

1. What is the origin of Sinterklaas?

We are sure that the celebration of Sinterklaas is celebrated since 1360, possibly earlier. At that time, poor children were given some bread, cookies, shoes and so on by the church, council or rich people. After Protestantism came, the vicars had problems with the feast which was often celebrated outside. They forbade it. But the Dutch parents started to have the feast at home: children put their shoe, or earlier the wooden clog at the heater with chimney in the house. The next morning Sinterklaas would have brought some oranges, figues, spiced cookies in it. There is a famous painting of Jan Steen about St Nicholas morning. (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam)

What connection with Spain is that?

2. Scientifically one can say this: the bones of the holy Nicholas were transported in 1087 from Myra to Bari (in South Italy). When Ferdinand II of Aragon married Isabella of Castilië, the part of Italy with Bari became Spanish.

But more logical is this: in the 16th century the Netherlands and Spain were one country. There were many contacts. Nice goods like oranges and mandarins came from there and in an old song it rhymes:

*Saint Nicholas your holy Man
Put your best cloth on
Go with that to Amsterdam
To Amsterdam from Spanje (Spain)
Apples of oranje (orange)*

3. To what extent the American figure of Santa Claus is inspired by Sinterklaas? (Maybe by Holland emigrants in USA?)

Dutch emigrants founded New Amsterdam, later New York. They chose as patronage Saint Nicholas, because they knew him very well. Saint Nicholas – Sint Heer Klaas (holy don claas)= Sinterklaas. When you pronounce this often it will become Santaklaas → Santa Claus. The Dutch brought the tradition to USA, although the date changed later to Christmas.

What is the origin of the pages (Zwarte Pieten)?

4. In the Middle Ages the holy Saint had a black devil. In many countries there still are horrible figures who have to frighten children. We did not have a second figure next to Sinterklaas until about 1825. In 1850 a Amsterdam schoolmaster wrote a book for children. He wrote about the black helper of Sinterklaas. In those days there was still slavery, but Black Pete was an important figure in the first edition of the children book. In the later editions Pete is transformed like more a bad helper: he has to punish naughty children. Before Sinterklaas did that.
5. About the pages, some people have criticized that are black, is there still controversial?
Yes, there is very much discussion about this now. In Amsterdam we started last year with "chimneyPiets"; you have got a picture in the mail of Pam. They are not any more black faced white people, but you can see that they are sooted by the chimney through which they bring the presents to the children.
6. Why Sinterklaas carries 3 crosses Amsterdam flag hat?
A bishop's mitre has no cross. Still many not-catholic people think Sinterklaas as a bishop should wear a cross on the mitre. Because we want moslim children in the Netherlands learn and enjoy the feast, many organisations put off the cross, what gave a lot of discussion again. Luckily, the Amsterdam city arms has 3 crosses, so we put this on the mitre as a sign of a real Amsterdam Sinterklaas without religious meanings.
7. Is it true that children who misbehave are "threat" that Sinterklaas will take them to Madrid?

more information about Sinterklaas:

pam evenhuis, spokesperson phone 0031.6410.878.111 or mail spokesperson@sintinamsterdam.nl

Yes, that was indeed. Some said that children were made to small pepper cookies (sweets that Sinterklaas brings); other that children got punishment in his castle. My own son believed that he could become a black Pete when he was taken to the castle of Sinterklaas in Madrid.

Probably this comes from the time we were in war with the Spanish because of our independency (1584-1648). So Spain brought good fruits but was also bad as a bogey-man.

8. Can you tell me a historical anecdote about Sinterklaas?

There are hundreds of legend about Sinterklaas/Nicholas. The most famous are these two:

One story tells of a poor man with three daughters. In those days a young woman's father had to offer prospective husbands something of value—a dowry. The larger the dowry, the better the chance that a young woman would find a good husband. Without a dowry, a woman was unlikely to marry. This poor man's daughters, without [dowries](#), were therefore destined to be sold into slavery. Mysteriously, on three different occasions, a bag of gold appeared in their home-providing the needed dowries. The bags of gold, tossed through an open window, are said to have landed in stockings or shoes left before the fire to dry. This led to the custom of children putting out shoes, eagerly awaiting gifts from Saint Nicholas. Sometimes the story is told with gold balls instead of bags of gold. That is why three gold balls, sometimes represented as oranges, are one of the symbols for St. Nicholas. And so St. Nicholas is a gift-giver. (from www.stnicholascenter.org : a very good site!)

Another story tells of three theological students, traveling on their way. A wicked innkeeper robbed and murdered them, hiding their remains in a large pickling tub. It so happened that Bishop Nicholas, traveling along the same route, stopped at this very inn. There was nothing to eat anymore but the innkeeper offered nice meat which he kept in his cellar. Nicholas felt it was not right, so he went with the innkeeper downstairs. There he found out. He summoned the innkeeper. As Nicholas prayed earnestly to God the three boys were restored to life and wholeness. In France the story is told of three small children, wandering in their play until lost, lured, and captured by an evil butcher. St. Nicholas appears and appeals to God to return them to life and to their families. And so St. Nicholas is the [patron](#) and protector of children.

(from www.stnicholascenter.org, but a bit changed as I know it.)

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