

## Chapter 5

### Jolly Christmas: From Whence Santa Comes

Santa Claus is unique. He is not the most powerful mythical character; Superman could beat him up. He is not the most noble; King Arthur outdoes him there. He is not the wisest; Solomon is wiser (and yes, Solomon was mythical). He is not the most knowledgeable; Dr. Manhattan (from *Watchmen*) is practically omniscient. Maybe he is the kindest; although, as we will see, this has not always been the case.

What sets Santa Claus apart is “the Santa-Claus-Lie.” Those who know that Santa Claus doesn’t literally exist (that is, adults) try to fool those less knowledgeable (that is, children) into believing that he does. A child might initially believe in some mythical character, like King Arthur. But when that child approaches an adult asking whether King Arthur existed, that adult will tell the child the truth. Of course, adults themselves might be deluded, and believe a mythical character is real (I won’t name names); but if they teach children to believe, it’s because they believe too. But we know that Santa Claus doesn’t exist, yet we teach gullible little people to believe that he does.

Of course, the tooth fairy enjoys a similar lie, but Santa Claus dwarfs her devotional status. No one dresses up like the tooth fairy and, unlike the tooth fairy lie, if you don’t perpetuate the Santa-Claus-Lie you are ridiculed and made to feel guilty. (When I wrote an op-ed for the *Baltimore Sun*, defending the idea that parents should not teach their children to believe, I was called just about every name in the book.) And if you teach another person’s child the truth about Santa Claus—even if it was your own grandchild—forget about it. This is a violation of the child’s rights, or the parent’s rights, or—well, something is going on here that demands outrage! Priests have been confronted by parents and lawsuits have even been filed.<sup>i</sup> In Britain, a substitute teacher was fired for telling her class that Santa Claus didn’t exist.<sup>ii</sup> In the U.S., a music teacher was forced to recant such claims to keep her job.<sup>iii</sup> If it were any other mythical figure, telling children the truth would just be seen as part of their job. But telling the truth about Santa gets you fired? How in the world did we get to this point?

As you may have guessed, many are deluded about the answer to this question—but this is not an easy question to answer. The origins of myths and traditions are hard to find because speculation about them is not hard to find. When people don’t know where a tradition comes from, they invent their own explanation; it gets passed down through the generations, and eventually it’s in a book as fact. This makes doing research on topics like the origin of Santa difficult. There are, for example, many different explanations of why Santa drops through chimneys, all incompatible, but all

from reliable sources. Then there is the difficulty presented by the wide variety of traditions that exist. Today, Santa has a uniform look because we have a mass media system that sells us one image. Before mass media, however, “Santa” traveled mainly by oral tradition, and changed roles, looks, and names radically, depending on which community he found himself in. Keeping track of it all can be quite confounding.

But despite the difficulty, I dove into Santa’s history—and what I emerged with was astounding. After weeding out all the junk, leaving only the verified facts, I discovered the true origins of Santa Claus, and the Santa-Claus-Lie... and it’s like nothing you would expect.

### *Santa Claus is not St. Nicholas*

The assumption that Santa Claus “is” St. Nicholas is nearly universal. After all, “St. Nick” is just another of his names. But when you stop to think about it, the suggestion doesn’t make much sense. Go read “’Twas the Night Before Christmas,” and ask yourself: What historical saint ever wore fur, looked like a peddler, and entered houses through chimneys? What saint ever had twinkly eyes, merry dimples, rosy cheeks and a cherry nose? What saint was known for being chubby and plump and shaking like a bowl full of jelly? What historical saint was an elf—yes, in the poem, St. Nick is an elf—and was whisked around the sky in a tiny sleigh like a hurricane by flying reindeer named after elemental powers like thunder (Donder) and lightning (Blitzen)? As Phyllis Siefker asks, “Why weren’t they named Faith, Hope, and Charity? Why wasn’t Santa’s ride one of righteousness, tranquility, and somber hope, instead of a wild comet ride, an unleashing of powers with undertones of chaos?”<sup>iv</sup> We know that the St. Nick of the poem eventually became known as Santa Claus, but the similarities between the historical St. Nicholas and the St. Nick of the poem don’t go much beyond the name. So tracing Santa Claus back to the historical St. Nicholas doesn’t offer much in terms of an explanation.

Of course, you might be thinking, what about the gift giving in the poem? Wasn’t St. Nicholas a gift giver too? Maybe you even know the story of the three daughters. A poor father with three daughters was going to have to sell his daughters into prostitution because he could not afford their dowry. The wealthy St. Nicholas got wind, and slipped a bag of gold into the father’s house. When the father proved trustworthy by using it as a dowry to marry off the oldest daughter, Nick did it again. The father caught him the third time, but Nick made him promise not to tell anyone it was him. (I guess he broke his promise.)



St. Nicholas delivering three bags of gold so this father won't have to sell his daughters into prostitution.

(Artist: Elisabeth Jvanovsky. "St. Nicholas ::: Discovering the Truth About Santa Claus"

<<http://www.stnicholascenter.org/>> 15 July 2010.)

But the problem with appealing to this story is, despite the fact that it has no supernatural elements, we really have no good reason for thinking anything remotely like this happened to the historical St. Nicholas. Truth be told, even according to the Catholic church, all we “know” about St. Nicholas is that *he was a Bishop, from Myra (in modern Turkey), in the fourth century.*<sup>v</sup> That’s it! All other tales and stories of St. Nicholas, including the one above, are almost universally agreed to be folklore.

Why? Numerous reasons, but one is that Nicholas’ stories can be found in non-Christian myths that predate him. For example, Nicholas supposedly remained chaste all his life (though celibacy was not required of Catholic clergy until about the 1100’s). He also gave away all his worldly possessions, saved a condemned man from death by intervening in his trial, and can sometimes appear in two locations at once. But all of these things were true of the Pythagorean philosopher Apollonius, according to the Greek writer Philostratus, who wrote a century before Nicholas would have been born. Apollonius even provided dowries for three daughters of a poor father. Nicholas’ version of the story is “Christianed up” a bit—concern for the daughters is shown, not just the father—but it is very clearly the same story, with a few added elements.<sup>vi</sup> Clearly, Philostratus is the source of these stories, not St. Nicholas’ life.

This hasn’t stopped numerous people from speculating about what his life would have been like given what we know about the history of the time. The most recent is William Bennett’s book

*The True Saint Nicholas.*<sup>vii</sup> But it is only speculation. So the historical St. Nicholas still provides us with no good explanation for Santa Claus.

