

VORWEIHNACHTSSITTEN (PRE-CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS)

“CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS IN GERMANY”

CHRISTMAS IN GERMAN FAMILIES SINCE 1945

Based on the growing popularity of Christmas trees around the world, Knierriem says that the



Archaeologist Peter Knierriem thinks the tradition of Christmas tree will spread across the world

tradition is becoming symbolic of the change of seasons and the dawn of a new year — even in other countries.

The evolution of the Christmas tree

The way that Germans and many other European cultures celebrate Christmas these days is actually based on rather recent developments in historical terms, Peter Knierriem explains during an interview with DW.

He points out that the idea behind an ornate Christmas tree was first born in the early 15th century. Back then, city guilds across German-speaking states used to hang edible items on fir trees. Knierriem explains that these trees were moved around in street parades "accompanied by a lot of noise," to show off the affluence of those cities ahead of the important Christian holiday.

Christmas festivities didn't evolve much further until the early to mid-19th century, coinciding with the rise of the bourgeoisie and its rather philistine preferences in art during that time, known as the Biedermeier period. A wooden scaffold in the shape of a tree would be embellished to mark the advent of Christmas, using boxwood initially and later adding other kinds of tree branches as well. What was behind this custom was a desire to surround the home with evergreen branches, expressing the hope for new life heralded by Jesus' birth while also trying to insulate houses against the cold and inhospitable temperatures during that time of the year.

It was not before the late 19th century that the tree of lights we know today finally started to make it into living rooms. Knierriem says that the tradition began in 1870 with the Franco-German War:

"At that time, King William, who later became Emperor, celebrated Germany's victory over France under a Christmas tree in Versailles. 'If the King adheres to that custom, then it must be something worthwhile,' the people said, thus following his example."