



Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

The Orthodox baptism on Crete

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„Martyriko“

Who already was a guest at a Cretan wedding (therefore see in addition our leaflet at: [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/380-12E.pdf], will know that it thereafter usually won't be long until an invitation to the baptism drop in. A baptism is celebrated not nearly as a wedding; nevertheless it is a highlight for the child to be baptized, the parents and the godparents.

The planning of a baptism begins with the important question: Who should be the godfather/the godmother? The decision should only be made after careful consideration, because the godparent is not present only with the baptism. She/he will be the “mental father/mother” of the child and should stand by its site lifelong in word and deed. In former times the godparents were also those, who, should parents somewhat betide, accommodated the child and brought up. Usually parents select a close friend for this task. That has the advantage that life-style and convictions are usually very similar and therefore conflicts are avoided during the education of the child. Every now and then the choice of the godparents has practical reasons. Thus often persons are selected, who enjoy a high reputation in the municipality, or are financially very well posed. The godparent must be orthodox faith. If she/he is married, then a church wedding must have taken place. If she/he married only civil, she/he is not accepted by the church as a godparent.



Pic. left: The great-granny of the child is testing the water temperature within the baptismal font. **Pic. right:** the godmother with the Myro.

A big talking topic is naturally also the selection of the name. Usually the child is named after his grandparents. On Crete the following “regulation” applies: A girl gets the name of the grandmother on the mother's side, a boy that of the grandfather on the paternal side. This is however only a “guideline”. If there is for example a near relative (uncle, aunt, grandparents), which deceased, the child is often baptized on this names. Occasionally children are also “promised” a certain Saint. For example if a pair prays for offspring and it comes to the pregnancy, the baby gets the name of the miracle-working saint to the thanks. This promise (the so-called “Tama”) is given only if one is really ready to fulfill it because the disregard is to bring large misfortune! Interesting is also that most children, up to the baptism, are only called “Bebis” or “Beba” , so Baby and get their names actually only with the baptism!

If name and godfather are selected, nothing blocks the way to the baptism! The steps are the following: first of all the godparent turns toward the west, to the entrance of the church and renounce the evil. If this is done, she/he blows three times into air and “spits” three times on the soil.

Now godparent and Pope turn toward the east, to the altar. The godparent promises three times to follow Jesus Christ and reads thereupon the confession of faith.

Subsequently, she/he calls the priest the name, on that its favorite is to be baptized and they walk together towards the baptismal font. The priest blesses water and oil by doing three times the sign of the cross. Now he rubs something from the oil on nose, ears and mouth of the baptizand, in order to then pass it on to the godparent, who slathers the remaining body. Now the priest dips the naked baptizand three times into the baptismal font and speaks thereby the words: “The servant of God (name of the child) is baptized, in the name of the father and the son and the holy spirit. Amen.” After “immersing” the fresh baptized is put in the arms of the godparent, which winds it into a white flax cloth. Then forehead, chest, hands and feet of the child are crossed with the holy “Myro”. Meanwhile the priest speaks short prayers. The “Myro” is a special mixture from oil and 57 odoriferous substances and herbs, which are manufactured about every ten years by the ecumenical patriarchate. Now a strand of hair of the child is cut off. This is a kind of victim to God. Next it is dressed in the white christening robe. These symbolize the new garment of the soul. In addition the small necklace with the cross is donned to it by the godparent. Now priest, godfather and baptizing child walk three times in the circle around the baptismal font. At that the Lambada, the baptizing candle, naturally must not be missing, because it symbolizes the light of God. To the conclusion the mother kisses the hand of the godparent and gets its fresh baptized child put into the arms.



Candied almonds are distributed to the present ones like also during the wedding. Besides, each guest gets a stick pin with a small cross, the so-called “Martyriko”, as certification for the fact that she/he was present on this important day.

Naturally a baptism must be also celebrated! With good meal, music and dance one amuses, although usually in smaller circle than e.g. with a wedding.

Three days after the baptism it is time to bath the child and to wash the christening robe. The water used thereby must not in no case poured into the drainage because it contains arrears of the holy “Myro”. Traditionally it is brought into the church; it however is also acceptable to throw it into the garden or in the sea.

On the first Sunday after the baptism the godparent come for his baptizing child, in order to visit with it the mass.

As you see, the orthodox baptism is an event full of symbolism and one of the most important days in the life of the baptizand. Thus it is worth to be in any case thereby!