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CONTEMPORARY SPANISH FESTIVALS

by

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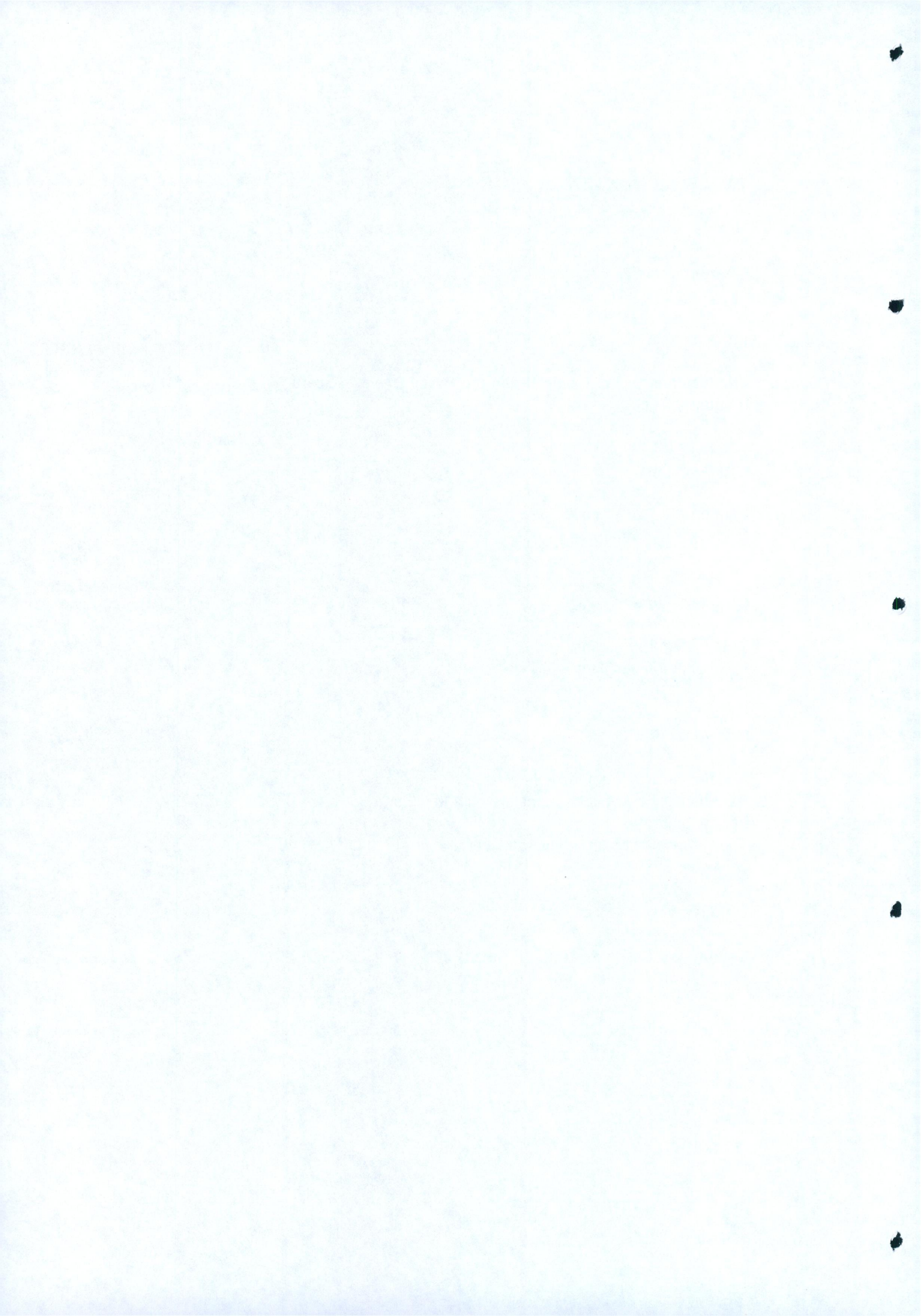
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION:

Spain in the late twentieth century continues to maintain its popular culture of traditional festival rites. Almost every town and village, of all the seventeen autonomous regions, have inculcated this tradition. Some have persevered for centuries, others have stagnated in one region and are re-introduced in another location as a result of migration. Spanish festivals honour patron saints, religious occasions and, most of all, events relating to local folklore.

As Epton Nina Consuelo points out "festivals bring people together to celebrate the passing of life and allow and invite the ethnographer, the glutton, the devout, the amorous, the aesthete and the historian to participate." (1) In the course of this thesis you will see that these phenomena are clear characteristics of Spanish festivals. Social barriers are unimportant because people of all levels of society are encouraged to share and participate in the festival rites.

I became interested in Spanish culture, a result of having studied there in 1993 on an Erasmus Exchange Programme. What enamoured me to the country was its great diversity of cultures, each region having its own distinct traditions. The festivals of each region reflect this local identity. To write about all the festivals throughout Spain in the yearly cycle would take volumes, so I have concentrated and condensed my interest to three regions which will exemplify the state of contemporary festivals currently in practice in Spain. The three regions I have chosen are Catalonia, Valencia and Andalucia. According to Richard Ford all share the common belief that "the region comes before the state." (2)

There are also the biggest festivals in Spain during the Easter period. The Easter
festivals are off season events where locals take precedence over foreign tourists. A
growing awareness of community identity has blossomed and everyone takes a civic
pride in these events which begin with the Carnival (which always precedes Lent) right
through to the "Semana Santa" Festival at the end of the Easter cycle.

In the course of this thesis I will discuss the relevance of the festivals of "Las Fallas",
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regions. In the course of my research I discovered that in the past these festivals
endured some turbulent periods of financial hardship and political restrictions. Once
the hard times have passed the festivals once more burst forth in all their might. (3) My
research has revealed that the three festivals have originated in the middle ages. Others
of more recent countries, have changed and evolved according to circumstances,
reflecting a wide range of fashions and influence over the years. The new democracy of
Spain has brought about regional autonomy where each sector maintains its own
parliamentary role which was granted in the 1978 elections. Today the festivals get far
hand support from their local government because they play an important role in
displaying nationalist sentiment. Previous to the new democracy Franco realised the
importance and impact the festivals had in promoting this nationalistic spirit, particularly
in Catalonia. He clearly ruled out any inkling of dissent among the regions which
these festivals could have promoted. Examples of his authority can be found where he
repressed the February Carnival in Catalonia, where anyone found wearing masks would
receive severe penalties such as imprisonment and interrogation, and for this reason the
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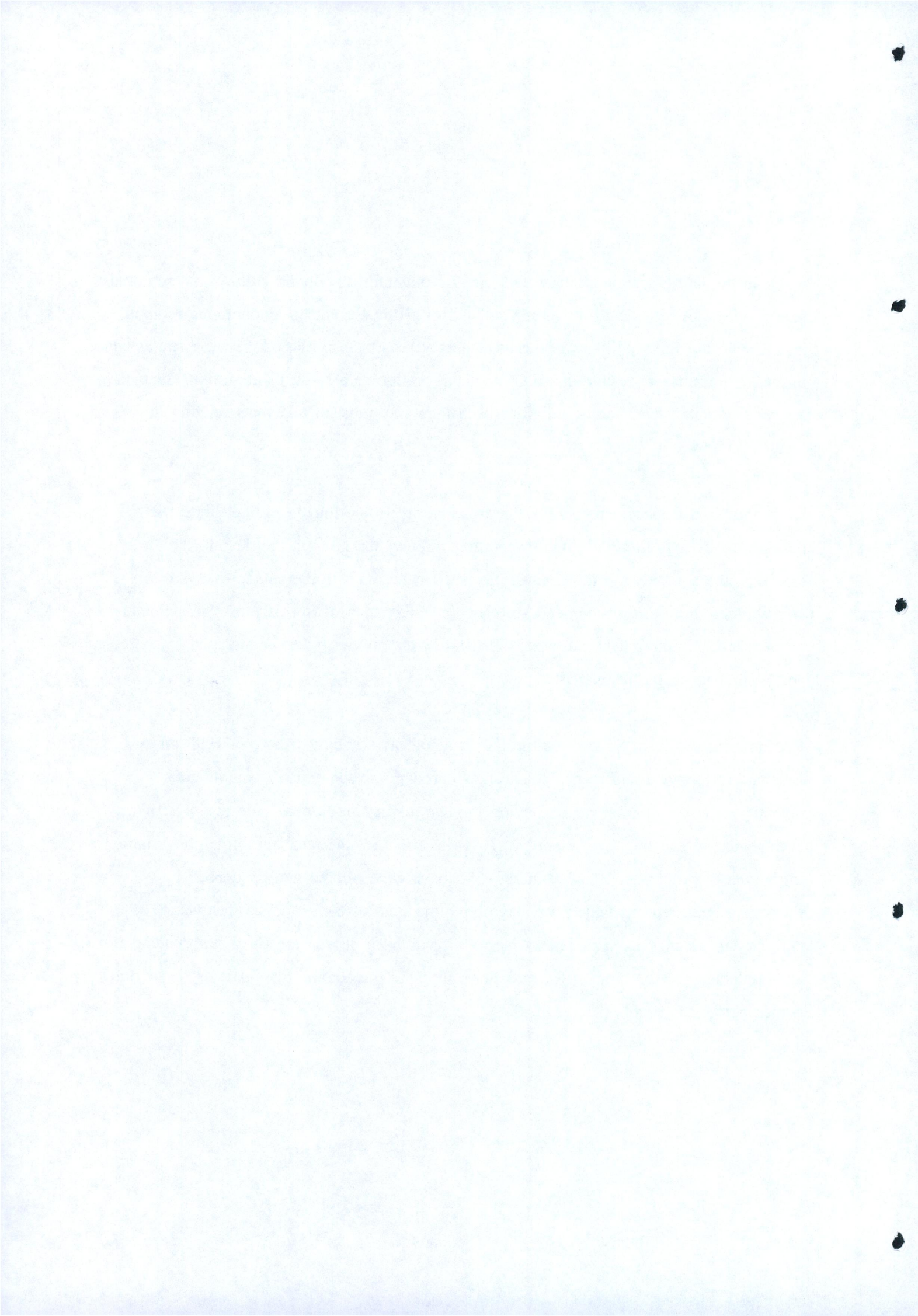
Chapter 1

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Other factors which have moulded the ethos of the Spanish nation in the past fifteen years since democracy include the ever increasing influence of Americanisation which is clearly reflected in the "Las Fallas" festival, and Spain's entry into the European Community, promoted by Catalonia in order to be more intergrated into European culture rather than Spanish nationalism. Spanish festivals in the late twentieth century continue to reflect its political and sociological behaviour. I will discuss this in the following chapters.

THE MEANING OF THE CARNIVAL AND THE EASTER CYCLE IN SPAIN:

In theory, and in accordance with the liturgical calendar the carnival takes place over three days, before Ash Wednesday, but in some parts of Catalonia it lasts a week. (4). The reality is that carnivals may be celebrated when the tradition of the townland dictates.

