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(Continued from Page 63)
cakes and candies also are traditional.

Christmas Eve is the key festival time in Polish households. Housewives prepare for supper with care to abide by tradition. Certain dishes are served for the occasion, including fish or mushroom soup, fish with stewed prunes, cabbage and a variety of fruits and cakes.

Christmas wafers, called "oplatki," are customary prior to the Christmas Eve meal. Each person shares his wafer with everyone at the table, wishing them health and prosperity for the coming year.

The Christmas tree is important for the Polish Christmas Eve celebration, as it is the gathering point for the distribution of gifts. Traditionally the gifts are distributed by the Good Star, impersonated by a woman with white robe and veil.

Christmas in most countries is closely associated with the church and church celebrations.

Unlike Christmas in most countries, Christmas is not a happy occasion in Syria. Pilgrimages are frequently made from Syria to Bethlehem to attend the Christmas Eve midnight service. Christmas Day is then observed quietly

in the home. Not until New Year's Day do Syrians enjoy the festival spirit.

Many of today's popular U.S. Christmas customs have their origins in ancient and foreign traditions.

The burning of the Yule log is a custom which originated with the Scandinavians. At their feast of Jul, during the winter solstice, the Scandinavians kindled huge bonfires in honor of the god Thor.

In feudal times, the bringing in of the Yule log was one of the most joyous ceremonies connected with the festival. Men hewed down the biggest log, singing Yule songs while they prepared it for the fire.

Both popular traditions — Santa Claus and the hanging of the Christmas stockings — have their origins in Holland.

Unlike most traditions which clearly originate in one country, the origin of the Christmas tree is claimed by many. German legends attribute to St. Winfred the idea of the Christmas tree, while Egyptians, Scandinavians and the French all have equally persuasive legends attributing to their nationality the introduction of the Christmas tree as a tradition.

—SUSAN BELNIAK

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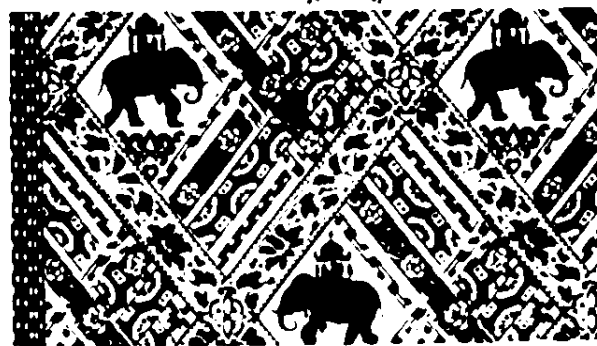


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