To make matters worse, we may not “know” anything about St Nicholas at all. We really have no good reason for thinking that St. Nicholas actually, historically, existed. In fact, we have pretty good reason for thinking that he didn’t. The first historical mention of him is in 440—long after his supposed death. If that mention had laid out some historical facts, or maybe a Nicholas epistle or treatise, then historical Nicholas would be in good shape. But it didn’t, and it was already loaded with miraculous stories that we know are legend.<sup>viii</sup> The first biography of Nicholas doesn’t show up until the 700’s, and we have no idea where the author got his information.<sup>ix</sup> And then there is the fact that multiple locations have simultaneously claimed to have his remains.<sup>x</sup> That would be pretty hard if Nicholas actually had remains, but if he didn’t...because he never existed...well, that wouldn’t be too surprising.<sup>xi</sup> The forgery of documents and relics (including the bones of non-existent saints) was common in the Middle Ages.

There is one “tack” in history with Nicholas’ name on it. Tradition holds that he attended the Council of Nicaea, in 325. But it doesn’t look like this tradition is actually true. Copies of the “roll” they took exist, but only three of the eleven bear Nicholas’ name.<sup>xii</sup> So he was either there and his name was removed, or he wasn’t there and his name was added. Which is it?

Well, when the church “preserved” writings throughout the Middle Ages, they did so by having monks copy them. And it was quite common for monks to add things they thought “should” be included to what they were copying. (For example, it is well known that they added references to Jesus into the works of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus; for some reason, his original history of first century Palestine left Jesus out.<sup>xiii</sup>) If a monk copying the roll in the Middle Ages knew Nicholas lore, and happened to put the dates together and realized that Nicholas “should” have been there, that monk would not have thought twice about adding him. So this seems more likely.

There is a story that supposedly “accounts” for why Nicholas would have been removed. Tradition holds that, while at the council, Nicholas struck another bishop—Arius—for professing (what was soon to be) unorthodox views about Jesus’ divinity. It could be that Nicholas was consequently defrocked, and thus taken off the roll. If this story predated knowledge of the discrepancies in the roll, it might hold some water. But records of the council were kept, and no official record of this incident exists. In fact, the story is relatively new.<sup>xiv</sup> It seems much more likely that it was concocted to explain Nicholas’ absence from the roll. After all, it is unlikely that Nicholas would have been left to keep his hand after striking someone in the Emperor’s presence, but Nicholas is not known for a missing hand.<sup>xv</sup>

That St. Nicholas never existed would not be a novel realization. Numerous saints, who were recognized before the Catholic Church developed an official “saint recognition” system, have been determined to have never existed. This is the result of the Bollandists, a Jesuit group of scholars, who have long been set with the task of authenticating ancient saints. In 1969, based on their findings, the Catholic Church dropped more than 40 saints from their calendar, and declared that the feast days of 90 or so saints were optional.<sup>xvi</sup> It is impossible to find a compiled list of which saints the Bollandists declared “non-historical” and which they declared “mostly-mythical.” My guess is that the “dropped/optional” divide reflects something along those lines. But even the world’s “Largest List of Saints” is almost silent on the subject, and only mentions a couple of defrocked saints by name.<sup>xvii</sup> Two “biggies,” St. Christopher and St. Valentine, were dropped and, from what I can tell, are thought to have never existed—although their “cults” were not completely repressed (but confined to specific locals). Others cults, like St. Ursula’s were repressed.<sup>xviii</sup> St. Nicholas’ feast was declared optional, but Catholics are very careful to clarify that they still think he exists.<sup>xix</sup> Fictional saints are common because, before the official system was put in place, popular opinion determined sainthood—and the populace loved to make saints.

But the thing is, even if St. Nicholas really existed, and even if the three daughters story was attributed to him because he was a generous guy—he didn’t give gifts annually, ride in a sleigh, have a giant white beard and a red suit, smoke a pipe, wear fur, live at the North Pole, or own flying livestock. At *best*, Nicholas and Santa Claus have two things in common—part of their name, and generosity. So, again, tracing Santa back to the “historical” St. Nicholas does little in terms of explaining the jolly old elf.

### *St. Nicholas gets a few more tricks*

We’ve seen really good reason for thinking that St. Nicholas never existed. But the people of the Middle Ages didn’t know any better, and Nicholas was one of the most popular saints ever. Not only was he the patron saint of sailors, but also of children, merchants (pawnbrokers), penitent thieves, archers and prostitutes (yes, prostitutes have a saint...and it’s “Santa Claus”). Of course, none of the stories that make him a patron are authentic; Nicholas was just a magnet for miraculous stories. But pretty soon, people believed that that he would return from heaven, on the (supposed) anniversary of his death, Dec 6<sup>th</sup>, to deliver gifts, often riding on a white horse or donkey. Now we are getting somewhere! This sounds a bit more like Santa Claus. But why did people start believing these things about Nicholas? From where did these traditions come?

We find the answer in Paganism. Converting Pagans wasn't easy. Even if you converted their leaders, they would continue their old festivals and worship their old gods. (As Homer Simpson said, "God bless those Pagans.") Just like Constantine had, the Church turned to the old "adopt and adapt" method. Pagan gods were turned into Christian saints, so that praying to them could be "Christian." Demeter became St. Demetrios, Mars became St. Martin. The list is extensive. This is one reason why so many Catholic saints have been declared non-historical. Finding overlap between St. Nicholas and Pagan gods will not only help answer our questions about the origin of Santa, but the more similarities we find, the more reason we will have for thinking that Nicholas is just a Catholic appropriation of a Pagan god, and not an historical figure.

Once such example we have already seen, is the stories of Apollonius. Another great example is found in Nicholas' seafaring miracles. He is the patron saint of sailors, and was said to have rescued them from all sorts of trials, walking on water, calming storms, and even showing up on board and helping with sailing duties. But these miracles mirror, quite precisely, those of the sea gods Poseidon, Neptune and the Teutonic (German) god Hold Nickar.<sup>xx</sup> Temples to these gods (and the clergy that ran them) were even appropriated by the church and renamed for Nicholas.



St. Nicholas pulling off some very Poseidon-like miracles

(“Byzantine Icons – Studio ‘Theophanis the Cretan’” <[www.eikonografos.com](http://www.eikonografos.com)> 15 July 2010.)

Looking for parallels to St. Nicholas' more “Santa-like” qualities, we find the Norse god Odin. The Norse were warriors, and Odin was too—a great warrior, with a great big white beard. The Norse also lived up north where it was cold, and when they locked themselves inside during blizzards in December, it would sound like all hell was breaking loose outside—and that is what they believed. The sounds they heard were Odin, returning to earth, with dead warriors in tow, rampaging through the countryside. (These beliefs would eventually help create Halloween.) And as they did this, Odin rode an eight legged white horse named Sleipnir.<sup>xxi</sup>



Left: A picture of Odin on his horse Sleipnir; notice the eight legs. (“Odin – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia” <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odin>> 15 July 2010.)