Traditional christian understanding interpreted the Carnival as "an intensification of Liberty, as contrasted with Lenten abstinence". (5). Traditional interpretations in Spain by writers like Arcipreste Hita, relate more to the fun and folly of the Carnival, like "Don Carnival Y Dona Cuaresma", translated as Mr. Carnival and Mrs. Lent.(6)

Caballerro Bonald, in the "Fiesta y Ritos de Espana", suggests that the principal characteristic of Carnival is permissiveness anything goes policy where, even more than putting on a mask, to dress up in order to hide the physical form and nature of the person, alters the personality. Indeed dressing up, where people are mistaken for another, liberates from inhibitions and can even invert sexuality. Gilmore concurs, pointing out that the carnival is a time of great licence, of psychological release, where the mask allows one to do whatever one wants, without the fear of recognition. "We can come alive and cover our faces and no one recognises us and look out the sky is the limit". (7). When Franco came to power in 1931, one of the first legislative acts passed by his government was to outlaw the Carnival. In 1937, in the midst of the Spanish Civil War anyone found wearing a mask was liable to servitude punishment.

Celebrations then abated temporarily but, after the War in the late forties with Marital Law suspended, the celebrants went underground, and no one could take the Carnival away from them.(8)

The word "Carnival" originated from the Italian-word "**CARNE VALE**" meaning "goodbye meat", suggesting that a carnival is a prelude to the Christian Lenten period. Anthropologists from the fifteenth century associated carnivals with the rituals of the ancient Greek Gods - Bacchanalia and Saturnalia - which celebrated the end of the Winter period, in preparation for Spring. Caro Baroja asserts that "Carnival today is a prodigal son, but, a son all the same of christianity". (9). It is not discounting the fact that it could be a pagan ritual, but, clearly today's interpretations stem from the christian origin. Contemporary writers, such as J.M. Caballero Bonald, Julio Caro Baroja, and Epton Nina Consuelo, are unanimous in their findings.

Lent, following the carnival celebrations in the Easter cycle, is a period when people traditionally abstain for several weeks from meat and worldly desires to lead a more constrained life. This was to identify with the humanity and death of Christ, to participate in his suffering and to rejoice at his resurrection. At the end of Easter when the "Semana Santa" festival is celebrated in the south of Spain, the procession with floats gives an external veneration to the christian dimension and living faith of its people.





(Fig. 1)



REGIONS OF SPAIN

CATALONIA - ANDALUCIA - VALENCIA

The region of Catalonia in the North of Spain connects with Valencia at Tortosa, and Valencia almost borders Andalucia but is separated by the region of Murcia.

Geographically all are mediterranean regions, but in many respects they are worlds apart, culturally speaking. Each region has its own unique customs and traditions which can be traced back to the ancient history of Spain when the Moors and Jews lived there together. Both Moors and Jews were driven out in 1492 by the Spanish monarchy, leaving behind a rich cultural heritage. Additionally each region encourage its people to speak their own language, sometimes in preference to Spanish.

Richard Ford, in "Handbook for Travellers in Spain", published in 1845 a book which Ian Gibson refers to throughout his own book, "Fire in the blood" speaks strongly about Spaniards' loyalty to their own community regions and explains that the concept of Spain as a nation had little meaning to them. He writes "Spain is today as it always has been a bundle of small bodies tied together by rope of sand and being without union is also without strength. Galicians, Catalans, Castillians, Andalucians, Basques, Valencians, Murcians, each with their own customs, installed in widely varied landscapes and different languages. 'Who' asked Ford, would ever be able to make them see eye to eye, to bind them into anything more than a temporary unity?" (10).

On a political level this sense of regional pride was further promulgated in the 1978 constitution, three years after the death of General Franco, based on the conviction that unless historically differentiated regions like Catalonia, Valencia and the Basque country were afforded a considerable measure of self-government the new democracy would fail to take root. Now Spain is a quasi-federal nation divided into no less than seventeen comunidales autonomas (autonomous communities) each with its own local parliament.

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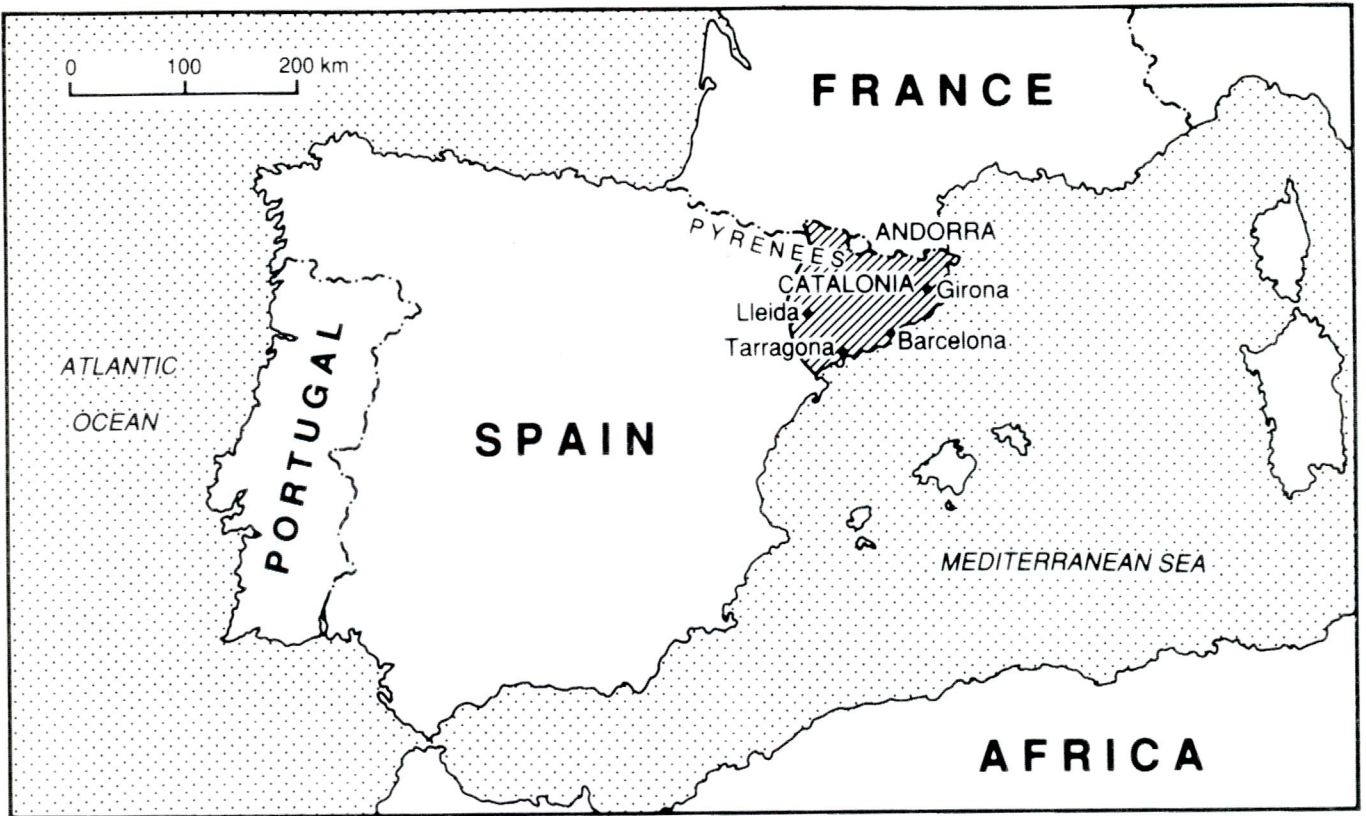


Fig 2. Map of Catalonia region

Chapter 2

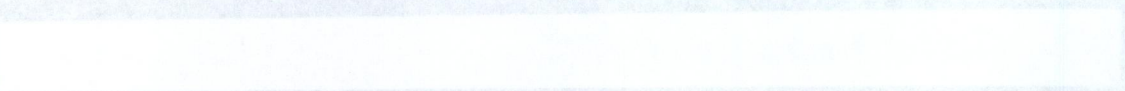
CATALONIA:

Catalonia in the north east of Spain is by far the most industrialised region. Its continual economic growth affords its people a good standard of living. They also take great pride in their economic ability to compete in the European market above all other regions of Spain including Madrid. This has resulted in a certain amount of rivalry between both regions. Which goes back to the Franco years when Catalonia was denied its independence, political autonomy and cultural freedom by the Central Government in Madrid who ruled and governed the country. All political decisions were made from Madrid and any form of Catalan nationalism was rejected. Many executions took place of Catalan rebels who posed a threat to Franco's government. He banned the Catalan language in schools, churches, newspapers and commercial documents. His aim was to make Spanish the only language spoken in the country. Richard Ford asserts that

"no province of the unamalgamating bundle which forms the conventional monarchy of Spain hangs more loosely to the crown than Catalonia, this classical country of revolt, which is ever ready to fly off".(1)

Franco realised that feast days and festivals played an important role in Catalan culture and that they promote strong nationalist sentiment, and so he put an end to the February Carnival from 1931 onwards, until his death in 1975.

The 1978 constitution set up three years later finally gave Catalonia, along with other regions, a considerable measure of self-government and thus the Catalan language and cultural identity have been restored. The new democracy has reinstated many of the festivals which were demolished during the Franco regime.



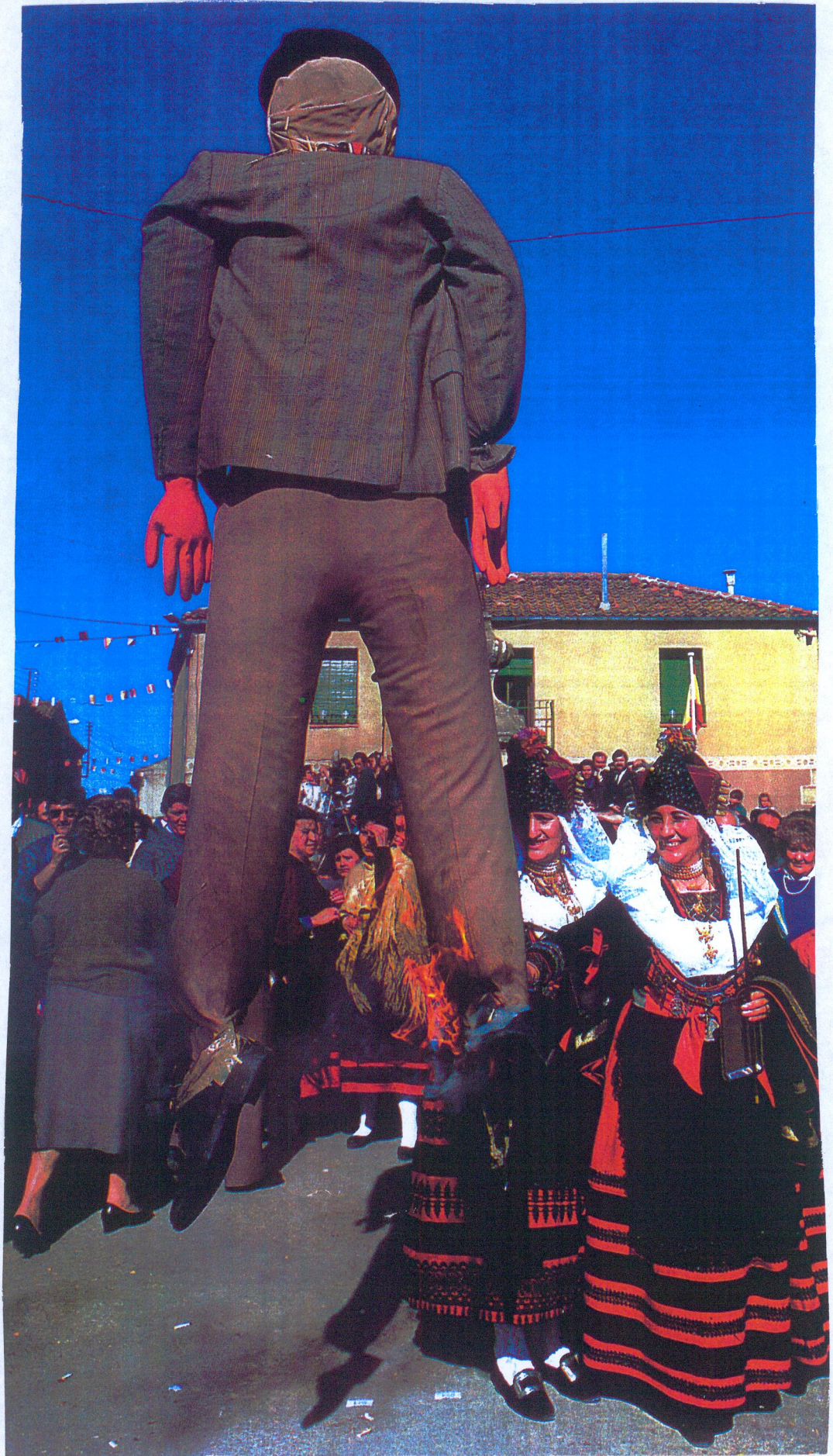


Fig 3. Carnislotles figure in the Northern Catalan territory

The Catalan festivals receive strong support from Jordi Pujol, President of the Generalitat (The Catalan Parliament). This was particularly evident during the opening ceremonies of the 1992 Olympic games, when a most spectacular display of Catalan Carnival rituals was mounted which gained world wide attention through the mass media.

