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# In-Cult



**Interviews - Spain**  
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## WATER TRIBUNAL OF VALENCIA – JAVIER PASTOR MADALENA

Interview conducted by Emilia Abad and José Gil



*Javier Pastor Madalena, lawyer and secretary of the Acequias de Mislata and Rascaña. Graduate in Law from the University of Valencia. Specialist in Water Law. He is a lawyer for numerous irrigation communities and town councils. Mediator.*

### **Javier, where does the need for a specific court for irrigation water come from?**

To understand how it came about, we must appreciate that throughout the Mediterranean arc, irrigation communities have been organised through the figure of the Síndico or Water Judge, who had all the power of the community, including the power to impart justice within it. Even in the Middle Ages, this position was appointed by the king. In the final stretch of the River Turia there were seven intakes of the river, each of which formed a community of irrigators, which here we call acequias, whose Síndico was appointed by the irrigators.

It should also be noted that rainfall in Valencia is very irregular throughout the year. In order to reduce dependence on rainfall and to have more fertile land, centuries ago farmers created a complex system of irrigation channels that took water from the Turia river. The area that makes up the Tribunal de las Aguas is the last stretch of the river where the city of Valencia is also located. When there was not enough water coming down the river, the farmers came to the city to request its protection and help in order to force the upstream users to respect their privileges in the use of the water. This fact would force them to establish an ordinary turn of the waters that would allow them to irrigate all the irrigation ditches, up to the last one to take the water, the Acequia de Robella, which was the one that supplied the city with its right to water for sanitation and prevention of floods.

And finally, it should be borne in mind that all the Síndicos had to appear periodically, weekly, to report to the farmers on the latest irrigation news, and they did so on Thursdays (market day) where they would all be located in the same place and where it would be easy for matters of justice to be discussed between them until the Tribunal as we know it today was finally set up.

### **What is the structure and control of the irrigation network in the huerta of Valencia?**

The waters of the Turia are channelled through each of the main irrigation channels (the Acequia Madre), which distributes them among other smaller ones. The intakes are located on both banks of the river. So that the water is distributed proportionally and its use is optimised, each bank is entitled to three and a half days of irrigation per week; the water that is not consumed by one irrigation ditch is passed on to the next, where it can be used. In turn, the different irrigation communities set shifts that supply 7,000 ha of irrigated land. To exercise control, there are ordinances, which were passed down orally until they began to be written down at the beginning of the 15th century. Each community democratically elects a president or trustee from among its members, who is responsible for overseeing the fulfilment of obligations: irrigation shifts, cleaning of canals, payment of quotas, etc. With its non-directive governing board, but the function of Judge is personal to the Síndico.

### **How does the court work?**

The court is made up of the trustees of the eight irrigation communities, who have no legal training, although they are perfectly familiar with the ordinances of their community. Since medieval times there have been legal experts to advise the community and its governing board or board of directors, but they do not take part in the trials. A president and a vice-president are chosen from among the eight síndicos, who must belong to different margins. When there are disputes, the síndico of the acequia acts as a mediator to reach an agreement and avoid the resentment that can result from a sanction. If the dispute is unresolvable, the accused and the complainant must appear in court the following Thursday. The simple way of questioning and conducting the trial has meant that phrases such as "calle vosté"; "parle vosté" or "vosté ho ha fet?" have become part of the Valencian people's vernacular. In order to guarantee impartiality, the process is conducted and resolved by members of the opposing margin to which those involved belong. The sentences are always oral, respected and obeyed.

### **How many complaints does the court resolve annually?**

Farmers are aware that compliance with the rules is necessary for the good of the community. Moreover, the fact that the trial is held in such a popular place as the Puerta de los Apóstoles of Valencia Cathedral plays a deterrent effect: the people involved prefer to reach an agreement and be released from the public appearance. Fortunately, the number of complaints is low, no more than 15 or 20 a year, especially in spring and autumn.

### **Why has the Water Tribunal been maintained over time?**

The court is an example of a customary or traditional court of self-management of a society, based on an authority democratically elected by the farmers, and not imposed by a higher authority. Likewise, the speed and firmness of its rulings have demonstrated that its moral authority is still valid despite the centuries that have passed, which has earned it the recognition and respect of the members of the irrigation communities and its distinction as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage since 2009.

