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Thread: [Ancient Origins of January 1 \(Fun Facts\)](#)

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Here are a few interesting historical facts about New Year's celebrations, dates, and customs from around the world:

Ancient Origins of January 1

The practice of celebrating the new year on January 1 dates back to 46 BCE, when Julius Caesar introduced the Julian calendar. The month of January is named after Janus, the Roman god of beginnings and transitions, often depicted with two faces looking to the past and future.

In the Roman Empire, January 1 became a day for honoring Janus by offering sacrifices and making promises of good conduct.

Not Always January 1

In medieval Europe, New Year's Day was not consistently observed on January 1. Depending on local or regional tradition, the start of the new year could fall on March 25 (Feast of the Annunciation), December 25 (Christmas), or Easter.

It wasn't until the 16th century that many European countries standardized January 1 as New Year's Day after adopting the Gregorian calendar (introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582). Protestant and Eastern Orthodox countries sometimes adopted the Gregorian calendar reforms much later.

The Julian to Gregorian Shift

The switch from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar was prompted by inaccuracies that caused the Julian calendar to drift away from the solar year. Over centuries, the date of the equinox began shifting, making it difficult to plan religious festivals accurately.

Different countries changed calendars at different times. For instance, Catholic nations like Spain, Italy, and Portugal made the change in 1582, while Britain and its colonies waited until 1752, and Greece until 1923.

Medieval and Early Modern Celebrations

Despite the confusion of dates, people still held winter festivities. In many places, feasting, music, and dancing were features of the season.

Early records show that revelers would typically go "first-footing" in Scotland, a tradition (still observed by some today) where the first person to cross the threshold of a home after midnight brings gifts and good fortune.

Times Square New Year's Eve Ball Drop

One of the most famous modern New Year's traditions—the Times Square Ball Drop—began

in 1907. The first ball was made of iron and wood and illuminated with 100 25-watt light bulbs.

The event quickly became a popular spectacle, and to this day, hundreds of thousands gather in Times Square to watch the ball descend in the final seconds of the year.

Traditional “First Day” Foods

Across cultures, many people eat symbolic foods on New Year’s Day for good luck. For example, in the Southern United States, eating black-eyed peas and greens is said to bring prosperity. In some European countries, lentils (shaped like coins) are believed to symbolize wealth.

In places like Spain and parts of Latin America, one longstanding custom is eating 12 grapes at midnight—one for each stroke of the clock—to ensure good fortune throughout the coming year.

Modern Global Festivities

Cities around the globe hold spectacular fireworks shows to usher in the New Year—especially at famous landmarks like the Sydney Harbour Bridge, London’s Big Ben, and the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

In Japan, the new year (oshogatsu) is one of the most significant holidays. Temple bells are rung 108 times to symbolize purification from the 108 earthly desires in Buddhism.