



Nativity

In 1223, S. Francesco from Assisi (Umbria, a central region in Italy) wanted to reproduce in Greccio (a small mountain village near the town of Rieti) the scene of the birth of Jesus. Real people played the role of Jesus, the Virgin Mary and S. Joseph as real animals warmed the very freezing night by their breathing. A lot of people came to see the sacred representation from all the villages of the valley. They were in a procession with candles in their hands to give light to the dark night. They sang and prayed. People didn't forget the magic of that night and it went on for centuries, in a lot of places, in different forms. S. Francesco, with this nativity, started the most known tradition in the world. People were replaced by statues. The oldest nativity is the one by the sculptor, Arnolfo di Cambio, 1280, which we can still see in Rome (Basilica S. Maria Maggiore). In Napoli and Genova real schools of art started producing statues representing the way of dressing, the tools of farmers, merchants, shepherds who are put in nativity. The material used to make the statues can be: straw, wood, plastic, plaster. There is a tradition in Rome, very famous all over the world, to go to Piazza Navona from 8th December to 6th January. The square is full of stands which sell Christmas decorations, statues for nativity and sweets. In 'Piazza del Popolo' there is a 'Nativity Show' (100) from different countries. The Italian word 'Presepe' comes from the Latin one 'Praesepe' which means manger, the cradle used for Jesus.

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