Right: Another picture of Odin. He only has one eye (he traded the other one for wisdom). But notice the great white beard! (“Asatru Folk Assembly” <<http://runestone.org/gods/odin.html>> 15 July 2010.)

This may account for St. Nicholas’ December visiting, but what about the gift giving? One of the spirits believe to accompany Odin was a goddess, often called Berchta. She would visit your house bestowing either blessings or curses. Homeowners would leave out food, and oats for her horse, to influence her decision. In Scandinavia, the traditions combined and become more concrete; Julebuk, who was said to be Odin, would visit and deliver actual physical presents to the children (not just a “blessing” on the household). This all went down at New Years, but when the northerners adopted the Roman calendar, the whole shebang got moved to December 6<sup>th</sup>.<sup>1</sup> This, of course, would later become St. Nicholas Day—which commemorates his death and is the day he returns to earth to decide whether children have been good enough to deserve his gifts. (The children, of course, would leave out oats for his horse to influence his decision.) But, as far as I can tell, that wouldn’t be the case until the 1100’s, when a group of French Nuns decided to give gifts to children on December 6<sup>th</sup> in St. Nicholas’ name.<sup>xxii</sup> Why did they do this? Gift giving has been a part of holiday celebrations since the beginning (at least 2000 years before Christ), and it was a particularly big part of the Roman Kalends (New Years) celebrations. So the Nuns may have simply been giving their saint something “holidayish” to do. Or perhaps they got the idea from Apollonius’ three daughters story,

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Flynn, *The Trouble With Christmas*. Prometheus Books: New York. 1993 p. 48.

which seems to have been attached to St. Nicholas lore in the 700's.<sup>xxiii</sup> The answer might also be found in the aforementioned Hold Nickar, who was also believed to annually distribute blessings to his worshipers during the winter solstice.<sup>xxiv</sup> It's hard to tell.

Presuming that Santa finds some of his origins in the St. Nicholas lore, however, we now have some good ideas as to where Santa gets the gift giving and the December visiting. And an eight legged white horse at least gives us a starting point for explaining eight tiny reindeer. But this still only accounts for a few of Santa's attributes. And, in all honesty, we still may not know where St. Nicholas comes from. The first mention for St. Nicholas is in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, but the Norse and their gods weren't being Christianized until about the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Fortunately there is much more to the story. And what we are about to discover will blow your socks off.

### *Santa's Naughty Side*

If you go looking for older (non icon) pictures of St. Nicholas, and ignore books and websites that are intolerably kitsch, you will stumble upon some very odd and surprising pictures indeed—pictures of the “jolly” old saint Nicholas, holding children down, even tying them to trees, and whipping the hell out of them with birch rods. Others depict Nick stuffing terrified children into sacks. Some great examples come from early 1900's European post cards.



St. Nick survived, in Europe, as a punisher through at least the early 1900's.

(Grossman, *Christmas Curiosities*, p. 109, 110.<sup>xxv</sup>)

I'm sure you have heard of getting coal in your stocking for being bad, but what is going on here!? Although, I guess the ominous threats do make a bit more sense now. "No crying. No pouting! He sees you at all times! He'll know if you've been bad, so be good for goodness sake!" The song doesn't make much sense if the worst thing that can happen is a lump of coal. But if *Santa's gonna beat your ass...*

How did St. Nicholas get into whipping and sack stuffing? I'm so glad you asked, because the answer sheds a million-candle spotlight onto the origins of Santa Claus and St. Nicholas.

### *A Wild Ride*

Now, at first this might seem unrelated, but hear me out.

The story starts with one of the very first gods that ancient people worshiped—he may have even been the first. Evidence of human belief in this god goes back 50,000 years (long before Abraham would have been born), and he appears in one of the very first written stories, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. It is a god Siefker calls "the Wild Man."<sup>xxvi</sup> The Wild Man was an untamed half-man half-beast creature that the ancients believed lived in the wild. The half beast part of him was usually a goat, which meant that he often had horns, hairy legs, and hoofs. The ancients believed that he had grandiose powers over nature (thunder and lightning were often associated with him) and powers over fertility—which gave him powers over the bountifulness of crops, and even the fertility of people.

In fact, the ancients believed that the Wild Man was "one" with nature. Every winter, the earth seems to die, and they were never sure that it would revive again. But, the ancients reasoned, if the Wild Man were to die, but then be revived, this would ensure that nature itself would be revived, and spring would return. And thus, the ancients developed a custom. First, they would capture the Wild Man, often using a young girl as bait—he was a fertility god after all. They would then chain him up and lead him out of the wild and in through the streets of the town or village, to the square. Once there, he would be killed. Then a "healer" would come along and revive him. Everyone would celebrate, for that meant that spring would return. Lastly, the Wild Man would be set free, back into the wild.

Of course, the Wild Man didn't really exist, and no "healer" back then had the ability to revive anything. What was actually happening is that they would have someone dress up as the Wild Man—donning furs, horns and such—and go hide in the forest. The town's people would pretend to capture him, putting him in chains, and put on this big show parading him through town. It's unclear how many of the adults were in on the act, but I'm sure the children were scared to death. The sounds

of the chains alone, rattling through town, must have been horrifying. But both parents and children believed in the power of the play; to them, these events really did somehow ensure the return of spring.

These traditions were often very sexual—which makes sense, given the ritual’s association with spring. The Wild Man would carry a phallus or pitchfork, or some other sign of fertility, threatening townsfolk with it or with sexual gestures. Often, he would have sex with the young girl right in the town’s square—sometimes playacting, other times literally. Then he would be killed—again, sometimes playacting, other times literally. If he was literally killed, it was his offspring—now residing in the pregnant girl—that was thought to represent his “revival.”

