


CROSSROADS

CROSSROADS Language Studio's Newsletter December, 2015

The Origins of Xmas

Popular historical myth puts the birth of Jesus at December 25th 1CE. However, most modern theologians (including the Catholic church) agree that if the historical Jesus ever really existed, then he was most likely born around September 3BCE. If this really is the case, then what is the basis for Xmas as we know it?



In pre-Christian Rome, the festival of Saturnalia was celebrated between December 17th and 25th. During this time the Roman law courts would close down, and virtually anything was permitted. No matter what the atrocity committed during the eight-day festival, you could not be prosecuted for it. As part of the festival, each Roman community was expected to nominate one person as a symbolic “enemy of Rome.” At the end of the eight day festival the “enemy” would be taken away and slaughtered, heralding the end to the festive period.

Other practices from Saturnalia included widespread intoxication (especially Dec 25th), multiple forms of debauchery and the consumption of human shaped biscuits (a precursor to the gingerbread-man cookie we eat at Xmas today).



Around the 4th Century CE the early Christian church was on a crusade to convert pagans to their religion. In order to encourage conversion, the pagans were allowed to continue to celebrate Saturnalia, as long as it now became a date assigned to the birth of Jesus. Early Xmas festivities incorporated wholesale the practices of Saturnalia including drinking, sexual indulgence, singing naked in the streets (the beginnings of Xmas caroling), etc.

As time went by Saturnalia took on more significance in Christian celebrations but many in the church were unhappy about this. In 17th Century America, Xmas was banned because of its pagan origins. Being caught celebrating Xmas was punishable by a term of imprisonment. Even today there are branches of the Christian church in Europe that do not celebrate Xmas on Dec 25th because of its origins.

There are other pagan practices that over the years became part of Xmas. For example, the use of Xmas trees was established in Germany in the 17th Century, but its origins can be traced back much earlier to the Asherah cult in Egypt. The Asherah worshipped trees and once a year would bring them into their homes. In the conversion of the Asherah people to Christianity the Asherah Pole (tree) was merged with Xmas celebrations. How about the practice of gift giving? In early Rome, Emperors would insist that the Jewish community bring them gifts on December 25th. Failure to do so could result in death. Over time this became part of Xmas and evolved into the practice of giving children gifts in the 19th century.

Here in the 21st Century, Xmas is moving away from its beginnings in paganism and religion to become what is now mostly celebrated as a secular holiday built around the worship of something completely modern — consumerism. One can't help but wonder what Xmas might look like in another few hundred years.

Article by Mark

Net News

NET LESSONS: Too busy to come to CROSSROADS?

.... Try our *lessons on the net!*

Here's a good site to follow up on the history of Xmas:
<http://www.history.com/topics/christmas/history-of-christmas>

Some Thoughts for the Month



Joshua Says: I have always wondered, and worried, about just what it is that holds some people back from becoming good communicators in English. The truth is that there are many and varied reasons why some students progress faster than others. In addition to not wanting to openly make mistakes, some Japanese students only feel comfortable expressing facts and not ideas. If you are one of these students, do consider the following quote: *“Saying what we think widens a conversation far more than saying what we know”*.

Junko Says: The TOEIC trainees I have been teaching recently took the test just after I had completed going over the first 4 listening sections with them. Some of them said it was the first time they had some success in Part 1 of the test. Part 1 asks questions about pictures and I realized the reason they did well was because the pictures helped them understand the questions without needing Japanese translations. The images made it possible for them to understand the English immediately, and they chose correct answers without delay.



Mark Says It's hard to believe that it is December already and that I have been working at Crossroads for almost one year. The time has (mostly) flown by. Now I'm looking forward to the upcoming holiday season and spending some extra time with my daughter. What do you have planned for the holiday season?

Colm Says: When arriving at Crossroads studio a few days ago, a lady held the elevator open for me and pressed the button for the 5th floor before I had a chance to speak. This got me thinking of elevator etiquette across the world. In the West, it usually involves respecting personal space, small talk and awkward whistling. In many Asian countries, it's a desperate pile-on with people suffocating each other. I got lucky.



