

THE BIG BOOK OF FESTIVALS



MARITA BULLOCK & JOAN-MAREE HARGREAVES *Illustrated by* LIZ ROWLAND

LOTHIAN

ANASTENARIA

MARVEL AT THIS INCREDIBLE FIRE-WALKING RITUAL IN NORTHERN GREECE

Could you walk barefoot across red-hot coals with temperatures of up to 400° Celsius? This is exactly what happens in parts of northern Greece during Anastenaria, an annual religious festival devoted to two Greek Orthodox saints. Devotees can walk barefoot over hot coals without the slightest trace of harm. Some describe this feat as a great mystery, but for the fire-walkers their ability to withstand fire is simple: they believe they are protected by the icons of saints Constantine and Helen, which they hold while walking over the burning coals.

The ritual takes place in the evening after hours of singing and dancing in the *konáki* – the special religious houses where the icons of saints Constantine and Helen are kept, and where people congregate before the fire-walk. The singing and dancing helps the fire-walkers achieve an altered state of consciousness. Many describe a feeling of ‘being taken by the spirit’. Some dance on the coals in a trance-like state, while others run quickly across or dance dramatically in a state of ecstasy. Afterwards there is a traditional dance around the fire and more dancing in the *konáki* before a meal with family and friends.

WHERE AND WHEN The festival is celebrated by some Greek–Macedonian communities around Thessaloniki in northern Greece, and in parts of southern Bulgaria. Celebrations take place around 21 to 23 May and can last anywhere between three days and a week.



The music performed inside the *konáki* is Thracian folk music using a lyre, a drum and a piped instrument called a *ghaidha*.

Many legends exist about the ability to walk on fire. Some say Saint Constantine's enemies tried to burn him, but he remained unharmed due to his connection to God.



Mikháli has been helping his mother prepare for Anastenaria for months. They have candles, incense and oil to burn inside the *konáki*.



Music helps the fire-walkers to prepare for their walk over the hot coals.



Anastenarides believe if someone is burned by the fire they haven't been protected by the saints!



EASTER

CELEBRATE NEW LIFE AND NEW BEGINNINGS ON ONE OF THE HOLIEST DAYS IN THE CHRISTIAN CALENDAR

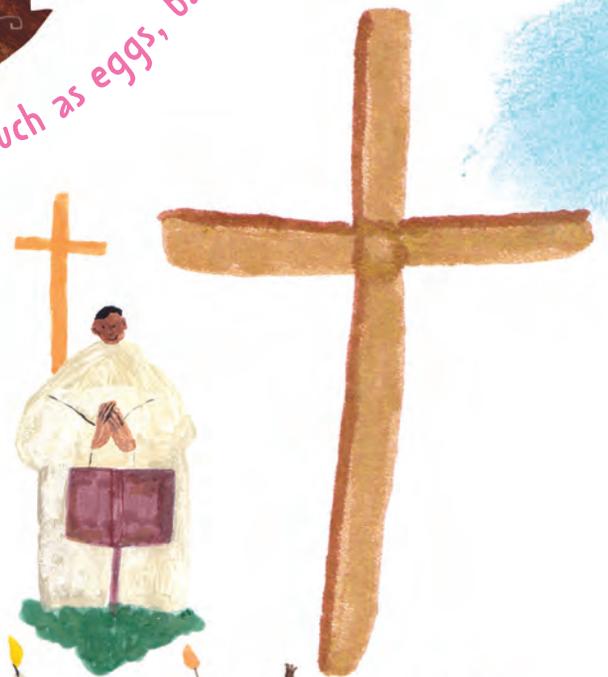
Easter marks the anniversary of Jesus Christ's resurrection more than 2000 years ago. Christians believe that Christ was betrayed by Judas, one of his twelve disciples, and was nailed to a wooden cross in Jerusalem. Christ eventually died on the cross and was buried in a cave, but he came back to life three days later and remained on Earth for another 40 days and 40 nights.