The Wild Man shows up in the origins of almost every religion in the world. Egyptian, Babylonian, Roman—even Moses was depicted with horns through the middle ages.<sup>xxvii</sup> My favorite example is from Greece. You are probably familiar with Pan, the little horned god with goat legs that plays the flute. You can probably figure out for yourself that Pan finds his origins in the Wild Man; but what you don’t know is that Pan was originally the only god the Greeks had—he was “the All.” It was later that the Greeks personified the different aspects of the All, and created other gods—like Eros and Apollo—and Pan got moved down the list. But Pan was the original.<sup>2</sup>

And this is just the beginning of the Wild Man’s influence and effect on society. This tradition continued and became many different things. The Mesopotamian, Persian and Babylonian traditions that we talked about in chapter one, of killing a king to ensure the return of spring, clearly find their origin here. Almost every society has some kind of dying/resurrecting god—the Greek Osiris, the Babylonian Tammuz, and later the Christian Jesus. They are all almost certainly influenced by the Wild Man tradition. The Wild Man went on to become Robin Hood, Harlequin, and even the “fool on Parade.” In fact, the very idea of a parade finds its origins in the Wild Man tradition. And, as we shall now see, the Wild Man also became Santa Claus, and probably St. Nicholas too.

### *Santa’s Wild Side*

We see the most obvious connection between Santa Claus and the Wild Man in the North. The annual visits of Odin, Berchta, and Julebuk most likely find their origin in the annual appearance of the Wild Man. Recall, it was believed that Julebuk actually appeared physically, bestowing gifts

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<sup>2</sup> Siefker, p. 49.

upon children. In reality, someone annually dressed up as Julebuk by donning a horned mask<sup>3</sup>—clearly reminiscent of the Wild Man tradition, in which someone would annually don furs and horns to play the part of the Wild Man. Since these traditions got laid upon St. Nicholas, and Nicholas later became Santa Claus—well, the connection is pretty clear. But that story is also a bit too simple.

As we have seen, the Wild Man tradition did influence and branch off into other things, but it also survived—pretty much in its original form—throughout the Middle Ages (and even into 1900’s, in a few isolated places). As you can imagine, this did not sit well with Catholic clergy who were trying to convert Pagans. And the people were not only worshiping this god, but they would dress up like him and parade around. The church tried to outlaw such practices, but it didn’t stick. Even when they converted the leaders of the community, the populace still followed the old gods and partook in the old traditions. So how were they going “adopt and adapt” the Wild Man?

One thing they did is simply equated him with Satan. Up through the 500’s, when Satan was given a physical form in art, he was usually depicted as a fallen angel—his appearance differed from other angels not at all, apart from the fact that he was, literally, falling. He was also occasionally depicted as a serpent, or dragon. But he wasn’t depicted as we think of him today, until the early 600’s, when Pope Gregory officially equated the appearance of Satan with the appearance of the Wild Man. Ever since, Satan has been depicted as a horned, furry goat-legged beast with a pitchfork. But not even this really kept people from worshiping and dressing up like the Wild Man character. The populace often didn’t “really” convert, and, to stay in their good graces, priests—who were often converts from the same Pagan religions—would indulge their “followers” and allow them to partake in the old practices.

In fact, the Wild Man even got a boost from the Church’s efforts to supplant village plays. Disgusted by the debauchery of medieval village plays, the church put on its own plays that depicted bible stories and the myths of Saints, hoping to draw public attention away from the secular. But just like today, when the church attempts to seem hip and relevant by adopting popular forms of entertainment—think “Christian Rock”—the public thought the plays were lame and ignored them. To spruce them up, the church added comic relief in the form of the Devil, who would often enter the stage spouting his comedic catch phrase, “Ho, Ho, Ho.” Although he was “the bad guy,” the public loved him. (Compare this to how The Joker or Darth Vader is often people’s favorite character, despite the fact that he is the bad guy.) The plays became more popular, but so did the Wild Man/Devil.

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<sup>3</sup> Flynn, p. 48.

But the most relevant way the church tried to depose the Wild Man was by making him the slave (or “side kick”) of a Saint.<sup>xxviii</sup> Recall that, in the Middle Ages, it was believed that St. Nicholas would return to earth on the anniversary of his death, December 6<sup>th</sup>. His visit would involve gifts, but his main role in the Middle Ages was as a disciplinarian.<sup>xxix</sup> In many traditions, he would show up at your door and quiz you on your religious knowledge; if you failed, you were punished and if you passed, he would put a small gift in a shoe you left outside.<sup>xxx</sup> And parents wouldn’t just pretend that St. Nicholas dropped by while the kids were asleep. Nicholas (that is, someone dressed up like Nicholas) would physically appear at your house. Our current “Mall Santas” are a remnant of this dress up tradition, and clearly the ancient Wild Man parades are a precursor. Again, it’s unclear whether the parents were “in on it”—most of them were illiterate and only knew what the church told them. If the church sent someone and said it was Saint Nicholas, they would probably have believed it. Regardless, the children were scared out of their gourd.

But in what way would St. Nicholas punish you? In tow, held back by chains, Nicholas would have a “companion”—a side-kick—a demonic “goat-man,” complete with horns, hooves, and furry legs and body. It was the Wild Man! What better way to “depose” an ancient Pagan god than to make him the slave of a Saint?



St. Nicholas with the Christ Child (in wings) and his “helper” (at the door) in tow. Notice the boys hiding under the table...they’ve been bad. (Grossman, *Christmas Curiosities*, p. 40.)

If you displeased the Saint, he would release the chains and let the Wild Man dispense his punishments on you. What punishments? He could just beat you up, or pick you up by the ears. He also had birch rods he could beat you with, and he carried on his back a bottomless sack or basket, in

which he could stuff as many kids as he needed and carry them away. Or maybe he would just add you to his chains, and lead you away.



Some older postcards depicting Krampus, an Austrian version of St. Nicholas' sick kick.

Notice, on the left and in the middle, he has one human foot and one cloven hoof. ("Christmas with the Krampus"

<http://www.kindertrauma.com/?p=162> 15 July 2010.)

To where would he take these poor children? Where else? Off to hell!



Notice the lake of fire to which these poor children are being led.

(Grossman, *Christmas Curiosities*, p. 43.)

So, it seems that in this December 6<sup>th</sup> tradition, two myths came together—the St. Nicholas myth, and the Wild Man myth—to form one tradition. But looks can be deceiving. Here is the thing. The Wild Man predates St. Nicholas, and is hardly seen without him. His first appearances with St. Nicholas are very early; so early, in fact, that some, like Siefker, claim when St. Nicholas first appeared, he already had the Wild Man in tow. In fact, early on the two were interchangeable, and often took on each other’s characteristics. So much so that, in Germany, the Wild Man character was often called Nicholas, and “Old Nick” became another German name for the Devil. Is it just a coincidence that St. Nicholas is the only saint that people dress up as and pretend to be—like people used to do with the Wild Man? It’s hard to tell if two traditions became one, or if one tradition became two.