CARNIVALS OF CATALONIA CELEBRATIONS:

The Carnival period preceding Lent is extensively celebrated in both rural and urban regions of Catalonia. The celebrations have experienced a considerable boom in the last few years in spite of a diminishing population (as a result of migration in the past) now as a result of an increasingly healthy economy in the small towns there has been both a revival and a increase in the number of festivals - to eight hundred - amongst a population of some Four million inhabitants.(2)

Some of the more traditional small town communities, which have continued to maintain their ancient and modern carnival rites, are quite evident in the northern Catalan territories, like the towns of "Durro" (Valle de Bohi) and "Ribera de Cardos" where the medieval ritual "Death of the Carnivals" is still maintained. Like many Catalan towns Durro's Carnival celebration is full of enjoyment with lavish food and drink, prepared in its traditional way, maintaining its own uniqueness and indigenous nature. There is a clear absence of foreign tourists when compared to the Barcelona and Sitges Carnival celebrations.

The ancient rituals of "Death to the Carnival King" which is celebrated in many Catalan towns can best be appreciated in the northern territory of Durro (Valle de Bohi) and Ribera de Cardos.



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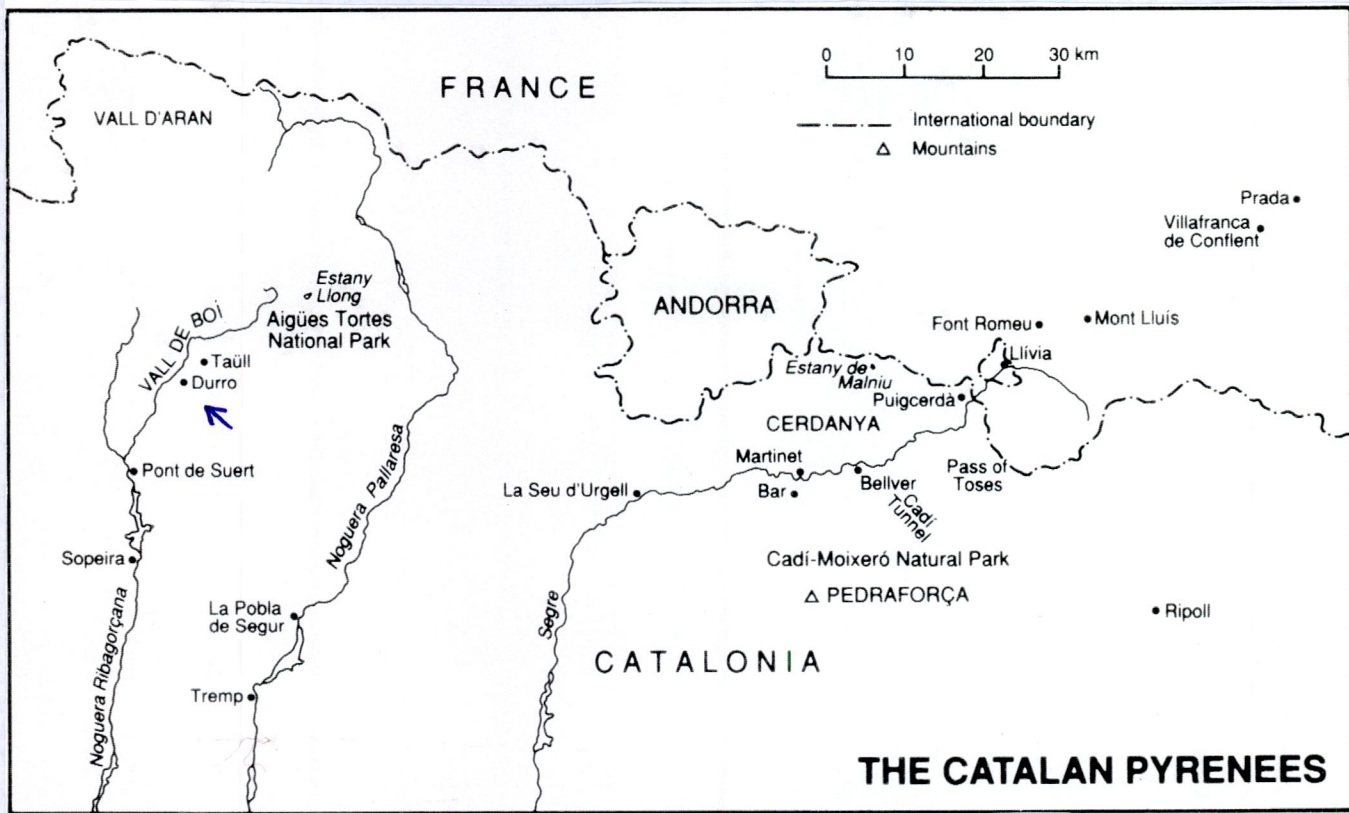
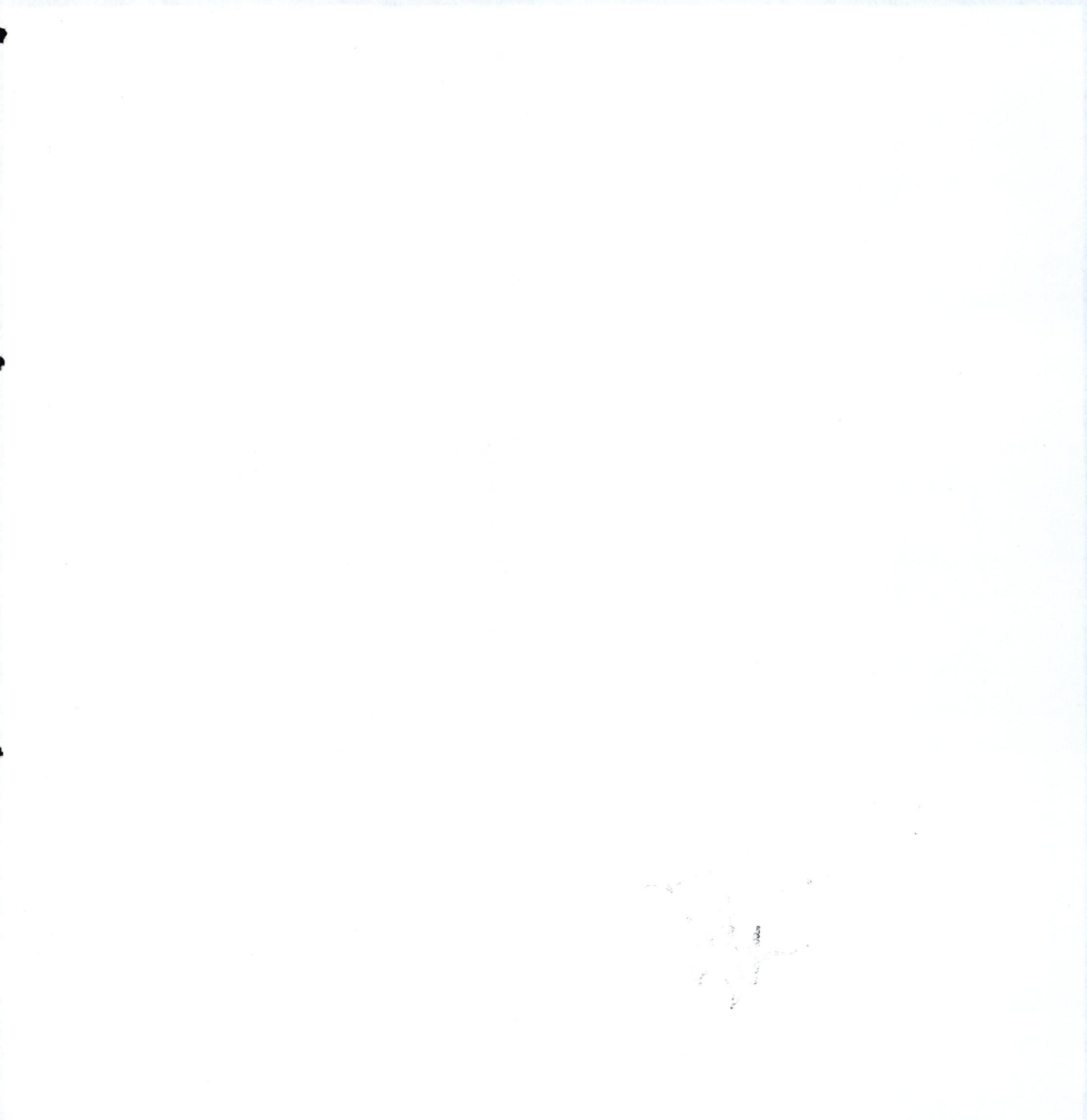


Fig 4. Map of the Northern Catalan territory

The carnival figure called "Carnislotles" (represented by a straw doll) means "Carnival King" in Catalan. The sentence to death of "Carnislotles" takes place on Ash Wednesday afternoon, in the centre of the village and the great spectacle can be contemplated by all the villagers from an elevated hilltop position, in the town. The figure of Carnislotles, who is physically represented by one of the young boys in the village, is accused of gluttony, drunkenness and having brought idleness to the village for several days, and for such grave assaulting circumstances against the property and morality of the people the spokesperson, jocosely and with a great flowery speech, requests the penalty of death. The defense asks for absolution from the sentence, maintaining that there were benefits received, thanks to him, as during three days they have filled their stomachs and have been served in great style.

Finally, the judge orders the death sentence and in a witty speech terminates his life. Immediately afterwards a person in the crowd fires a shot in the air and the Carnival King falls down dead, pulling with him a boy dressed in an Ox costume. They collect the Carnislotles (the dummy doll) and the boy, and carry them to the square, where they cover them in straw and set fire to them. When the flames have ignited the straw, the boy, who now represents the King of the Fiesta, quickly escapes shaking the lighting straw from his body amidst the applause of the spectators. This event now celebrates the resurrection because in this way the carnival will reign once again the following year. In "Ribera de Cardos" they prepare a grotesque carnival king similar to Durro's "Carnislotles" which is erected on the Sunday preceding Ash Wednesday and again a young boy is used, this time to carry the figure around on a donkey.



