

Basque Mythology:

OLENTZERO

Course: Basque History and Culture I
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–OLENTZERO

(Onenzaro, Onentzaro, Olentzaro, Ononzaro, Orentzago...)

olesen + aroa → „to call/ask” + „time/season”

*For earlier Basques, it was the season of asking from house to house.

- ✓ chubby man
- ✓ good meal & wine
- ✓ peasant clothes & txapela
- ✓ pipe



jentilak

*race of giants,
enormous strength

glowing cloud,
blind man, birth
of Jesus,
slaughter

**jentilak* leave,
Olentzero
embraces
Christianity

*remaining
jentilak hide
themselves,
stones,
Olentzeros
announcement

woods,
fairy,
*childless
couple,
charcoal
maker,
toys,
children,
fire,
eternal life

DIFFERENT VERSIONS

PAGAN VERSION Thousands of years ago there was a tribe of *jentilak* and *Olentzero* was one of them. One day the people of this tribe discovered a **glowing cloud in the sky**. They feared that this phenomenon was the divine sign of the arrival of the **birth of Jesus**. None of them could look at this bright cloud except for a very old, **blind man**. He confirmed their fear. So, the blind man asked his giant friends to throw him off the highest cliff and they did it, but on the way back the group of giants tripped, fell and died (except – *Olentzero*)*. **He hiked to the villages in the valley and cut the throat of those people who ate too much on the day before the arrival of Christ, on the 24th of December***.

Jentilak* left, only *Olentzero* remained behind to embrace **Christianity.

*The remaining *jentilak* hid themselves under the **stones**. *Olentzero* placed stones on them and announced to the Basque people the arrival of Christianity.



CHRISTIANIZED VERSION As a new born *Olentzero* was left alone in the **woods** where a **fairy** found him and raised him*. He turned into a strong man and worked as a **charcoal maker**. He carved **wooden animals, toys** and **dolls**. When he had a big charcoal bag full of toys he hiked to the village in the valley and distributed the wooden figures amongst the **children**. The kids loved him and *Olentzero* came back whenever he had finished another bag of toys. One day he came down to the village and found a **house in flames**. Without hesitation he ran into the house and saved the children. Unfortunately, the house collapsed under the fire, burying him. Suddenly fairy came and granted him **eternal life to continue to bring joy to children and people**.

*The fairy took *Olentzero* to a childless couple and they accepted the baby with open arms.



DICEMBER

30	31	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
30	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	 24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	1

MODERN OLENTZERO

→ in the night of **Christmas Eve**, when everybody sleeps, he gets into the houses through the **chimneys** to warm himself up

→ **charcoal maker** who lives in **a hut in the mountains**

→ brings **Christmas presents (or coal)** to the children and to the adults

→ "**baserri**" (farmhouse) in towns and cities



Useful links 😊

[Olentzero - Wikipedia](#)

[Olentzero: The Basque Christmas Figure \(nabasque.eus\)](#)

[Olentzero, the Basque Santa Claus - YouTube](#)