What is more, long before St. Nicholas was around, the Wild Man actually had names. He was often called “Claws,” and depending on his look or purpose, other descriptions were added. If he were more human, he would be called “man Claus.” “Ru Claus” was the “rough Claus.” Recall also the tradition was popular in Germany, and that many of Nicholas’ miracles and stories mirror those of the German god Hold Nickar. St. Nicholas was first mentioned in the 400’s, about a century into the “Christianization” of the German peoples and we’ve already seen that many saints are just Christianized Pagan gods. Did they simply combine Hold Nickar with “the Claus” (the Wild Man)? It’s already unlikely that St. Nicholas is an historical figure. Could this be his real origin? Is he the “Saint Nick-Claus”?

Of course, this is just an educated guess. But regardless of where Nicholas came from, he and the Wild Man remained the best of friends throughout the Middle Ages. They separated into distinct characters, but where you found one, you almost always found the other. And this provides us with a few more answers about Santa’s origins. We now know the origin of Santa’s bottomless sack of presents—it used to hold children—and from where the “lump of coal” punishment tradition comes. We also see the beginning of Santa being dressed in fur—since the Wild Man was covered in goat fur. We even heard the faint echo of Santa’s catch phrase, “Ho, Ho, Ho.” But these are all things that belonged to the Wild Man; how did they get transferred to Santa Claus?

*St. Nicholas + Wild Man = Santa Claus*

The short answer is that St. Nicholas and the Wild Man combined, once again, into one character that shared attributes of both. This new character was human, like Nicholas, but wore fur, carried switches, and doled out punishment like the Wild Man. The Wild Man, as Nicholas’ companion, had many names—“Hans Trapp,” “Knecht Ruprecht,” and my favorite “Krampus”—but Saint Nicholas

just had the one name. So, at least in Europe, that is the name the new character took. And it was this character that eventually became Santa Claus.

But, again, that short answer is far too simplistic.

For one, he did acquire other names—like the moniker “Chris Kringle.” That was due to German Protestants trying to replace St. Nicholas as a holiday gift giver, because he was a Catholic symbol. They thought the “Christ Child,” or “Christkindel” would be more appropriate, and they moved the gift giving to Christmas Eve. The Christ Child was most often depicted as a young woman wearing a wreath of candles (an actual baby wouldn’t be very effective as a gift bringer), but the Christ Child’s function was the same as Nicholas’, and s/he would also be accompanied by some version of the Wild Man. But the Christ Child was too boring, and people started throwing St. Nicholas into the mix again, and he eventually took the leading role. Finally, the Christ Child was just “phased out” of the tradition, leaving St. Nicholas with a new date to deliver gifts (December 24<sup>th</sup>) and a new name, Chris Kringle.<sup>xxx1</sup>

The combination of the Wild Man and St. Nicholas helps explain why, in Europe, you sometimes see depictions of “St. Nicholas” beating the hell out of kids. So that’s covered. But it doesn’t really help explain the American Santa Claus that much. Our Santa doesn’t beat people, and has a wealth of other attributes—chimney sliding, flying reindeer, living at the north pole, etc. In addition, it doesn’t really explain the Santa-Claus-Lie. After all, kids in the middle ages “saw” St. Nicholas show up, at their house. We just lie about that.

We find the beginning of an explanation for these things in the Protestant Reformation. As we just saw with the Christ Child, protestant reformers didn’t have much love for the Catholic St. Nicholas. One such group of reformers was composed of Germans who settled in Pennsylvania. They didn’t hate Christmas like the Puritans did, and they also, apparently, had a love for scaring their children into obedience—it’s just too handy. Thus, they created their own punishing Christmas visitor, named “Belsnickel.”<sup>xxxii</sup> If the European “Mean Nicholas” is St. Nicholas with some of the Wild Man’s attributes, then Belsnickel is the Wild Man with some of St. Nicholas’ attributes. As Belsnickel, the Wild Man took on some of St. Nick’s human features and duties (like gift-giving), and even part of his name—among many of his other names was “Pelznichol,” which literally means “Furry Nicholas.” But, even though his switches turned into a whip, and his rattling chains turned into huge bells, he remained the black beastly punisher he once was, bag, furs, and all.

...Pelznichols, whip in hand, went from house to house with cookies and chestnuts, rewarding well-behaved children and frightening and whipping those who had been naughty. Their appearance varied, but they were always black faced and bell-jingling, dressed in animals skins or patches, and carrying a whip or bag...He [was] the precursor of the holy old

elfe “Christkindle” or “St. Nicholas, ...it is no sooner dark than [his] bell is heard flitting from house to house...He would toss nuts on the floor, and when children tried to pick them up, he would strike their backs or hands with his whip.<sup>xxxiii</sup>



An artists' rendering of Pelznichol.

(Artist: Ralph Dunkerlberger. *Christmas in Pennsylvania: A Folk-Cultural Study*. The Pennsylvania Folklife Society.)

But how did Pelznichol become Santa Claus; how did his giant clanging bells become ringing sleigh bells? We already know part of this story. Recall from chapter three that, even though the Puritans tried to stamp it out, Christmas was still celebrated in the Americas—debauchery and all. Part of the Christmas tradition at the time was wassailing. The wealthy were obligated to open up their homes to the poor on Christmas (especially their servants); the poor would come in and sing songs of well-wishing to the homeowners in exchange for their best food and drink. In New York City, this tradition took the form of the poor getting drunk, banding together, and wandering around demanding entrance into the houses of wealthy landowning strangers—if they were refused entrance, things could get nasty. Some rich New Yorkers—among them Clement Moore, John Pintard and

Washington Irving—didn't take too kindly to this and set out to turn Christmas into a family-oriented holiday about gift-giving to children.

Such efforts included inventing domestic Christmas traditions that never existed. One tradition that did exist was the St. Nicholas tradition, and they tried to introduce it to America as well. For example, St. Nicholas appears many times in Washington Irving's *Knickerbocker's History of New York*—a fictional history of New York published on St. Nicholas' holiday (December 6<sup>th</sup>)—and John Pinard commissioned a broadside of Saint Nicholas in 1810. But their Nicholas was too saintly, a staunch figure donning robes brandishing a switch. Although their work made Americans aware of St. Nicholas, as a gift giver he didn't catch on outside their circle of influence (like the New York Historical Society, or those that identified themselves as the Knickerbockers).

But those rich New Yorkers found exactly what they were looking for in a poem entitled "A Visit from St. Nicholas." You know it as "'Twas the Night Before Christmas." In this poem, St. Nick was gentle, offering no punishments, but only rewards—to children. He was akin to the poor workers that threatened to show up at their doors, demanding libations—his shoddy clothes and "stump of a pipe" identified him as lower class. (This is why the father in the poem rushes downstairs to tear open the shutters—he expected wassailers. It is also why he seems to fear St. Nicholas, until almost the end of the poem.) But, unlike the poor, St. Nicholas did not demand anything in return. This new St. Nicholas was appealing to the rich and poor alike, and this poem catching on would domesticate the holiday as they wished. And catch on it did.