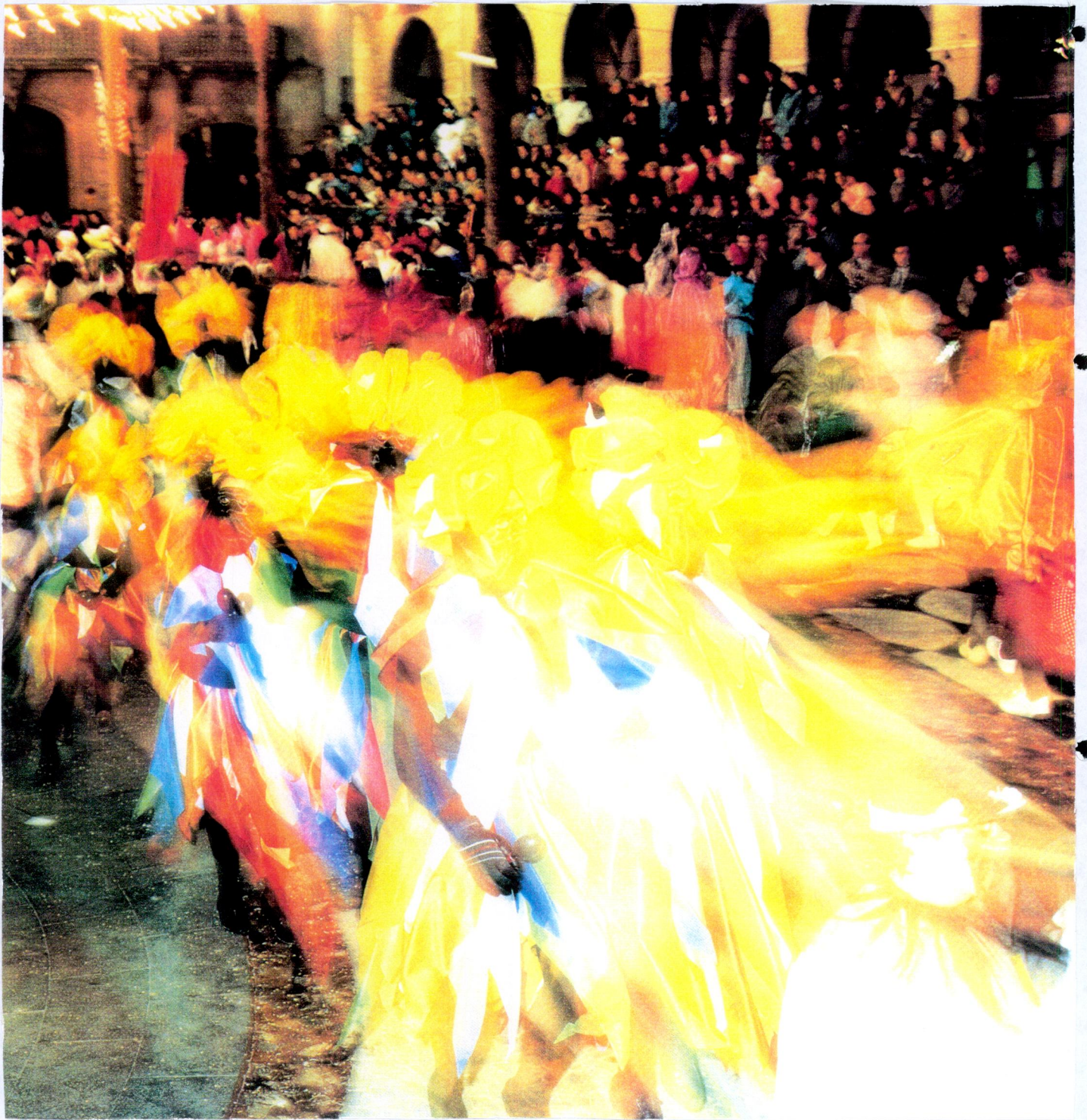


Fig 5. The Carnival of Villanueva i la Geltru 1992

He later hangs the dummy from the balcony in the square with a saucepan in his hand, symbolising the eating ritual of the Carnival. From this position the dummy presides over the festival. Julio de Baroja describes this as "garnish and deprived of poetry but in general ostentatious and enjoyable".(3)

Although these rituals from the northern Catalan territory may seem primitive and trivial they nonetheless belong to a long trail of Mediterranean customs which date back to the nineteenth century. Some have died away and others, such as Durro and Ribera, have in recent years been revitalised. The Carnivals of Villinova, Sitges and Barcelona have always had a history of political undercurrents, connotations of sexual intrigue, bizarre disguises and masked balls which differentiate them from the more simplified rituals of the Northern Catalan territory. The Carnival in these three towns is tinged with a hysterical and explosive excitement. The participants parade through the streets, drinking, singing and merrymaking, displaying their feelings and sentiments in song and verbal aggression. Again this can be traced back to the Franco regime period when the Catalan people were repressed in both civil and political freedom.

David Gilmore points out that "the poor and powerless used the 1930 Carnival to express their accumulated resentment against the rich and powerful to indicate political and social injustice." (4)The Carnival today in Sitges still retains political innuendos though in a more constrained way compared to the 1930's. However, there are strong sexual references in the disguises and floats. Quite a number of the float displays, costing over one million pesetas, were devised by the Gay community. Last year in Villinova they celebrated their two hundred and thirty second anniversary.

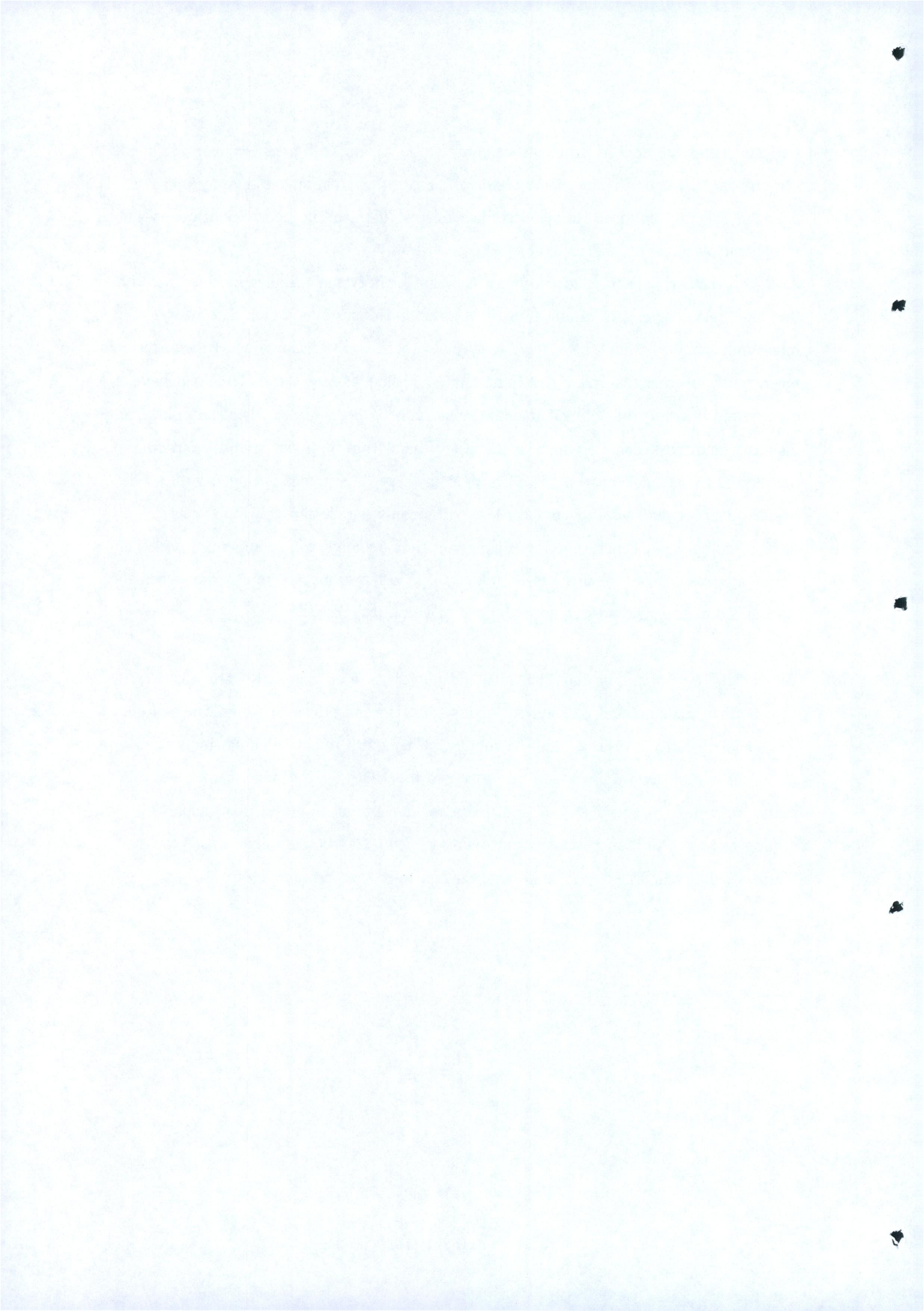




Fig 6. The Carnival of Sitges 1993



The organisers found a political motive to retaliate against Madrid for infiltrating the Barcelona Olympic Games, with their archer (Antonia Rebollo) who opened the Olympic Games by setting fire to the Olympic flame with his arrow, but, unfortunately missing the target. Some of the floats satirised Rebollo dressing him up in traditional costume of Louis XV representing the Carnival King, of Villinova.(5) Each year they invent a new character to portray the Carnival King.

Again a year ago a unique celebration took place in Barcelona, which had its first Carnival reunion in "Mont Juic" where some seven thousand children visited the amusement park dressed in disguises. Later that afternoon they were carried on a carnival float through the Rambla and the ceremonies concluded with a spectacular display of masked figures in flamboyant and vibrant coloured costumes (6). All sections of the community seemed to take part in this festival.

The February Carnival, like the Catalan community itself, maintains its aura of radical transformation and modernisation which is in keeping with both ancient and contemporary life. The new changes in carnival celebrations brought about since democracy are a reflection of a society where over all changes are taking place, both positive and negative. Some of the more popular festivals like Sitges and Villinova Carnival have fashioned themselves, admittedly on a smaller scale, on the Carnival of Rio, Vienna and Venice and has become devoid of Catalan culture in favour of a more Westernised approach. Costumes are imitations of that of a Viennese or Carribean masked ball. This fancy dress parade plays into the hands of the local organisers who are happy to trivialise these popular festivals, turning them into tourist attractions for the benefit of an audience consisting largely of foreign clientele.

