

COMENIUS PROJECT

FOOD FOR THE SOUL

CARNIVAL AND GASTRONOMY



FEBRUARY 2011

CARNIVAL

SHORT HISTORY

It began four thousand years ago before Christ, with festivities in Ancient Egypt, such as festivities in honour of Isis. They were a mixture of religious and farming events that took place during the crops. People would paint their faces, dance and drink. There is also evidence that Carnival has roots in pagan festivities such as the ones in Ancient Rome, namely dances in honour of Dionysus.

With Christianity, Church began to control the people's excess in these pagan festivities. Carnival would now be a festivity that ended in penance on Ash Wednesday. Christians used to initiate Carnival on Christmas, New Year and King's Day. However, these commemorations would accentuate on Shrove Tuesday, called so because it was the last day in which Christians would eat meat before their fasting on Lent, a period where there would be no sex and fun such as circus, theatre and parties.

The Sunday of Carnival is always the 7th Sunday before Easter. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and lasts 40 days. In the Middle Age, there were Carnival games and customs. In Rome, horse races, parades and other fun activities. The mask bawl was introduced by the Pope Paul II, in the 15th century, but gained strength on the next century due to the success of *Commedia dell'Arte*. The most famous masks are the ones produced in Venice and Florence which were used a lot by the noble ladies in the 18th century as a symbol of seduction.

In Europe one of the main rituals in Carnival was Shrove-Tide. The word comes from Latin and means beginning, the start of Lent. It exists since 590 after Christ, when Carnival was officialised. The people would commemorate by eating and drinking to compensate fasting.

CARNIVAL IN PORTUGAL

It is a mixture of paganism and religiosity: besides being a preparation for Lent it was also influenced by many pagan rituals linked to nature, especially the rebirth of Spring with the death of old crops and the beginning of new ones. Therefore, rooted in the folklore is the burying of a character, an animal or a thing (the most common is the Funeral of the Codfish) in order to later celebrate life with dances, parades, colour, light and music.

Carnival comes from the Middle Age and was always a way of rebellion against order. During Carnival, the world was upside down: the devil was loose, masked people scarred many, men dressed as women, and the king was metaphorically killed. In Portugal, Carnival was and still is a street festivity.

In *Torres Vedras*, Carnival begins with a royal parade (a betrayed king and a male queen). Then comes the fights, funs and parades.



In *Podence*, in *Trás-os-Montes*, devilish figures with cowbells tied to their waist run in the streets. They are called *Caretos* and are men dressed up. They ring the cowbells towards women. It is a ritual related to fertility and is a way for men to reach to women. On the other hand, if women want to run from them, they usually dress up as men. The customs are made of wool of linen and the masks are made of tin.



In the Azores, after Christmas, groups of people start organising musical-dance carnival plays. These are a tradition in Terceira, although in small emigrant communities and other Azorean islands some interest in these folk dances and plays have been shown. There are different types of folk dances: there are “pandeireta” dances and sword dances. The dance-plays are based on social criticism and actual events, fights or tittle-tattle. Their aim is to amuse people. Every one joins up at the town hall to watch these dances. After each play, every group of dancers go to the next town hall and play all over again. Other people dress up in masks trying to scare people with them, with water balloons and water guns. There are also children parades organised by schools and other typical events of this time of the year, but they are not traditional.



Another activity is the *Assalto* (Assault) because these festivities were organised secretly by a group of friends who would choose a family as a victim and assault their home during the night, using it as a party location until dawn. Nowadays, people organise their parties and invite friends and family to their homes.



CARNIVAL AND GASTRONOMY

Carnival is celebrated during the three days before Lent, which begins in Ash Wednesday and lasts until Easter. However, right after Christmas, the environment is prepared for Carnival. On Sundays there were parties and meals, thus the name Fat Sundays. **Bean stews** became very common in Portugal, which vary according region. Rice accompanies the stew.



Some of the traditions in Portugal (mainland) were adapted to the Azores according to customs and environment. Interesting is the use of some sweets generally used in Christmas also used in Carnival.



Coscão



Filhós de forno



Filhós frita



Fofa