## MISTERI D'ELX – HÈCTOR CÀMARA SEMPÈRE

Interview conducted by M. Teresa Agulló and M. Luisa García-Caro



*Professor Hèctor Càmarà Sempere is a specialist in Catalan religious literature of the Middle Ages and a member of the Misteri d'Elx Board, the entity in charge of protecting, maintaining and celebrating the Festa in accordance with tradition. He explains why this religious drama is one of our greatest cultural treasures.*

### **What makes the Misteri d'Elx unique in Europe?**

Several features explain its uniqueness. I like to say that the Misteri is the only play which has been running uninterruptedly for over 500 years, something that neither Shakespeare nor Broadway musicals can boast about.

Furthermore, in Massip's words, it is "the best living and visible document of medieval theatre". We have countless old plays, but we do not know how they were performed. However, in the Mystery, we have both the text and the staging and, therefore, it is as if we were travelling through a time tunnel that takes us directly to the Middle Ages.

### **What role does popular participation play?**

The Misteri is known as the "Festa", this being its best definition: a festivity which involves the whole population. Although the staging takes place on every 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> August, it requires constant work by many volunteers throughout the year. Theatres did not exist in the Middle Ages; that is why, alongside its religious character, the performance takes place inside the Basilica of Santa Maria, where stagehands work with floor and air elements on a manual basis, following a centuries-old tradition. Furthermore, the work team includes hairdressers and tailors who endow the characters with the right appearance, as well as electricians or fitters, among others; altogether, almost 300 people give life to this religious drama performed by the singers of the chapel and the choir school (called Escolanía) of the Misteri.

Of course, the Misteri would make no sense without an audience. For two consecutive days, locals and visitors not only accompany the acts that precede the performance but also crowd the benches and galleries of the basilica to attend the staging. Despite perfectly knowing the plot, the drama keeps moving them year after year.

### **To what extent are children an essential part of the Misteri?**

Children have always been essential in this entirely sung performance. We should bear in mind that women were not allowed to participate in medieval plays, and therefore, when there were female characters, such roles were assumed by children for their high-pitched voices. That tradition has lived on to this day.

The selection is very strict in terms of singers' vocal skills, and the children enthusiastically accept the work that their participation entails. Due to the characteristics of the play, one of the most striking challenges faced by kids is the "Prova de l'Àngel", which serves to determine if they experience any dizziness when descending from a 25-meter-high dome in the Araceli or the Magrana, the aerial elements of the stage machinery.

### **What feelings does it provoke in the audience?**

Feelings change from one person to another. We must not forget that the Misteri is a religious theatrical piece about Virgin Mary's death and assumption into Heaven in body and soul, a theme that inspires deep fervour among believers. However, faith is not a must to enjoy the Mystery. There are some spectators who, captivated by the first experience, come back a second time and feel as if they were attending a completely different show. And this comes as no surprise, because the scenic space varies according to the place that you occupy in the basilica: the composition of the scene, the view of the characters, the light and the music are all perceived differently, but always remaining spectacular and overwhelming. Each experience is unique. To this must be added the awareness of witnessing a performance that requires the altruistic work of a community that has inherited this tradition from their parents and grandparents, a community that one joins because they feel it as their own. That passion for achieving a common goal can be clearly seen, and it arouses the emotion of all attendees.

### **What does the Misteri mean for the city of Elche?**

The Misteri continues to be played on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> August every year because it is Elche's festival *par excellence*. And nothing unites a town more than its festivities: every inhabitant identifies with them.

Unlike other medieval "mysteries", that of Elche was the one which best managed to bring together the population to celebrate it and transmit it; and precisely the consolidation of that symbolic and identity-related nature allowed the Misteri to last over time, while others disappeared.

As a matter of fact, the declaration of the Misteri d'Elx as an Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO acknowledged that its conservation depends on its link with the people of Elche, which is why its inhabitants continue to join forces so that it can remain alive for ever.