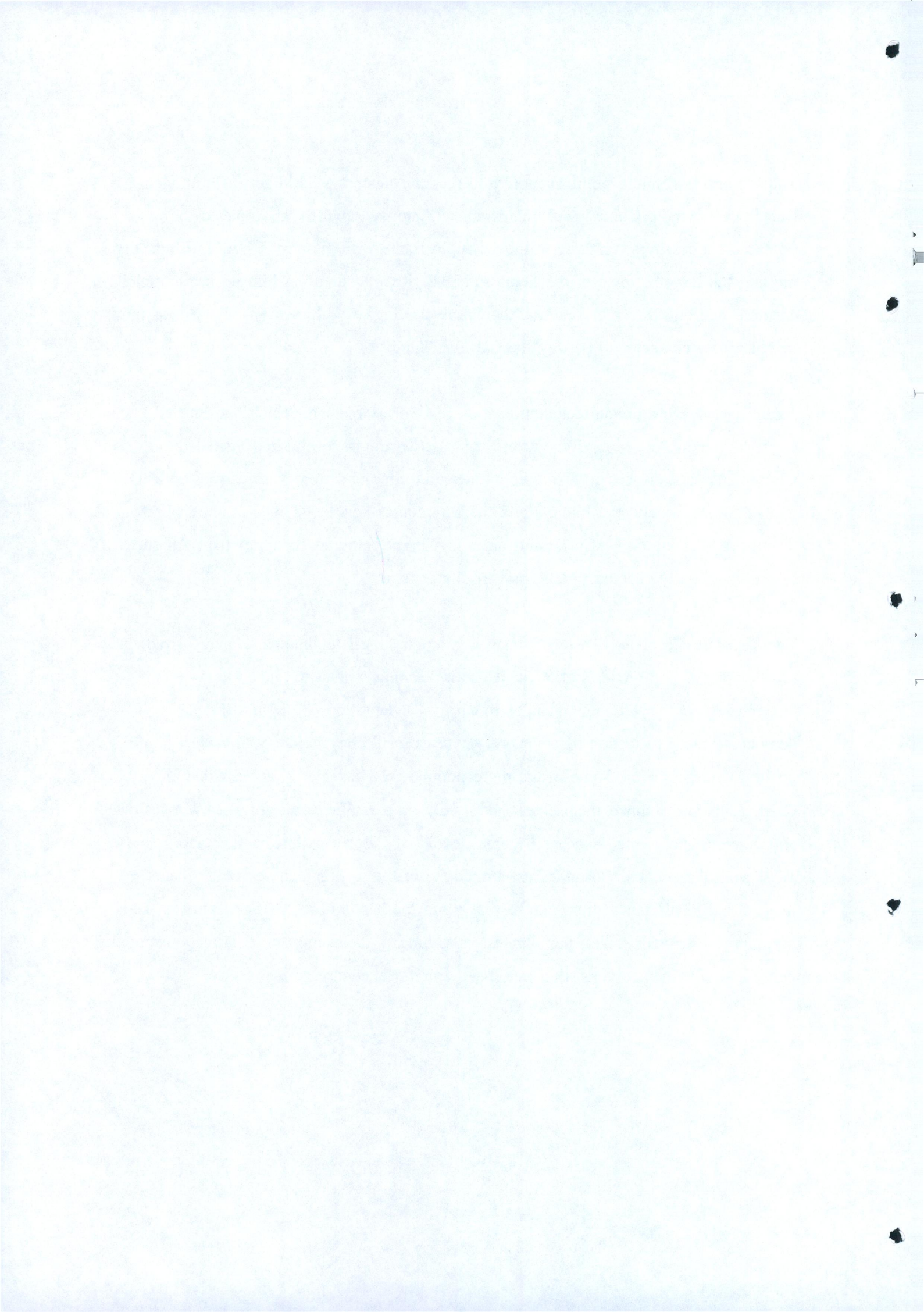
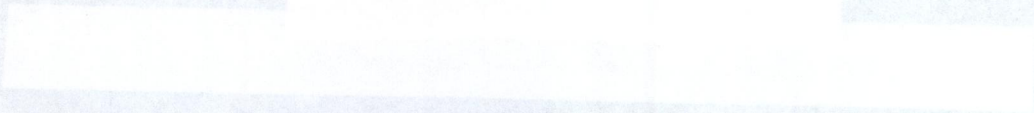




Fig 7. The Carnival of Barcelona 1993



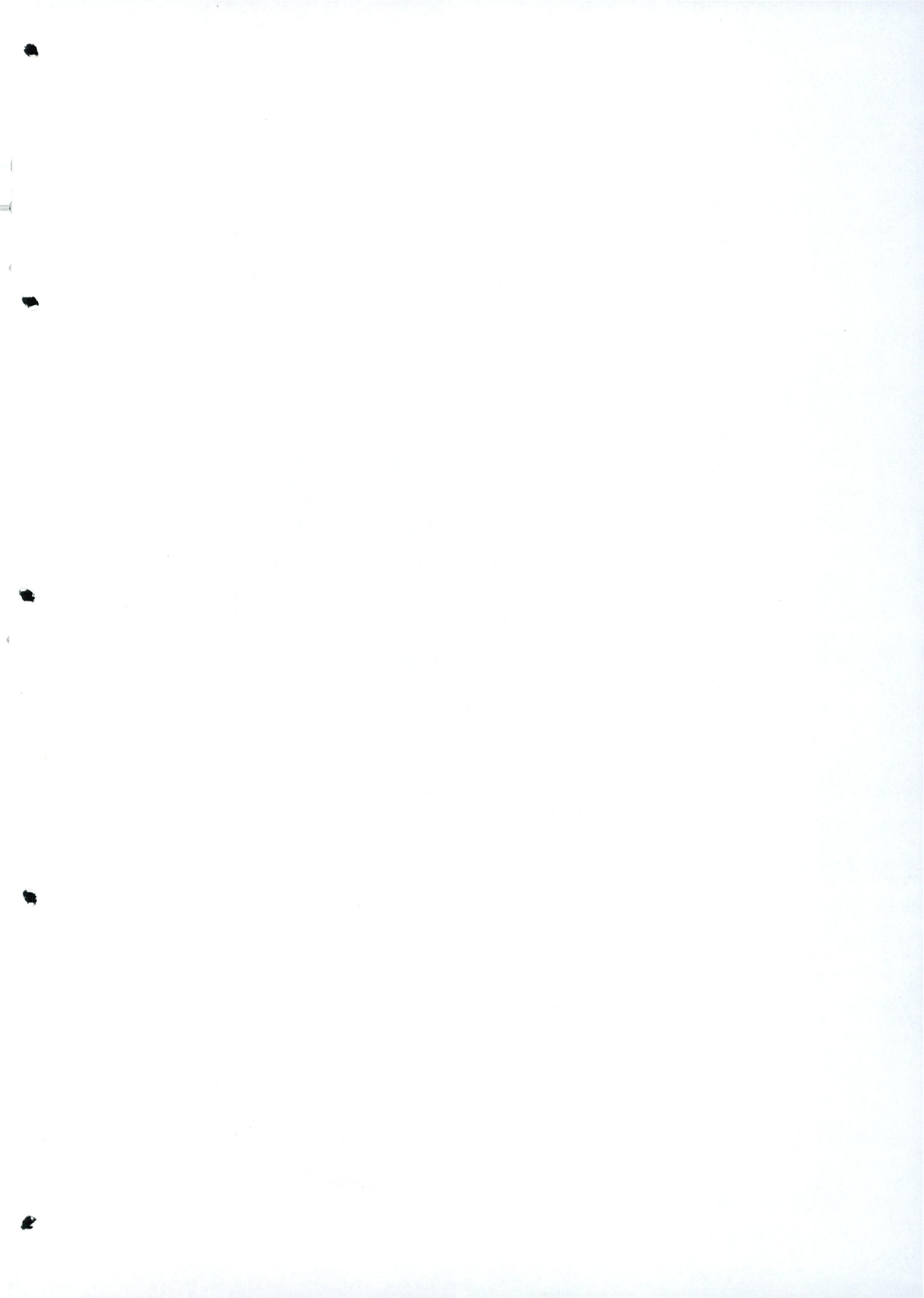
Fig 8. Costumes from the Villanovea Carnivals 1993



In the week long celebration, John Payne comments "five to six thousand European tourists flock to the Carnival of Villinova spending 60,000 pesetas each on the party". (7). Whether one agrees or not Catalonia has looked more to Europe than to Spain for its cultural inspirations; as Ian Gibson points out "inevitably in recent years, outside traditions from France and Italy have infiltrated the Catalan people" (8). To my mind, there is a great need to restructure the events and promote more of an indigenous approach to that of the Carnival rites of the northern territory. These, backed with the financial resources of Catalan Industrialism, would contribute to the revitalisation of its own regional sense.

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Chapter 3

Valencia and it's people

Valencia is located south of Catalonia. In the time of the Roman Islamic civilization it belonged to the Catalonian region. Valencia's origins and evolution, Catalan's like to believe, are wrapped up in **their** culture, even in today's contemporary society.

Certainly there is evidence of its influence in its language and social structure, and it is clearly more related to Catalonia than Castillia. The nature of the Valencian people are hard working but said to be more relaxed than those in the industrialized North.

They are the third largest region in Spain with a population of 2 million Marten Dominguez Barbera has described Valencian history and its people as " full of all social classes living together in harmony, without intermingling, especially where enjoyment is concerned. Valencian people cannot envisage life and work without the Fiesta. Outdoor fiestas by day and by night, both large and small, involving only a group of neighbours or sometimes including the whole neighbourhood, are part of the whole environment".

(1). The Valencian people tend to stay within their own class in society when celebrating together, but, each sector of the community supports one another in the characteristic celebrations of their Festival, "Las Fallas".

On the 19th March, the feast of St. Joseph, "Las Fallas" becomes an expression of the Valencian people's collective spirit: "satirical, grotesque, unashamed, funloving, noisy... and forgetful, passionate, of fire and ashes reborn like the legendary bird the Phoenix." as Josep Piera, points out. (2).

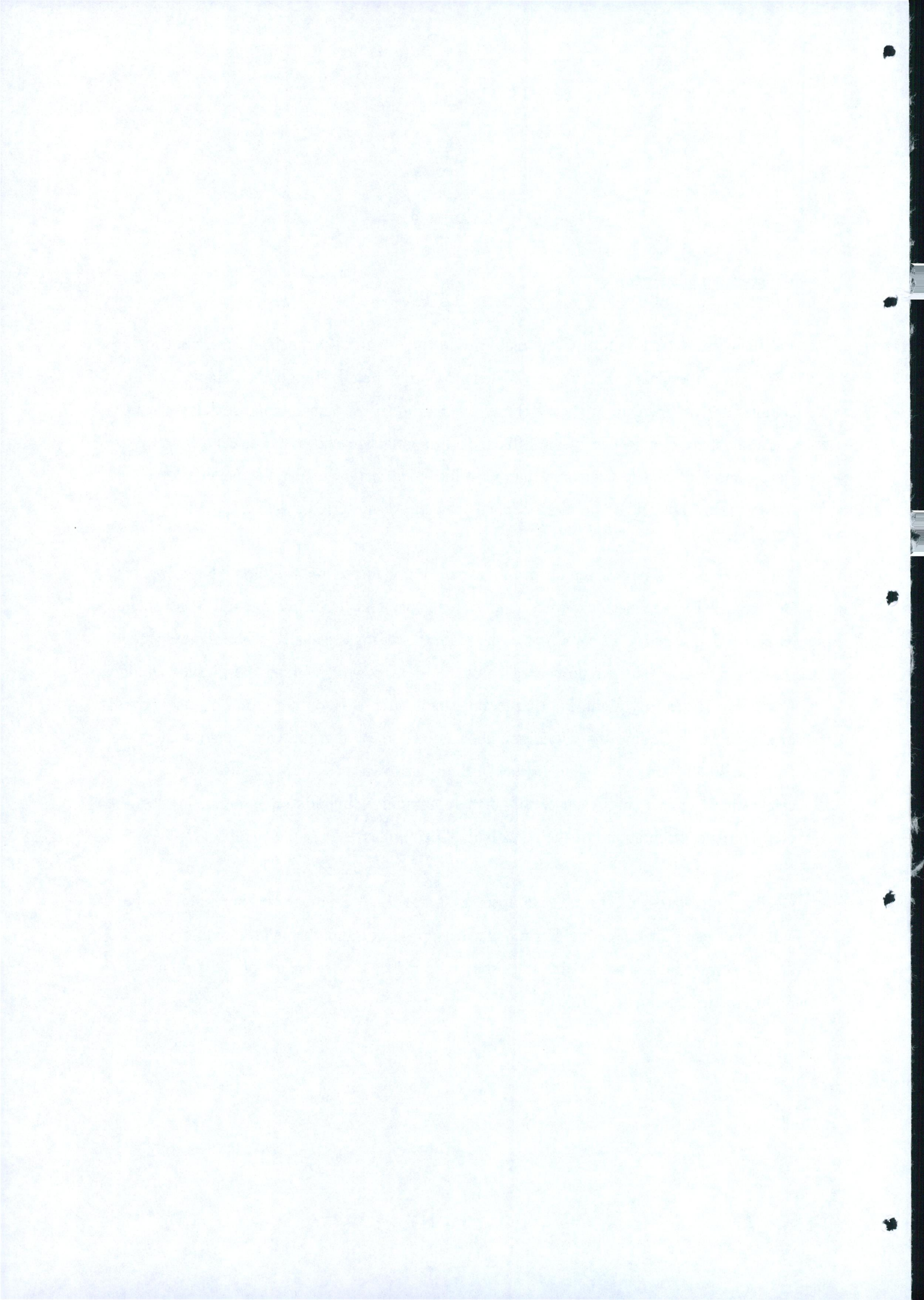






Fig 10. "La Comoditat Valenciana" Satirical comment on Spains compulsory Military service. 1990

