

“The Fatima – Ship Procession” A Traditional Ceremony in Germany

Hasan GUNES¹ and Nadide GUNES²

1Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi, Van, Turkey

2 Rekabet Kurumu İOO Van, Turkey

Abstract

There are many religious days and feasts that are being celebrated in Europe and Germany. One of them is “St Mary’s Day” that is being celebrated on the 15 th August. There is a ritual that is especially being realized on “St Mary’s Day” and that has become traditional in Germany. The due ritual is being realized on “The Bodensee Lake” in Germany and called as “Fatima – Ship Procession”. It is an extraordinary interesting situation to see a name that is of Arabic origin on a feast that is known to be a Christian feast. When the word “Fatima” is investigated it can be seen that this name is commonly known and used amongst Christians living in Europe and especially in Latin Countries. The source of the name that is being used in the due ritual, what its roots are and where it comes from historically, is an important subject that has to be investigated especially by theologians and historians. As a matter of fact the source of the due name unfortunately isn’t known very well by the Christian Community.

Key Words: Fatima – Ship Procession, Tradition, The Bodensee Lake

Mary’s Ascendancy to the Sky, 15 th August

The “St Mary’s Day”, just as it is the fact with “the ascendancy of Christ to the sky,”¹ is accepted as one of the prime feasts and being celebrated by both the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. Even if this day isn’t declared as a holiday in most of the Christian countries, there are still countries, though a few, that are celebrating this day as a religious holiday. In the due feast, according to the Christian belief the ascendancy of St Mary as the wife of God and mother of Christ is being celebrated.² All the communities that are present within Christianity are accepting the ascendancy of St Mary to the sky. But in what way St Mary ascended to the sky is differing from sect to sect. That is, some of the sects accept this day as “The ascendancy of St Mary to the sky”,³ some of them as “St Mary’s coming back home”⁴ and some regard it as “St Mary’s falling into eternal sleep.”⁵ The celebration of the due day as a feast has its roots going back to the 5 th Century. But its emergence goes as far as to Augustus, the Roman Emperor. Augustus declared the due day as a holiday because of the 15 th August was one of the hottest days in summer. And Patrick Cyrill changed this holiday 500 years later into “St Mary’s Day”.

1 Christi Himmelfahrt

2 The ascendancy of St Mary into the sky is being told by different legends. According to one of these legends St Mary was ascending to the sky escorted by a bright, holy light, Thomas, one of her apostles waiting around her grave took her belt as a proof. At the present the due belt is being exhibited in the “Pieve di St.Stefano Cathedral” in Prato,* (Italy) every year.

According to another legend the apostle opens the grave and finds there only flowers and plants. Based on this legend the ceremony where people are blessed with a plant emerged. The due blessing manner has been preserved by the Catholic Church for centuries. To commemorate the ascendancy of St Mary to the sky wreathes made out of seven ** different plants are being hung on the ceiling of the house. It is believed that the wreathes protect the household people from evil.

*http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?hl=tr&gs_sm=s&gs_upl=212512125101761011110101010172117210.11110&q=cache:gsjLoUqYs4QJ:http://www.italien-inseln.de/italia/toscana-toscana/prato/hauptstadt.html+Prato+g%C3%BCrtel&ct=clnk. 22.09.2011.

Prato+g%C3%BCrtel&ct=clnk. 22.09.2011.

** The number “7” is very significant in Christianity. As a matter of fact it symbolizes the pains and grieves St Mary suffered.

3 Mariae Himmelfahrt.

4 Heimgang Mariae.

5 Mariae Entschlafen

Consequently for the first time in history Cyrill⁶ the Patrick of Alexandria organized this celebration to be a means of expressing his devotion to St Mary. The entrance of the feast into German soil goes back to 813 AD. Though it started to be celebrated quite late in the country the ceremonies are carried out very effectively. Today especially in the churches of South Germany ceremonies are being organized by priests having special authority. Except the known ceremonies realized in the churches there is also “Fatima’s Ship Procession”⁷ that has also become traditional as a ceremony to be performed on “St Mary’s Day”.