## ST. JAMES WAY – MANUEL VICEDO MARTÍNEZ

Interview conducted by Isabel Capitán and Rafael Arenillas



*Manuel Vicedo is a biologist, he worked in primary and secondary education and nowadays he is a lecturer at the Permanent University of the University of Alicante. Since 2014, he has been organizing trips to the St. James Way for the senior students of the university.*

### **Manolo, what made you decide to do the St. James Way for the first time?**

When I retired in 2009, I decided to take the backpack and do the Way. I had heard a lot about it, and I had many friends who had done it, but as a biologist, I was more interested in natural experiences, and that's why I took so long to decide. On the one hand, I had a cultural interest; and, on the other hand, the personal challenge, the feeling of being able to beat myself up. I did most of the Way with a friend, and although he stopped at Santo Domingo de la Calzada, I continued until the end. For 36 days, I walked the 792 km of the Way from Roncesvalles to Santiago. That was a unique experience, difficult to repeat in these times. I completed from 18 to 20 km. a day. I passed through 205 urban centres, 7 provinces; in short, I covered the entire north of Spain. It was an exceptional adventure that has marked my life forever. From my point of view, one of the main reasons why the road leaves this feeling on you is the people. Although you walk alone, you are always accompanied by people who come from all over the world. You sleep in hostels sharing life with these people you didn't know before, creating bonds, helping each other, sharing, and finally you return home full of experiences.

In 2014, the students of the Permanent University asked me to organize the trip for them. I loved the idea of spreading the spirit of the Way and living an intense experience with my senior students; therefore, since then, I have scheduled one stage of the Way a year, about 9 days long, during which about 100 km are covered at a rate of 15/18km a day. The first trips were so successful that I had to create a new group that started again from Roncesvalles.

### **The Way has evolved over the years, and with them the reasons for walking it, in your opinion what are the current ones?**

Since Sancho de la Rosa set out on the Way in 1132, starting from Roncesvalles with religious motivation, the reasons why people decide to do St. James Way have changed over the centuries. Today there are basically three: cultural, religious and sport. To these, we must add the personal challenge and the feelings of solidarity, cohesion and coexistence, which are shared

among the walkers. Living experiences with people from other countries with different mentalities also offers a linguistic and cultural richness to the traveller.

### **Is it necessary to sleep in hostels and carry your backpack all along with you to be considered a good pilgrim?**

In the old days, there was no logistical infrastructure, hostels or hotels, as we have today along the Way, so the pilgrim had to carry his backpack with all his equipment on his back. Today, however, it is not necessary to do it, as there are systems to pick it up to the end of our stage. This is much more comfortable for the pilgrim, as it allows him to relaxedly walk and not worry about it during visits and stops. Nonetheless, it is advisable to carry what is only necessary, few clothes and little weight.

As for sleeping in hostels, this is the traditional accommodation: they are simple, cheap, and usually equipped with laundry and other essential services. However, it is difficult to find a place in some seasons due to the considerable number of pilgrims. An alternative is to sleep in hotels, which generally offer many facilities and make it easier for older people, who used to face a very hard to do the Way, to do it now without too many difficulties.

### **What does it feel like to finish the Way and reach the Plaza del Obradoiro in Santiago?**

There are many indescribable emotions. Joy, happiness and a feeling of pride are the most obvious. The first thing pilgrims usually do when they arrive at the Plaza del Obradoiro is to give each other a congratulatory hug for having reached their goal after great efforts and sacrifices. Then, you have to go to the Pilgrim's Office to request the famous *Compostelana*, a document that proves that you have completed the pilgrimage.

### **What impresses you most about the Way?**

Along the Way, the pilgrim can enjoy a variety of landscapes of incredible beauty and contrasts, ranging from the wooded areas of the Pyrenees, through Castillian moors, to Galicia wetlands. Each city, each village we pass through, each of the hermitages along the Way has its charm. The pilgrim stops and feels enraptured in this contemplation. There are Romanesque temples, such as the cathedral of San Pedro in Jaca, the church of San Bartolomé in Logroño, Santa María de Eunate in Navarra or the Collegiate Church of San Isidoro in León, and Gothic temples such as the Cathedral of Burgos or Leon which impress the pilgrim.

Last but not least is the relationship with the other pilgrims you meet on the Way, for just one or several days, and with whom, besides having a common goal, you share experiences and a part of your life, establishing relationships that will last for many years to come.

# MOORS AND CHRISTIANS - LUIS CARBONELL LLOPIS

Interview conducted by Carmen Fernández and Rafael Torres



*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 *fiesta* 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.