Danielle dit: Le froid s'est installé à Matsuyama depuis peu. J'ai toujours l'impression que l'hiver ici arrive sans prévenir. Du jour au lendemain, le temps passe du beau et chaud au froid hivernal. Donc j'ai souvent l'impression qu'il fait très froid alors que la température n'est pas si basse. Il est temps de ressortir les pulls et les gros manteaux.

ACROSS

- 1 excess of immoral activities
 - 6 allowed
 - 7 shockingly cruel or inhuman
 - 10 accused of breaking the law
 - 11 almost, but not quite all, complete or whole
 - 12 result from consuming too much alcohol
 - 14 killed (usually for food)
 - 15 traditional story lacking proof of fact
 - 16 preceding and indicating something to come
- ## DOWN
- 2 change from one state to another
 - 3 made or formed into one
 - 4 selected for a special purpose
 - 5 someone learned in religious theory
 - 8 merge or unite into one
 - 9 select someone for a position or honour
 - 13 unorthodox system of religious beliefs and customs

Play A Game!

(print version [here](#))

NOTICE BOARD

Pet's Corner

Owls have a reputation for being very "wise". For centuries, from folk tales to Harry Potter, they have impressed us as being the wisest of animals. In cartoons and other illustrations, they are often depicted carrying or reading books to emphasize their intelligence, as well as to encourage people to study.



The University of Bath in England has taken this concept a step further. In July this year, the university awarded an owl with its own library card.

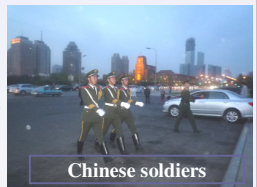
Yoda, the owl, with his handler Marcus, is on campus twice a week at Bath. His job is to scare away seagulls - in "an environmentally friendly" way. And "in recognition of his valuable service to the campus," the Library Management decided to issue Yoda with his own library card.



What next, an honoree degree in Seagull Management??

Ren's "My stay in China" - Part 11

Dalian was once colonized by Japan, so you can see some Japanese culture there. On the first day, I walked around the downtown area of the city; then I saw something interesting. Some Chinese military men came out of a building connected to the army. They walked over to a tall pole that had a Chinese national flag hanging on it and started pulling the flag down. It looked interesting and many Chinese pedestrians also gathered to watch.



Chinese soldiers

With a Russian Tourist



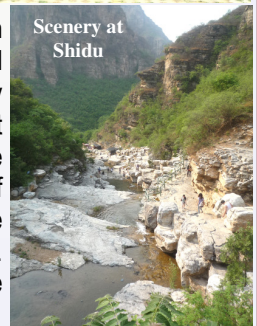
Monument at Gaodi 230

On the second day, I went to a suburb called Gaodi 230 which is one and a half hours away by bus. The place was once a battlefield where Japanese and Russian troops fought. There, I met some Russian tourists who asked me to pose for photos with them. One of them spoke fluent Chinese. We chatted for a while in Chinese, which seemed strange for the other Chinese people around us, who started to stare.



Teachers and Students

In May, my private Chinese school had an exciting event. We went to a suburb named Shidu, also in Beijing. The tourists were mainly Chinese teachers and Japanese students, but some Europeans and Americans also joined. The teachers had to speak Japanese, English and, of course, Chinese. It seemed challenging for the teachers. Shidu is endowed with natural beauty. First we took a canoe tour, and after lunch, we enjoyed hiking and riding on a Chinese bamboo boat. This activity took up the whole day; we departed at 7:30am and came back at 8:00pm. But we were able to eat dinner and go to a pub together after. It was quite a hard day, but everybody was happy.



Scenery at Shidu

Last Month's puzzle Solution



ACROSS

- 12 one who studies prehistoric peoples
- 13 disappear without trace
- 14 a building used to study the stars
- 16 in some way different

DOWN

- 1 going back to an earlier time
- 2 close to correct
- 3 exactly
- 4 all the way through
- 5 people who lived in times past
- 6 relative position or rank
- 7 fix or adjust
- 8 the sun's farthest distance from the equator
- 9 provide evidence by example
- 10 the greatest distance
- 11 the power to order or control others
- 15 becoming greater in height



Don't forget... Our SPECIAL 1+1 Campaign offer! Up to 50% off!!

See our notice board, or ask Junko in our office, for the details.