Fatima Ship Procession a Traditional Ceremony

In Christianity some rituals like “Catholic Feast”⁸ (Corpus Christi) are carried out especially outdoors as long as the weather conditions are suitable. Alike this one of the rituals carried out outdoors is the one realized on “The



Bodensee Lake.”⁹ To the due ritual, named “Fatima – Ship Procession” thousands of people attend coming from the surrounding countries and cities. The ritual that was first realized in 1979 actually has its roots in 1970. In the 1970 a carpenter coming from Bludenz / North Italy acted as a pioneer in the realization of the ritual at the very point where the three countries intersect.¹⁰ The carpenter got an inspiration from the ritual “Madonna and Fatima” that has been being realized up from 1917 in Portugal and carried a similar one to here. The way the ritual was performed took its place in German Society and is celebrated regularly every year on the “St Mary’s Day” on the 15 th August. The celebrations that were appropriated in a short time enlarged themselves quite much within time. While in the first times only one ship and hundreds of people were to be attending now the

number has reached up to six ships and nearly 3-4 thousand people.

The ships departing from Rorschach, Bregenz and Lindau (map I¹¹ and map II¹²) which are the cities of three different countries are decorated with flowers just like it is done in an atmosphere of a feast and amongst the decorations there are also a cross and a statue of St. Mary on the deck. When the ships departing from the three different cities of the three different countries arrive at the meeting point that is in the middle of the lake a clergyman blesses the pilgrims who are attending with plants. After the blessing ceremony a firework show of 5 minutes is realized in the memory of St. Mary. In this way performed with different facilities the ritual ends at about 22.00.



6 http://www.heiligenlexikon.de/BiographienC/Cyrill_von_Alexandria.html 22.09.2011.

7 Fatima is an important religious centre in Portugal. In the due city there is also one of the important Roman Catholic Churches situated. So naturally it is a very important centre concerning the Catholic Community.

8 Frohleichnam.

9 Lindau am Bodensee/ Germany

10 Germany, Austria, Switzerland..

11 <http://www.fahrradreisen.de/images/2011/500581k.jpg> 11.10.2011.

12 http://sued.aldi-reisen.de/media/reisebilder_eurotours/karte_radtour_bodensee.jpg 11.10.2011.

In the way back the choirs situated on every ship sing hymns escorted by the priests and in this way and manner turn back to the harbours they departed from. While Catholics celebrate the due day in the stated way the Orthodox Church spends the same day by not eating any meat, fish, milk products or not drinking wine.

Conclusion

In Christianity, that is one of the four theistic religions, there are some traditions performed on some religious feasts. In the due feasts many traditions are conveyed into our culture via cartoons, TV series etc. or visual and auditorial means of mass media. The Nicolaus, the pine tree, coloured eggs during the Eastern period are only a few of them. But most naturally the due celebrations can't become meaningful because of their not being present in our own culture. For this reason an obligation arises to reach the origins of the celebrations celebrated by the Christians and conveyed throughout TV, cinema or different means of communication.

The more it is gone back to the origins, the more it is realized how significant in fact the feasts are in religious terms even though they may seem from outside just as a means of fun, and in addition it has been understood much better why devoted Christians fasted in those times and still do so in certain periods. When it is analysed what the originating purpose of the feasts were when they newly emerged and when it is taken into consideration why they are celebrated nowadays very interesting results have been reached at. Especially the realization of the "Fatima - Ship Procession" to be performed as a facility on the "St Mary's Day" is one of them. As a matter of fact the name "Fatima" being a name of Arabic origin makes the situation far more interesting. To conclude precious scientists dealing with linguistics or history should investigate where the due name comes from. As a matter of fact when the due name is made a research of, it can be seen that it was given as a name to very well known religious places in Brazil, Argentina, Portugal and Spain.

If the original purpose of some traditional celebrations that are being conveyed into our culture by the means of films or other facilities can be known by us, the due celebrations will become more meaningful.

References

http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?hl=tr&gs_sm=s&gs_upl=2125121251017610111101010101172117210.11110&q=cache:gsjLoUqYs4QJ:http://www.italien-inseln.de/italia/toskana-toscana/prato/hauptstadt.html+Prato+g%C3%BCrtel&ct=clnk

http://www.heiligenlexikon.de/BiographienC/Cyrill_von_Alexandria.html

<http://www.fahrradreisen.de/images/2011/500581k.jpg>

http://sued.aldi-reisen.de/media/reisebilder_eurotours/karte_radtour_bodensee.jpg