Since it was this poem that led to Santa's Claus's popularity, and the popularity of the Santa-Claus-Lie in America,<sup>xxxiv</sup> explaining its origins goes a long way in explaining the origins of Santa Claus. And where the poem's origins can be found is in the Pennsylvania German Belsnickel tradition. St. Nick was no saint, but a lower class peddler, dressed in fur, dirty and sooty—like Belsnickel. Also like Belsnickel, his sack was full of presents (not disobedient children) and he seemed to have magical powers over nature. Since Belsnickel finds his origins mainly in the wild-man tradition, once again we see that Santa does not find his origins in a Catholic Saint, but in a Pagan god.

These origins also help us trace the origin of the poem itself. It is common to attribute the poem to Clark Clement Moore, but it is very unlikely that he was the author. It was first published anonymously in 1823 and it wasn't until 1829 that anyone even hinted that Moore might be the author. It was 1839 before anyone attributed the work to Moore, and it wasn't until 1844 that Moore claimed authorship by including it in a collection of "his" works. But it is not like anything else he ever wrote—Moore was a religious academic—and a number of those works were plagiarized from

classic sources (so he was not above presenting the works of others as his own). In addition, Moore would not have been familiar with the German Belsnickel tradition—he was Dutch, not German.<sup>xxxv</sup> The poem does, however, fit into the works of Henry Livingston Jr. even matching the form of his other poems. Members of his family recalled him reading it to them in their youth, and expressed surprise when they saw it published under Moore’s name, years after Livingston’s death. The Poem even exemplifies a few of Livingston’s quirks: for example, one of Livingston’s favorite phrases was “Donder and Blitzen”—German for “thunder and lightning.” To boot, Livingston was German, and would have been familiar with Belsnickel. There is even a good explanation for how the poem got into Moore’s hands. Harriet Butler—who visited Livingston’s home and first submitted it for Newspaper publication in 1823—was later a governess in the Moore household.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

It’s worth noting, however, that the poem also borrowed from other traditions. Livingston loved the phrase, “Donder and Blitzen”—but why make them flying reindeer that pull Santa around in a sleigh? Livingston was probably borrowing from the Norse thunder god Thor, who rode a flying chariot that was pulled by magical goats named Gnasher and Cracker—that is, “thunder and lightning” or “Donder and Blitzen.”



Thor, with his goats Gnasher and Cracker, pulling his chariot.

(Left: “Saxons and Vikings in Britain” <<http://saxons.etrusia.co.uk/images/thor.jpg>> 15 July 2010.)

(Right: “Icons. A Portrait of England” <[www.icons.org.uk/.../oak-tree/hip0003111.jpg](http://www.icons.org.uk/.../oak-tree/hip0003111.jpg)> 15 July 2010.)

How did the goats become tiny reindeer? Good question.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Vincent Yzermans suggests that the sleigh and reindeer came from the lore of the Laplanders, who turned St. Nicholas into a Shaman

who they believed flew in sleighs drawn by flying reindeer.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Siefker, however, points out that the Laplanders most important Christmas visitor was Stalo (another variation of the Wild-Man). He had a sleigh, but it was pulled by Laplandish lemmings, and he was certainly not benevolent—terrifying Laplanders through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>xxxix</sup> Lemmings are tiny however; so maybe some combination of the two traditions produced “tiny reindeer pulling a tiny sleigh.” From what I could gather, the idea of a chimney entry could have come from any number of places,<sup>xl</sup> but another explanation for Santa’s tininess could be that had to be small enough to slip down the chimney. Who knows? Britain’s Father Christmas, another offshoot of the Wild Man, had ten children who were led around by *Cupid*, and among them was Gambol the *dancer*.<sup>xli</sup> So that could account for a few more reindeer names. But all in all, although his name was St. Nicholas, the gift-giver in the poem had almost nothing in common with the Christian saint; instead he was mostly Wild Man.

#### *The Americanization of “St. Nick”*

Of course, the St. Nick of the poem lacks many of our modern Santa Claus’ attributes. He is an elf, not a full grown person. Nothing is said about a red and white suit, nor about the North Pole. There’s no Rudolph or Mrs. Claus. And he only leaves small presents in stockings—nothing big, and nothing under the tree. And his name is not “Santa Claus,” but St. Nick. So from where did these traditions come?



The first depiction of St. Nick to go with “A Visit from St. Nicholas.”

(“A Visit from St. Nick Index” <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/etc/xmas/vsn/index.htm>> 15 July 2010.)

It is commonly said that the name “St. Nicholas” became “Santa Claus” as a result of Americans butchering the Dutch pronunciation of “St. Nicholas”—Sinterklass —into “Santa Claus.” But that can’t be entirely right. “Claus” was a part of the name of the Wild Man, on whom Santa Claus is clearly based, long before anyone was talking about St. Nicholas, or using the same “Santa Claus.” In fact, a poem depicting “Olde Santeclaus” (1810) predates the first publication of “A Visit from St. Nicholas” and people were already calling the Christmas Visitor “Santa Claus” by then.<sup>xliii</sup> In addition, how is “Sinterklass” Dutch for “Saint Nicholas”? Where is the “Nick?” “Sinter” means “Saint.” Doesn’t “klass” mean “claus”? Perhaps that is what the Dutch called the Catholic figure we call “St. Nicholas”; but wouldn’t “Sinterklass” be—literally translated from the Dutch—“Saint Claus?” And if that is what the Dutch called the Catholic Saint Nicholas, isn’t that all the more evidence that St. Nicholas is just a saintly version of the Wild Man—the “Saint Claus”? Thus, it would be more accurate to say that both the name “Saint Nicholas” and “Santa Claus” came from the name “Saint Claus.”

Some of the other traditions are easier to track down. His stature as a full grown, rotund person owes the most to his depictions in *Harpers Weekly*. Although first depicted as full grown in 1857, Thomas Nast was the main influence. Nast’s full grown Santa was delivering presents to Union soldiers in 1863, and was most lovable in 1881.



Thomas Nast’s most famous depiction of Santa as a full grown person (not an elf) in 1881.