Ian Gibson, in his book "Fire in the blood" (the new Spain), describes this noisy celebration comparing it to that of Japan, with nothing but fire crackers exploding on the morning of the Fiesta. "Car horns, pounding car radios, ambulances, fire brigades, police sirens, faulty burglar alarms, madly barking dogs, open air terraces with throbbing music, revellers bellowing at each other, blaring T.V. sets, construction sounds, hammering, shouting, all make up the list of atmospheric euphoria" (3). Indeed according to research carried out by the Tourism Board in Spain what foreigners mostly dislike about Spain is the excessive noise.





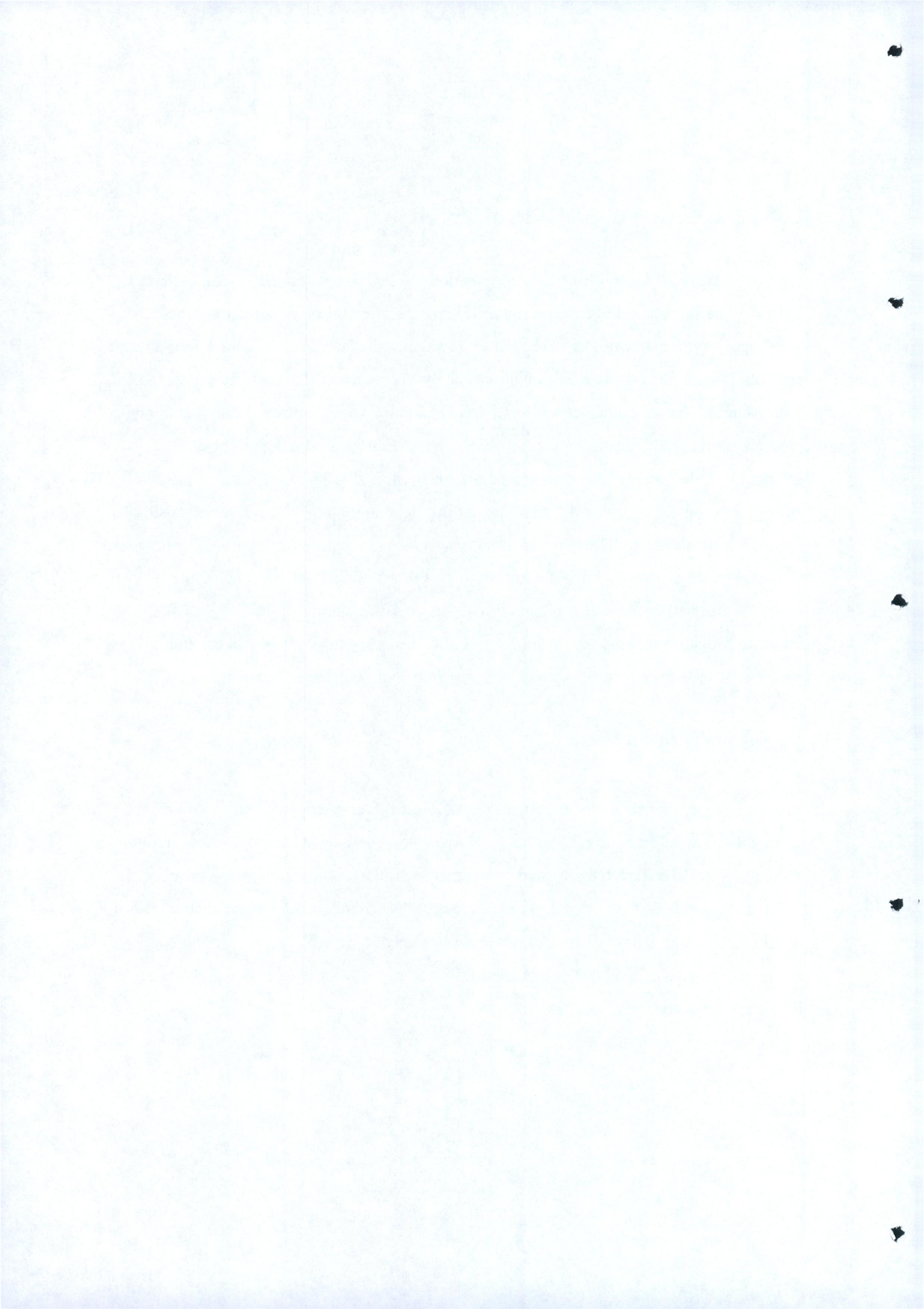
Fig 11. "La Comoditat Valenciana" on fire .

LAS FALLAS OF SAN JOSE IN VALENCIA:

On the feast of St. Joseph, in the Lenten period, Valencia puts on a Bon-fire called "Las Fallas" which displays huge, larger than life-sized sculptures or constructions made of wood, polystyrene and plaster. Their height which is in the region of about four storeys projects a monumental presence which is felt by everyone on the days preceding the 19th March. These sculptures are composed of scenes which satirize local events and are of a political and social nature. In recent years they have also highlighted international themes. There are about three hundred "Fallas" in total, placed strategically on the cross roads, and squares throughout the cities of Valencia, costing in the region of eleven million pounds every year. This is financed by the local lottery and financial institutes, throughout the region. (4). Once the "Fallas" is burnt on the midnight of the 19th March and turned to ashes and smoldering embers, the "Fallas" artists and district community begin to construct and plan the next year's celebration which will take approximately a year to complete with painstaking craftsmanship.

THE CONSTRUCTION

The entire operation is under the direction of a local district community (including the commissioning of artists to follow plans already approved by the various community groups), who determine the size and space that the sculpture will require, their concept and the thematic idea. The artist sketches possible structures based on the theme with its usual sarcasm and irony. The committee will select the best sketch and the artist produces it as a small model. Each then select a team involving a hundred craftsmen to help the artists construct the "Fallas".



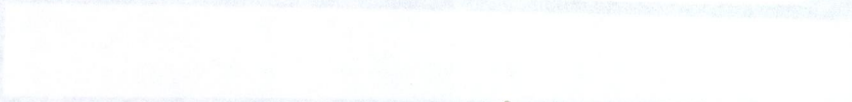
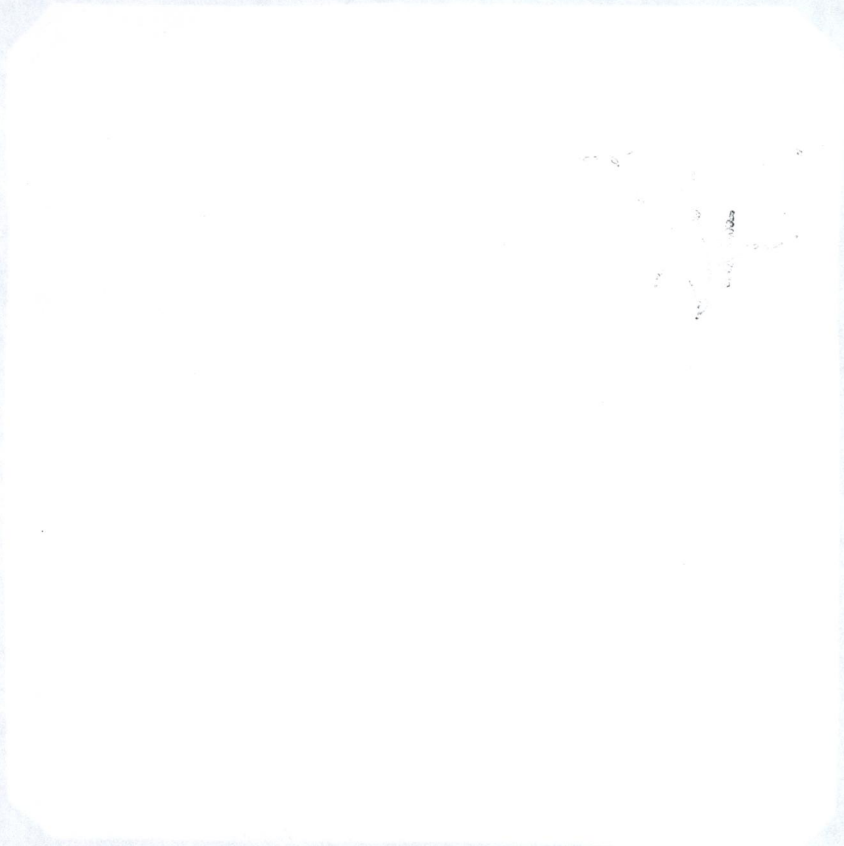




