

MOORS AND CHRISTIANS - LUIS CARBONELL LLOPIS



Luis Carbonell Llopis became a member of the “Filà Els Verds” of the Moors and Christians festivities in the city of Alcoy at a young age. This veteran, who has formed part of the Moorish side for almost 50 years, can help us to better understand this centuries-old tradition.

Luis, what is the origin of this tradition?

In the Middle Ages, Muslims and Christians fought for control over the territory of the Iberian Peninsula. The stories about this historical reality remained in people’s memory, and from the 16th century onwards, these battles began to be symbolically recreated in the Valencian Autonomous Region. Albeit in different formats, more than 500 Moors and Christians festivals currently exist in Spain —and over 1,200 around the world.

Who are the participants that bring the festivity to life?

The whole community is represented in the festivity. Men, women and children from every social and economic segment feel part of it and return to their towns and villages to participate. They all belong to a local association entrusted with organisation and fund-raising tasks all year round which comes to play a relevant role beyond the festive events. The *festeros* (people involved in the *festa*) can be further divided into smaller groups of Moors or Christians (known as “filaes”, “comparsas” or “compañías” among other names, depending on the locality where the festivity is held) that take part in the parades and the various events that make up this celebration. The integration in the Moorish or the Christian side stems from family tradition, the proximity of a “comparsa” headquarters or the desire to stay within one’s group of friends.

Beyond popular enjoyment, what impact do these festivals have on the towns and villages holding them?

They are very valuable in economic terms. The clothing and footwear sectors dedicated to making the costumes shown in the festive events generate a great deal of work and income. Besides, costumes are rented out to *festeros* from elsewhere, which extends the benefits to these types of firms. Since music plays a key role in the festivity, the bands that play it are hired for

plenty of events throughout the year. The economic impact is also positive for the catering sector and for the suppliers related to it due to the tourist interest that this festivity arouses. In addition to these benefits, it is worth highlighting the cultural ones, which make our history and our identity known all over the world, as it happened in 2006, when a parade was taken to New York.

Is this festival similar to the original ones?

This festival has centuries of history. While the basic structure has remained the same, it became necessary to make changes so that it could adapt to the evolution of society: the number of *filaes* has increased as a result of the incorporation of new historical episodes into the festivity and because there are more participants than at the beginning; the designs of costumes have changed too because more and more new fabrics are available; the festivity continues to inspire composers and the musical repertoire keeps growing. Although the festival has a military origin and therefore only men used to take part in it, the presence of women has become increasingly visible, and they are now integrated into most events.

Finally, what makes the *festa* attractive both to locals and to visitors?

Undoubtedly, the desire to fraternise for a few days. In the “comparsa”, the worker and his boss have all their meals together; they parade shoulder to shoulder dressed in costumes of magnificent colour and richness; they march to the sound of the same music and share the enthusiasm for the festival as well as the desire to have fun. This festivity transforms them and makes them equal.

For visitors, it is a delight for the senses: the rich and colourful costumes, the smell of gunpowder from the recreation of battles, the intense music, the unity and joy. In the city of Alcoy, all the places from which the public can enjoy the festive events are permanently taken; that gives an idea of the interest aroused by the Moors and Christians festival. On a personal level, now that I am getting on in years, I remember the emotion that I felt when I first joined the festival with my father’s support; the good friends that I have made and that I still keep thanks to it; my appointment as second lieutenant to lead the parades... These experiences evoke truly unforgettable feelings in me.