(“Q 22 – Merry Christmas” <<http://gyaniz.wordpress.com/2008/12/25/q-22-merry-christmas/>> 15 July

2010. )

In the same year, Santa got married. Mrs. Claus was added in 1881 by Margaret Eytinge's poem "Mistress Santa Claus" and she was popularized in 1889 by Katherine Lee Bates's poem "Goody Santa Claus On A Sleigh Ride." She saves the day by knitting a stocking that won't hold its gifts.

Before 1931, Santa's fur suit had been red and white at times, but that was only one of many color combinations that he donned. In 1931, however, Coca-Cola launched an ad campaign that replaced Santa's Pipe with a Coca-Cola bottle, and solidified the color of Santa's suit into red and white—the colors of their company logo. From then on, if the plastic Santa on your lawn didn't have a red fur suit, with white cuffs—it wasn't Santa Claus!



First Coca-Cola Santa, as depicted by artist Haddon Sundblom in *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1931. ("Santa: Coca-Cola & Santa Claus" <[http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/cokelore\\_santa.html](http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/cokelore_santa.html)> 15 July 2010.)

Rudolph was added to the reindeer in a children's book marketing campaign by Montgomery Ward in 1939. "Shop at Montgomery Ward, get a free copy of the children's booklet, 'Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer'." What a bargain!

In the gift department, Santa expanded beyond stuffing stockings due to capitalism. As Christmas grew in popularity, and businesses discovered there were profits to be had, they convinced us that we had to have more and more and bigger and bigger presents. They couldn't fit in the stocking anymore, so for a while, Santa put them *on* the Christmas tree. But that was when Christmas trees were still small fir tops that sat on a table. The presents continued to get bigger, and eventually Santa had to put them under the tree. And as we needed more room under the tree for more and more presents, our trees got bigger and bigger, came down off the table and onto the floor.

Why is Santa believed to live in the North Pole? Some claim that Thomas Nast was responsible, by depicting him as living there—for example, sitting atop a "Christmas Box" bearing the address "North Pole" and spying on kids with a giant telescope from that location. Nast supposedly did this to make Santa a "citizen of the world."<sup>xliii</sup> But I am pretty sure that the tradition goes back further than that. The Norse believed that evil came not from "down below," but from "up North"—where everything is nasty and cold. They believed that their version of the Devil—Old Nick—was from the North. In addition, recall that the Laplanders live even further north than the Norse; it is likely that their Christmas visitor Stalo, evil as he was, was also believed to live at the North Pole.

### *The Wild Man Lives On*

So now you know why we trick our children into believing that a giant fat man with a white beard in a red suit will visit on Christmas Eve, traveling from the North Pole, pulled by flying reindeer in a sleigh, delivering loads of presents upon the condition that the children behave. It is not because of the influence of a Catholic saint. Instead, it is because of the influence of a "saintly" version of an ancient Pagan god that often went by the name "claus." And we fool our children into believing that he literally exists and visits while they are asleep because a poem about him, that depicted him secretly delivering presents to children, caught on like a fad in the early 1800's.

That fad practically become a religion. Try telling someone you tell your children the truth about Santa, and see what happens. It will seem as if you are telling a Christian that you don't believe in God. Notice the amount of guilt that will be laid upon you—guilt, ironically, for *not* telling a lie. We'll deal with that guilt next chapter.

Santa Claus is not the only example of how the Pagan god he is based upon has survived throughout the centuries. My favorite example is found in Austria, where St. Nicholas' helper was known as Krampus. Krampus has recently enjoyed a comeback in Austria; the December 2009 issue of *National Geographic* even had a short article about it. (That December, Krampus also appeared on Comedy Central's *The Colbert Report*.) He now appears with St. Nicholas in December—in droves. Dozens of people will dress up like Krampus and parade through the streets of Austria, or through malls, wearing giant bells (reminiscent of the chains of the Wild man) and scaring people as the Wild Man once did. If you look closely, you'll probably see St. Nicholas in there somewhere, but he is just a side show. The main attraction is Krampus.



Modern depictions of Krampus. (Left: "AYA Salzburg Info Home"

<[http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/greal/NewAYA/salzburg\\_info/subpages/christmas.html](http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/greal/NewAYA/salzburg_info/subpages/christmas.html)> 15 July 2010.)

(Right: "Krampus – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia" <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krampus>> 15 July 2010.)

Do a YouTube search on "Krampus Austria." You won't be disappointed. But the wonderfully ironic thing is, both the demonic Krampus and jolly old elf Santa Claus find their origins in the same place—an ancient fur wearing fertility god.