Fig 12. Drafts for Fallas Construction

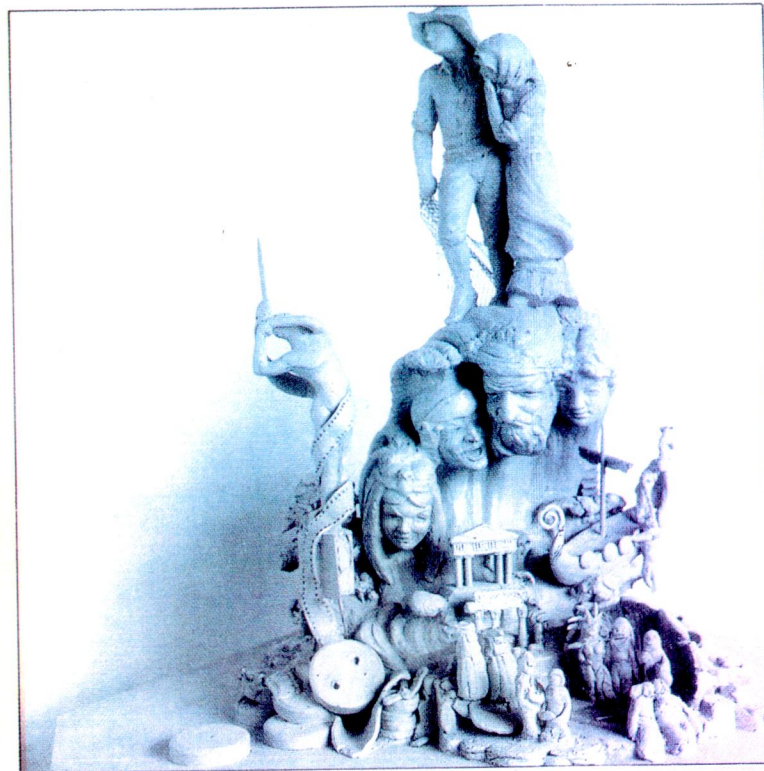


Fig 13. Small model of Fallas Construction

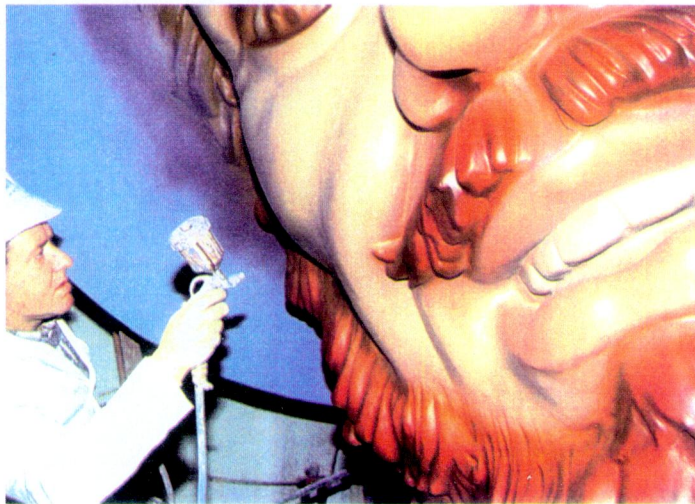
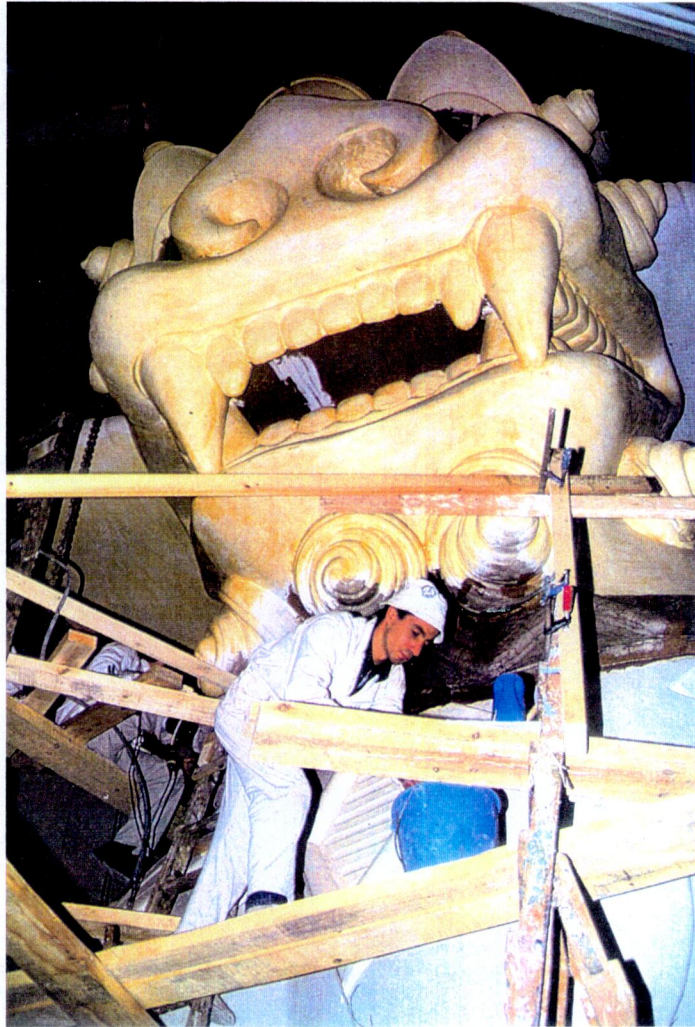


Fig 14. Artist working on large scale Fallas Construction

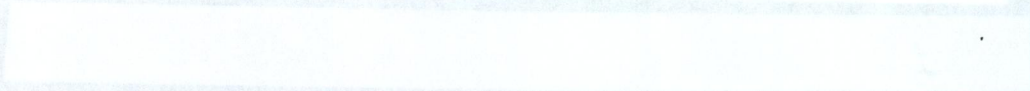
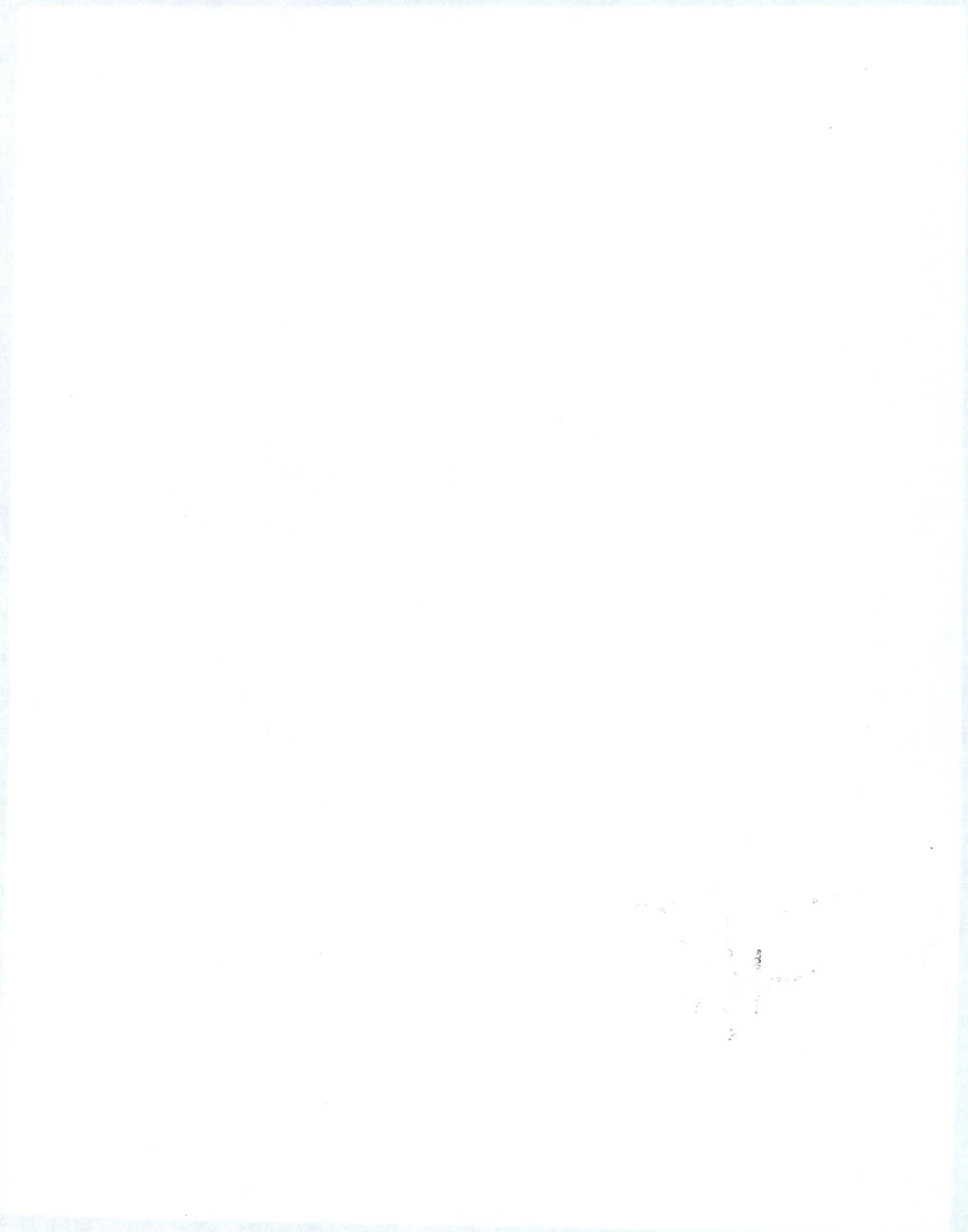




Fig 15. "Navel of the World" Las Fallas Festival 1991

In Valencia there are three hundred committees in total. Using the small three dimensional model they begin constructing the giant "Fallas" which takes ten to twelve months to complete, in the large workshops throughout Valencia. Today it has become such a popular festival that no street there is without one (5). The other motivation which stimulates the Valencians to make "Fallas"- constructions is the competition which can cause great rivalry between districts. Town Councils award prizes to the most clever and imaginative "Fallas". Sometimes the public disagree with the Jury's decision which causes general uproar. The winning sculpture or "Ninot", meaning "Fallas", is placed in the Fallas museum.

The effigies of the "Fallas" usually have a sharply humorous or ironic twist, poking fun at political issues and singling out politicians and religious leaders, although needless to say during the Franco years this was simply forbidden. However, since the establishment of democracy anything goes in the "Fallas" as long as it is original and in good taste. Marten Barbera asserts that the main source of inspiration through the years has been politics of a local and national level. In recent years Hollywood entertainers like "Madonna", "Michael Jackson", 'Ninja Turtles' have entered the arena, which he maintains could be understood and enjoyed by locals and foreigners alike (6).

This corroborates the view that in recent years Valencia has been losing its local identity and under the influence of the mass media, as in most of Europe, it is becoming increasingly Americanized. One of the titles "Naval of the World" 1990 depicts the American hamburger juxtaposed with well known Hollywood personalities, confirming the influence of American life style.





Fig 16. Valencian girls in procession to the Virgin of the forsaken Patroness of Valencia

Original festivals explored themes known solely to the natives, such as current fads in its social life, its history, its scandals. It explores some of the well known personalities of the city, deals with themes like the fishing port and compulsory military service, in other words it includes anything that affects Valencia as a region. Today, however, the festival concedes increasingly to what the tourist wants and the Valencian temperament accepts this. It has now acquired the status of a Spanish national celebration with a "Fallas" train service bringing passengers from all the regions outside Valencia such as Madrid, Barcelona and Saragoza. The Spanish Government in 1961 helped organize the "Fallas" ship which arrived from South America with hundreds of Argentines and Chileans to catch a glimpse of the event. By the 1970's it became so commercialized that it featured in "Life" magazine, "Paris Match" and "Scheeizer Illustrierte".(7).

Traditional costumes are worn by men and women in the parade, which has been revived by the younger organizing committee. These costumes are exquisitely embroidered with designs adapted from the Moorish and Christian handcrafts. Their headdresses are delicately crocheted in fine lace and these costumes are displayed every year during the procession, and generally worn by the young girls of sixteen to twenty years. More than three thousand of these girls take part, carrying flowers through the streets, which they place at the feet of the "Forsaken Virgin" statue, (patroness of Valencia). Over three tons of exotic flowers are offered to the image, in this striking event.



