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In-Cult



Cultural treasures, Spain
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CULTURAL TREASURES – SPAIN

ES_1 | Transhumance

Men have moved on foot with their livestock in search of pasture along the same paths for centuries. Nowadays, transhumance or seasonal cattle drives have been drastically reduced, among other reasons, due to the decline in extensive livestock farming, the number of shepherds and the difficulties of travelling along the traditional cattle trails.

The cultural transmission and exchange between regions, favoured by transhumance, is still alive in traditions, gastronomy, crafts and folklore; and the former cattle trails are now an excellent resource for getting in contact with nature and for the development of outdoor activities for an increasingly urban population.

In addition to the welfare of livestock, transhumance adds an outstanding environmental value: On the one hand, livestock disseminate plant species and contribute to the maintenance of biodiversity; on the other hand, the clearing of forest soil by animals helps to protect against fires. Transhumance is hard work, but it is a treasure that must be protected to prevent the disappearance of a way of life that has contributed so much to the benefit of society as a whole.

ES_2 | Valencia's Water Court

In addition to being a key resource for agriculture, water is very scarce in certain regions; hence why irrigation communities established their own courts to regulate its use and settle conflicts centuries ago.

Indications exist that the Romans already had a judicial body which fulfilled this function, its activity being confirmed in Islamic times too, possibly since the tenth century. Valencia's Water Court — Europe's oldest legal institution— is formed by a bailiff and eight trustees or representatives from the main irrigation ditches of the Turia River, farmers chosen by the irrigators who, despite lacking legal training, are highly knowledgeable about the unwritten and orally transmitted rules. The Water Court meets on Thursdays at noon, as it was customary among Muslims after the end of the weekly market prior to their holy day. Unlike them, the Christians did not impart justice in temples; however, they maintained the activity of this court at the Door of the Apostles of the Cathedral of Valencia, which enjoys the shade all year round at that time of day.

Its operation is simple: the reported farmers must appear before the court, which delivers its decision orally and publicly. The Court's judgments cannot be appealed and are always respected.

ES_3 | Mystery Play of Elx

The Festa or Mystery of Elche (Alicante - Spain), a unique European sacred-lyrical drama performed non-stop at Saint Mary's Basilica since the 15th century, narrates Virgin Mary's death (Vespra) and ascension to heaven (Festa). The performance on 14th August includes: Mary's yearning to join her son in Glory; the descent of the angel who grants her wish; the meeting of the apostles; the Virgin's death and her soul ascending to heaven. On 15th August the play represents Mary's burial, the Jews' dispute and conversion; the ascent of the Virgin's body (Assumption) and Mary's crowning.

This musical play develops on two planes: horizontal or terrestrial, formed by the *andador* (ramp)

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and the *cadafal* (stage); and vertical, aerial or celestial, with medieval manual pieces of stage machinery that move down to the singers: *magrana* (pomegranate); *araceli*; and *coronación*. It has a medieval monodic part as well as Renaissance and Baroque polyphonic pieces sung in Old Valencian only by men and boys, since liturgy forbade women's participation.

The inhabitants take part both as actors and spectators and in other organisation tasks, their efforts to keep this celebration over centuries having made the Festa become a symbol of the city's identity and a World Heritage Site since 2001.

ES_4 | Saint James Way

According to folklore, the hermit Pelayo found the apostle Santiago's tomb in 820 and built a modest church in the current location of the Cathedral of Santiago and its crypt, both of which have been a destination for pilgrims arrived from around the world along the same routes for over a thousand years.

The medieval Road to Santiago, a true melting pot, was key in the two-way exchange between the Iberian Peninsula and the rest of Europe, acting as a trade and knowledge 'hub' for the entry of social, economic, and cultural life elements that have shaped European society over the centuries. Saint James Way witnessed the power and influence of faith among all sorts of individuals in the Middle Ages and now continues to evolve in search of a more secular meaning. It brings together a set of historical-artistic heritage assets, alongside an intangible heritage which includes both spiritual and moral values that encourage solidarity.

Many pilgrims see the Way as a spiritual journey to find themselves, to reflect on important decisions and to achieve peace. A unique, never-to-be-forgotten chance to reach a challenging goal while meeting people and experiencing nature, as well as exploring new landscapes and places, that will mark a turning point in anybody's life.

ES_5 | Moors and Christians festivals

The "Moors and Christians" festivities are the festive representation of the struggles between Christians and Muslims (Moors) that took place since the Middle Ages.

They are celebrated all over the Iberian Peninsula, from Andalusia to the Basque Country and outside our borders, in several European countries and America, carried by the Spanish.

They were first documented in 1150, but it was not until the 17th and 18th centuries that they definitively became part of the popular roots of most of the towns in the province of Alicante, with those of Alcoy standing out for being the town that transformed the old festivities into the current dramatised representation in three acts:

- Parade of the Moorish and Christian troops (the luxurious costumes and music created expressly for these parades should be highlighted).
- Liturgical acts.
- Occupation of the castle by the Moors and its subsequent recovery by the Christian troops aided by the patron saint.

This trilogy became the common model for the "Moors and Christians" festivities in the Valencian Region. There are coastal towns where the Moors also attacked by sea, which is represented in the so-called "landing", after which the two sides fight at dawn on the beach.

ES_6 | Esparto crafts

In the arid landscapes of south-eastern Spain grows the *atocha* or *espartera*, a perennial plant with long, thin leaves which develops feather-shaped spikes. The leaf, known as esparto (grass), is a fibre that has been used for weaving in the Iberian Peninsula for at least 4,500 years.

Its resistance to humidity made esparto cordage widely popular in the mining industry among both the Phoenicians and the Romans. The export of esparto proved fundamental for the city of Alicante during the Muslim period, and only Spaniards could trade with it in the 16th century.

Fibre preparation follows a laborious process of harvesting, drying, soaking and chopping (removal of the leaf's woody part). In the past, some professional guilds were in charge of collecting and transforming the plant, but this activity also formed part of the domestic economy in many families, involving all their members, from children to the elderly.

Esparto serves to make ropes or farming and household tools, e.g. baskets, saddlebags, scouring pads, torches or espadrilles. Halfway through the 20th century, it was replaced by plastic fibres, even though some craftsmen still preserve these thousand-year-old techniques and designs.

No wonder numerous towns in Spain have a street called "Esparteros" (esparto craftworkers).

ES_7 | Fondillon wine

The recovery of a treasure called Fondillón

Fondillón, a unique old wine from Alicante (Spain), was present at Europe's most select tables since the Middle Ages.

Monastrell grapes, the only variety used, are extremely resistant to heat and drought. The oldest vines are over a hundred years old. The warm, dry climate allows the fruit to overripen in the stock until well into the Autumn, leading to increase both sugar and alcohol levels. After a natural fermentation with no added sugar, the wine spends at least 10 years in casks laid at three levels.

Ageing occurs through the traditional solera system: one third is extracted for consumption from the barrels closer to the floor or solera; then the same amount is moved or transferred from the second level to the solera and, finally, from the upper to the medium one. The new wine added will be at least five years old.

Fondillón is slightly sweet, full of aromas and ideal as an aperitif or for dessert and brought considerable wealth to Alicante until the phylloxera plague destroyed many vineyards in the early twentieth century. It stopped being produced until the appearance in the 60s and the 70s of some old barrels whose "madre" (lees) served to recover a wine which currently appears on the menus of the world's best restaurants