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- <sup>i</sup> Gerry Bowler, *Santa Claus: A Biography* McClland and Stewart, Toronto. 2005. p. 248.
- <sup>ii</sup> Joanna Sugden, "Teacher who told pupils 'Santa doesn't exist' is axed," *The Times*, 12 Dec. 2008. <[http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/education/article5326005.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/article5326005.ece)>
- <sup>iii</sup> Kristine Huges, "Teacher takes back no-Santa statement" *The Dallas Morning News*, 15 Dec. 2005. <<http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/latestnews/stories/121505dnmetnosanta.bacb8fc.html>>
- <sup>iv</sup> *Santa Claus, Last of the Wild Men*. McFarland and Company, Inc. 1997. p. 5.
- <sup>v</sup> For example, according to [www.catholic.org](http://www.catholic.org) "[Nicholas'] episcopate at [Myra](#) during the fourth century is really all that seems indubitable authentic." <[http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=371](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=371)>. The Catholic Encyclopedia agrees. Ott, Michael. "St. Nicholas of Myra." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 11. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 22 Jun. 2010 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11063b.htm>>.
- <sup>vi</sup> Jona Lendering, "Saint Nicholas, Sinterklass, Santa Claus" Livius.org, 2005. <[http://www.livius.org/ne-nn/nicholas/nicholas\\_of\\_myral.html](http://www.livius.org/ne-nn/nicholas/nicholas_of_myral.html)>
- <sup>vii</sup> Howard Books, 2009.
- <sup>viii</sup> Those who want to believe that St. Nicholas exists have very low standards for "convincing evidence." Jeremy Seal, for example, is convinced that there was a real St. Nicholas because the biography of another Nicholas (Nicholas of Sion) includes a mention of him visiting a martyrdom named after the original St. Nicholas. But this visit would have been about 200 years after his death (around 550), and a hundred years after the first historical mention of the "original" Nicholas (in 440). There were a host of churches, martyrdom, and other buildings named after non-existent saints, and it's no surprise that there were buildings named after Nicholas 100 years after people starting talking about him. St. Nicholas of Myra need not be historical, at all, for a building to be named after him 100 years after he was "made up."
- <sup>ix</sup> See Lendering, 2005.
- <sup>x</sup> Bruce David Forbes. *Christmas: A Candid History*. Los Angeles: University of Californian Press. 2007. p. 74-76.
- <sup>xi</sup> Again, apologists reach for explanations. Nicholas' bones were supposedly stolen at one point, but then later those from whom they were stolen claimed to have tricked the robbers, causing them to steal the wrong bones. Of course, all such stories should be taken with a grain of salt.
- <sup>xii</sup> It wasn't so much of a role, but a list of Bishops that voted to support what became the orthodox view of Jesus' divinity. As we shall see, tradition holds that Nicholas supported that view. See Lendering, 2005.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Scholars universally agree that portions of the relevant passage were embellished. Many agree that the whole thing was confabulated. Dan Barker, *Godless, How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists*. Ulysses Press, 2008.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Lendering brushes past this, only mentioning that it is from "late source."
- <sup>xv</sup> Lendering cites the fact that the story is embarrassing as evidence for its authenticity. It is assumed the ancients wouldn't make up embarrassing stories about those they admired, and sometimes this reasoning is valid. But if the story is fiction, it would have been made up as an explanation for why he got kicked out—thus wouldn't it have had to be embarrassing? Wouldn't he have had to do something wrong? On top of that, the story seems to be the most honorable way to explain his absence. He was so passionate about the Orthodox view that he punched Arius, the author of the biggest heresy in church history, at the very meeting that heresy became heretical. How is that even embarrassing? It probably makes people like him more! If the story was that he got taken off the roll because he molested children—then yeah, they probably wouldn't make that up. But as it stands, it is highly unlikely that it is authentic.
- <sup>xvi</sup> "Belgian group checks facts." Found in "Saint Makers. (Cover story)." *U.S. News & World Report* 126.1 (1999): 52. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. Web. 18 July 2010.
- <sup>xvii</sup> See *Catholic Online's* list of saints. <[www.catholic.org/saints/](http://www.catholic.org/saints/)> Comparing the old calendar with the new would show you who was removed. To see if your favorite saint made the cut, see "Saints of the Roman Calendar" <<http://www.ewtn.com/library/MARY/SAINTRM.htm>>. But it's probably impossible to find a list because most of those interested in saints are Catholic, and Catholics aren't too fond of compiling lists of things they were wrong about. For Pete's sake, it took them 350 years to apologize to Galileo for locking him up after saying the earth revolved around the sun. My guess is that the recommendations of the Bollandists, which led to the "mass defrocking," are locked up in the Vatican somewhere.
- <sup>xviii</sup> See *Catholic Online* "Saints FAQ's: Whatever happened to St. Christopher? Is he still a saint?" <<http://www.catholic.org/saints/faq.php#St.%20Christopher>>.
- <sup>xix</sup> "Is St. Nicholas a Real Saint." <<http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=234>>.
- <sup>xx</sup> Bruce David Forbes. *Christmas: A Candid History*. Los Angeles: University of Californian Press. 2007. p. 72.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Forbes, p. 12.

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<sup>xxii</sup> Bowler, p. 18.

<sup>xxiii</sup> See Lendering, 2005.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Details about Hold Nickar are hard to come by, but apparently one of the main gifts that he was (or those representing him were) thought to bring was (no joke), psychedelic mushrooms. For more on this see: Dana Larsen, “The Psychedelic Secrets of Santa Claus,” *Cannabis Culture Magazine*, Thursday December 13, 2003.

< <http://www.cannabisculture.com/articles/3136.html> > , and “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” PaganParenting.org < <http://www.paganparenting.org/spirituality/wheel/yule/santa.html> >

<sup>xxv</sup> Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 2008.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Phyllis Siefker. *Santa Claus, Last of the Wild Men*. McFarland and Company, Inc. 1997. Ch. 2.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Although Moses’ horns may be the result of a mistranslation of Exodus 34:29, where Moses’ face “shone” after talking with God. The Vulgate used the word “cornuta” for shone, and “cornu” means “horn” in Latin.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Siefker, Ch 4.

<sup>xxix</sup> Forbes, p. 94.

<sup>xxx</sup> Siefker, p. 155.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Forbes, pp. 78-79.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Although it was clearly a combination of the European Nicholas and Wild-Man traditions, it seems that Belsnickel was unique to German Pennsylvania—at least, I have yet to find an example of any tradition in Germany that is similar enough to Belsnickel (and enough unlike Nicholas or the Wild-Man) to be thought of as another version of Belsnickel.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Siefker, pp. 19-20.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Stephen Nissenbaum. *The Battle For Christmas*. Vintage Books, a Division of Random House. New York. 1997.

<sup>xxxv</sup> If you dig into this a bit further, you may find that the Belsnickel tradition was celebrated by the “Pennsylvania Dutch” and thus think that Moore’s Dutch origins would make him familiar with the Belsnickel tradition. But, ironically, the Pennsylvania Dutch are not Dutch at all—but are one in the same with the Pennsylvania Germans. The confusion began right after their immigration to the Americas. When asked where they were from, they would refer to their homeland of Germany in their native tongue—calling it “Deutschland.” Uneducated Americans thought they were saying that they were Dutch, and thus began calling them “Pennsylvania Dutch.” The name stuck, and is still preferred by the “less educated” Pennsylvania Germans.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Siefker, p. 32; Forbes p. 84-85; Bowler, p. 45-46.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Forbes, p. 87.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Vincent A. Yzermans, *Wonderworker: The True Story of How St. Nicholas Became Santa Claus*. ACTA publications, 1994.

<sup>xxxix</sup> p. 161.

<sup>xl</sup> Here are a few suggestions I found. William Hooper (in his self published, *The Heathen’s Guide to Christmas*) suggested that in the Middle Ages, the church used St. Nicholas as a threat, to make sure that all people—not just kids—obeyed. “Pay your tithe, or Nicholas will get you on Dec 6th.” People, in turn, threatened to lock their doors and windows to prevent his entry. The church retorted, “he is so resolute, he’ll come in the one place you can’t lock up in the winter: your chimney!” Yzermans suggested that Laplandish Christmas visitors would come in through the holes in their teepees, where the fire escaped. I doubt both explanations.

<sup>xli</sup> Siefker, p. 103.

<sup>xlii</sup> Nissenbaum, p. 72-73. It is worth noting that one New York newspaper, in 1773, said that another name for Saint Nicholas was “St. a Claus.” See Bowler, p. 28.

<sup>xliii</sup> R. J. Brown. “Thomas Nast: The Power of One Person’s Wood Engravings,” editor of HistoryBuff.com.

<<http://www.historybuff.com/library/refnast.html>>.