

## FAQs in English

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As every year, the arrival of carnival brings "Peropalo," a life-sized puppet who, in Villanueva de la Vera, is the main character of this event. During these days, there are several interconnected celebrations, making Peropalo one of the best examples (despite the distortions introduced through the centuries) of the agrarian fertility rites celebrated during winter in most of pre-Roman Europe. In fact, from the union of some of these rites, which were present in certain Roman festivals, the carnival as we know it derives. The explosion of freedom in all areas of these pagan events was later incorporated by the Church in the Middle Ages, condensed into the days leading up to Lent, the beginning of which marked the next change of season.

In Villanueva de la Vera, the central link of all these pagan elements has been, and still is, Peropalo. In its trial and ritual death, the entire village participates, understanding the true meaning of the event as a collective explosion of common identity.

### What is the celebration of Peropalo?



Carnival has been celebrated in Villanueva de la Vera (Cáceres) since ancient times. It is a celebration where the village comes together to have fun, sing, dance, eat, and drink... all around a puppet whose fate, after being paraded through the village, is to be burned on Tuesday afternoon.

Carnival is the time when the world is turned "upside down," and social conventions are broken. Disinhibition allows people to have fun and express themselves without barriers. This is facilitated by costumes, soot on faces, drinks... everything is allowed as long as it doesn't disturb the community's harmony or lead to senseless violence or the abuse of the strong over the weak. It's a time for joking, laughing, satire... in short, for partying. It's a time for contact, rubbing, hugging, jumping, shoving, and also for singing and shouting.

### How is the celebration experienced by the people?

In Villanueva, men wear loose shirts from old times or eccentric clothes. Women dress as they please, though most wear regional costumes. Life is lived outside the houses, in the square. People sing in small or large groups. There is dancing in the streets, the square, and the taverns, sometimes organized and other times in a chaotic way. It is a time for noise, anarchy, and music from various musical groups; for scruffy clothing and beautiful shawls and underskirts. It's the exclusive time for fun, abandonment of daily worries, and excess consumption as long as the body can handle it...

### **What is Peropalo?**

Peropalo is the center of Villanueva's carnival, the symbol of a celebration that is purely recreational, for the enjoyment of the people. It is not its excuse but its unifying factor, although one may have differing opinions about it: some wish for it to live, and others, nearby, yell for it to die. Some women wear mourning clothes at its death, while others dance in happiness. It's unity between contradictory elements, just like in real life. Peropalo is also a symbol of freedom, vital joy, and the natural forces of life. It is a celebration of great chromatic and musical beauty and an example of a village's identity. Furthermore, it is a token of human fragility.

### **What is the relationship between Peropalo and the jews?**

In Peropalo, realistic elements that narrate historical events and processes blend with symbolic ones. Over time, some connotations have been added that obscure its original magical meaning. However, the main character has always been central, and since the Renaissance, it has taken on an anti-Jewish connotation due to the special circumstances of those times. The puppet was called "Jude," just like other puppets that were burned during Easter festivals. Today, the aggressive tone in the lyrics of most songs no longer carries real meaning; it is simply a celebratory element used to justify the death of the main character.

### **What about the controversy about the use of a donkey during the celebration?**



Since the late 1980s, some animal protection organizations, mainly from France and the United Kingdom, have denounced the mistreatment of a donkey during the "corrida de las elecciones" on Tuesday morning.

However, these denunciations were based on false stories stemming from a misinterpretation of the event, taken out of context. In recent decades, the very popular song “The Donkey Died” has been sung during the event, leading animal protection groups to think a donkey was killed. In reality, they have denounced non-existent events, such as the donkey being thrown off a balcony, thrown into a fountain, one of its eyes being gouged out, and even that it was skinned and eaten raw. Villanueva residents admit that, perhaps in the 1980s, this part of the ritual was less controlled, but these horrific events never took place. To avoid confusion, the same donkey is used every year, and a “donkey supervising group” has been established to manage this act, which continues to take place without incident.

### **What is the relationship between the Inquisition and this celebration?**

Tradition holds that in the year 81 (exact century unknown), the people of Peropalo were taken to Llerena, the seat of the Holy Office in charge of Extremadura, accused of killing a man every year. The accusation had to specify that such a killing followed Jewish ritual patterns, as the Llerena court, being inquisitorial, had no jurisdiction over civil matters.

In the end, the proceedings showed that the people of Peropalo simply enacted the death of a Jewish man. They were absolved and given drums and halberds, which were incorporated into the celebration from then on. According to tradition, the king was present at the celebration and greatly enjoyed it, so he donated the items. This leads one to believe, given the rarity of royal visits to Extremadura, that this event occurred in the sixteenth century, since Philip II made a trip to be crowned king of Portugal that year. He returned in the early days of the year, which is why the song says, "On the first day of the year, we must sound the drum, as in Llerena we won over the Holy Inquisition." Halberds had been a key element of the royal guards since 1504 when the halberdier corps was created for the protection of the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella.



### **What happens with the puppet?**

The main character, being folkloric in nature, always undergoes a series of rituals that are repeated every year, which give the puppet its identity. It is secretly manufactured during Saturday night, and by Sunday morning, bars and discos empty out as the

Peropalo people accompany the puppet to its "rightful place," the "needle of dishonor." There, it remains in different positions during the days of celebration. On Sunday and Monday, it is paraded through the village streets. All end up at the square for the bean stew and "jota" dances.

### **What happens the great day (Día grande)?**

Tuesday is the day with the most events. The puppet is condemned to death for its sexual excesses and is forced to walk the sentence while riding a donkey. In this case, a young man substitutes the puppet on the animal, around which all the youths gather. For the sake of realism, the Captain of the celebration, along with other stewards, is handed a flag and halberds. The general satisfaction with the verdict is celebrated with a communal offering of sweets and lemonade.

The most vibrant events take place in the afternoon. The day starts with a comic offering, the "Offer of the Pumpkin People," in which those who give money are not thanked but instead hit with pumpkins.

There is also a secular procession, the "Walk," where part of the community, especially women in beautiful regional dresses, accompany the captains. They are protected by a group of halberdiers. The man carries the event's flag, and the woman carries a thick bramble from which a "chorizo" (red sausage) hangs, symbolizing Peropalo's genitals. During the route, traditional songs and stanzas are sung. The walk ends in the square, where the "Dance of the Flag" begins, with men spinning the flag in displays of skill and strength.



### **How does the celebration end?**

The end of the event is known in advance. The ritual culminates with the beheading, dismembering, and death of the puppet. On its way to death, it is accompanied by mourners who lament its inevitable fate and recall its sexual exploits. While it is tossed in a blanket, the musketeers shoot at it, and its remains are burned. The beating of drums, accompanied by a long "jota" dance, provides the final touch to the celebration. The ashes of Peropalo, scattered throughout the square, are believed to have the power to revitalize nature.

The strength of the character is such that, although in the stanzas sung throughout the celebration it is associated with Jude and the Jews, Peropalo is much more. It is also known as "Revive." Naturally, the main character will come back to life next year, with the same outfit, figure, and, of course, the same mission: to bring joy to the village.

