



Little Door to the Fifth of December

How Christmas fairs came to be in Germany

The first Christmas fairs in the German-speaking world were mentioned over 600 years ago! The Bautzener Wendelsmarkt (Upper Lusatia, Saxony) dates back to 1384, the Dresdner Striezelmarkt (Dresden, capital of Saxony) was first mentioned in 1434 and the Nürnberger Christkindlesmarkt (Nuremberg, Bavaria) and Augsburger Lebzeltermarkt (Augsburg, Bavaria) were around for a similarly long time. There's even a "Wintermarkt" in Vienna (Austria) which dates back to 1382.

However, unlike today the Christmas fairs in medieval times didn't exist for amusement or get-together. The medieval urban citizens visited the market to buy food and equipment for the approaching Winter and the Christmas festival. Next to the merchants, craftsman like basket makers and shoemakers were also given the right to offer their goods on the market, gradually toymakers did too. Cake bakers were also present to provide sustenance and travelling musicians ensured there was background music.

The change begins in the 17th and 18th century, when Christmas turns from a purely religious to a middle-class family festival. Get-togethers and gifts for the children became more relevant for the middle- and upper-classes. During this time, the custom to erect a crèche originated. The first of these crèches were built in Italy at the beginning of the 17th century.