There are many days of religious worship commemorating these events, including Palm Sunday (marking the beginning of Christ's last week on Earth); Maundy or Holy Thursday (commemorating his last supper); Good

Friday (the anniversary of his crucifixion); and Easter Saturday (commemorating the period during which he lay in the tomb). Easter Sunday is the most important day of celebration, marking Christ's resurrection and the celebration of new life. Church services are held and hymns are sung. Masses sometimes take place at midnight or at dawn.

WHERE AND WHEN Easter is celebrated by Christians of all denominations around the world. It falls between 22 March and 25 April, on the first full moon (this marks the beginning of spring in the northern hemisphere).

Christ's resurrection is often celebrated with symbols of new life, such as eggs, baby chickens and rabbits.





← Myra searches her garden for chocolate Easter eggs hidden by the Easter bunny.

Hot cross buns are traditionally eaten on Good Friday. The cross on top of the bun symbolises Christ's crucifixion.



The custom of giving eggs is an ancient one. In many places around the world, eggs made of chocolate wrapped in brightly coloured foil are given as gifts. In Russia and Poland, traditional wax-covered eggs are painted with elaborate and brightly coloured patterns.



In Switzerland, Easter eggs are delivered by a cuckoo and in parts of Germany by a fox!



LUNAR NEW YEAR

PILE ONTO BUSES, TRAINS AND PLANES TO BE WITH FAMILY FOR ONE OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

Lunar New Year, also known as Chinese New Year or Spring Festival, is the biggest and most important celebration in China and many other countries throughout Asia. The number of people who travel across China or internationally to spend the New Year with family is one of the largest annual human migrations on the planet!

In China, celebrations begin on New Year's Eve, when people gather to eat dumplings after midnight in a traditional dinner called *Nian Ye Fan*. Festivities usually last for around fifteen days leading up to a large street parade, called the Lantern Festival. Red lanterns decorate the streets and people dressed in red enjoy music, parades, acrobatics and traditional dances. A giant dancing dragon weaves through the streets, symbolising strength, wisdom, power and wealth.

WHERE AND WHEN Lunar New Year is celebrated in many countries throughout Asia and across the world. It marks the beginning of the first month in the Chinese (lunisolar) calendar, which falls at the end of January or the beginning of February each year.

Each Lunar New Year is represented by one of the twelve Chinese zodiac signs.



Rooster



Pig



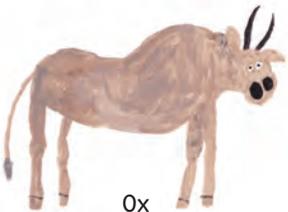
Tiger



Dog



Snake



Ox



Monkey



Rat



Rabbit



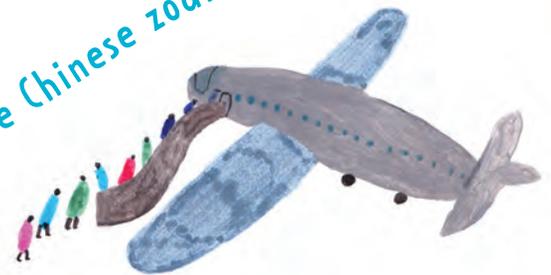
Dragon



Horse



Goat





Red lanterns are hung everywhere in China, symbolising the return of light, the coming of spring and the beginning of the new growing season.

Salt-cured fish hang in the streets of China. Fish symbolises prosperity and is often eaten during the Lunar New Year celebrations.

In China the colour red symbolises good fortune and happiness. Red is also thought to scare away the lion monster, Nian, in preparation for a happy new year.

The Dragon Dance is performed to scare away evil spirits and to bring good luck in the New Year.

The giant dragon weaves through the streets to the sound of cymbals, a gong and a big drum, held up by performers standing underneath.

In Beijing, Zhang Li enjoys a midnight feast of dumplings, called *jiaozi*. A coin is hidden inside one of the dumplings. If she finds the coin, it is believed she will have good luck for the rest of the year!