Fig 17. The Virgin of the forsaken

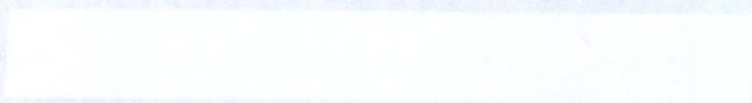






Fig 18. A group of people called "Despertaes" who explode bombs in the streets in the early morning of the Las Fallas festival

THE BEGINNING OF THE FESTIVAL:

"Las Fallas" begins a week before St. Joseph's Day. The "Ninots" (Fallas structures) are erected in one day and survive for a week on display before the sacrificial rite begins. The Mayor reads an official proclamation of the event from the city hall balcony. Then from the various public squares he declares the celebrations open. This ceremony is accompanied by the shooting of rockets and the great sounds of brass bands playing. A ceaseless round of merry making begins, something akin to the carnival celebrations of Catalonia but without masks or disguises. Ironically, "the Fallas" falls in the Lenten period, which in the liturgical calendar is a period of penance and fasting. Agustin Villanueva maintains that the celebration is a chance to break the monotony of the Lenten period. It has become a central point of the year for Valencians to take holidays and to enjoy the week long celebrations. (8).

The atmosphere is overwhelming in the city with its coloured flowers and balconies draped with banners of rich tapestries. Every morning, after the Fallas figures are in place, groups of people called "Despertaes" take to the streets, as early as 6:00am throwing noisy crackers so as to wake up the neighbourhood. The noisiest event of all takes place at the town hall square in Valencia. At midday thousands of kilometers of "tracas", a series of fire works are strung together in a row, which light each other in succession. This sounds like a triumphal earth quake. Smoke and sound fill the square along with the brass bands which accompany this orchestration of sound. A combination of explosive fire works and high pitched noises have become the most important element in this local ritual.

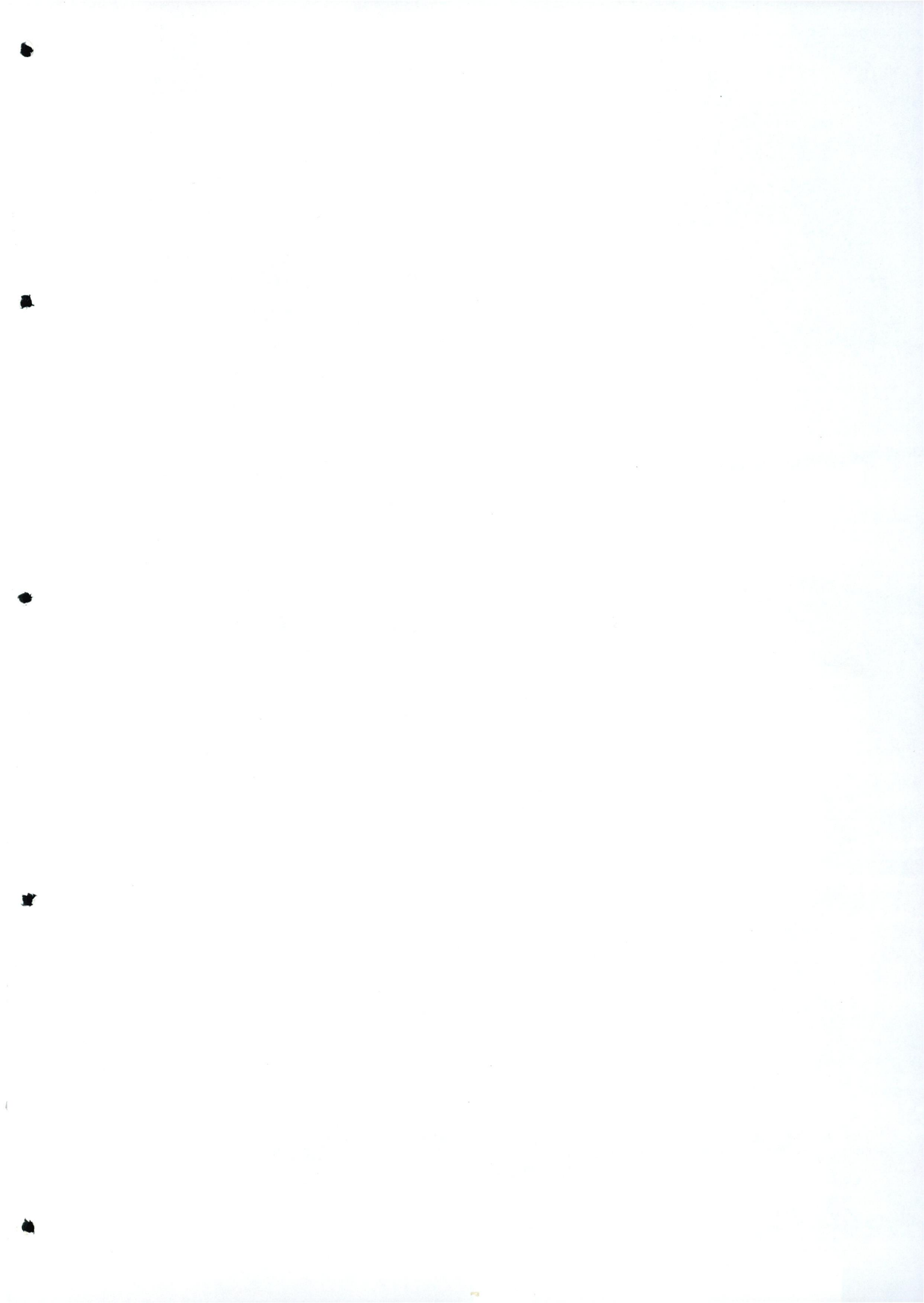




Fig 19. Fallas Construction

The climax of "Las Fallas" is on the 19th March. As the preparation for the lighting of Las Fallas begins an official jury tour the city making last minute decisions about which Fallas will be selected. When the final verdict is reached all the local Fallas groups, over three hundred in total, converge at the stock exchange. The winning Ninot is selected and is spared from the flames. When midnight comes the church bell rings out and the local Fallas queen ignites the fireworks that will eventually burn to the ground. "Fire, fire" shouts the crowd in the same imperious way that they demand death in the arena. There is a tense moment of silence before exultant cries break out and the city is converted into a mass of sporadic flames.(9)

It is amazing to think that all the work which has gone into this has been consumed by fire within a few hours, and like a pagan festival it reminds us of our place in nature that we are part of a whole cycle of birth, growth and death.

HISTORY AND ORIGIN

The origin of "Las Fallas" can be traced back to the middle ages, when the guild of carpenter's, at the approach of the longer days stopped working at night, and on St. Joseph's day burnt odd pieces of wood and shavings in front of their work shops. Eventually, neighbours who had no connections with the carpenters joined in the activity and helped to make the bonfire bigger. With time they added figures of well known local characters, on whom they wanted revenge or just wished to poke fun at. Alternatively, according to Ramon Marti in the "Cronica of King Jaume 1" the word Fallas applied to fires or beacons which up to the eighteenth century were lit at different points of the city to act as a guide for sailors.

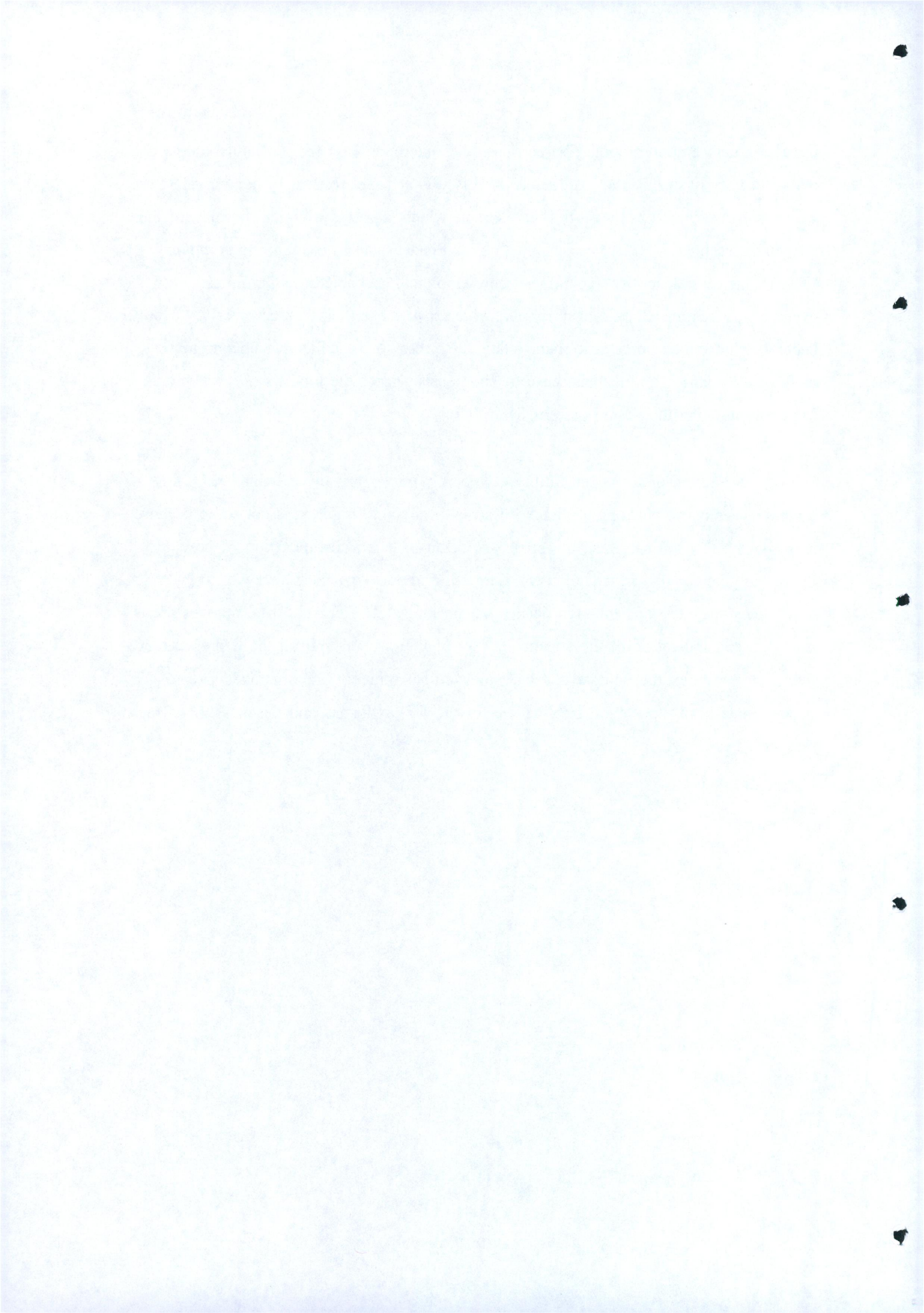




Fig 20. "La Crema." burning 1990

Local scholars and anthropologists, on the other hand, claimed that the Fallas derived from the fires lit during the "saturnalia". This was a pagan festival in honour of Saturn which was celebrated at the turn of the season which suggests a typical burning of the old year's vestiges. The Valencian poet Josep Pieta, wrote in the nineteenth century: "The Fallas of Valencia has acquired a new emblematic character as an almost legendary event firmly established amongst people, which in the twentieth century was to go on to become what is now an artistic manifestation expressing the collective unconsciousness of the Valencians with all their sense of apotheosis and of the moment the ephemeral joy of things, and the absurd side of life". (10).

While one might wonder at the futility of a community's artistic and financial efforts of a whole year being burnt and reduced to ashes in a single night, it is not futile because it is about a form of sacrifice, a sacrifice of beauty. It is a manifestation of how Spaniards live for the present moment, forgetting about what the future may bring. This is the clear message and the significance of the Fallas. The Fallas of the nineties are a true sign and indication of the Valencian way of life, where after all the depression of the Franco regime, the political, satirical jokes still continue. The organizers are unconcerned about the moral implications of the Fallas themes and the messages which they convey.



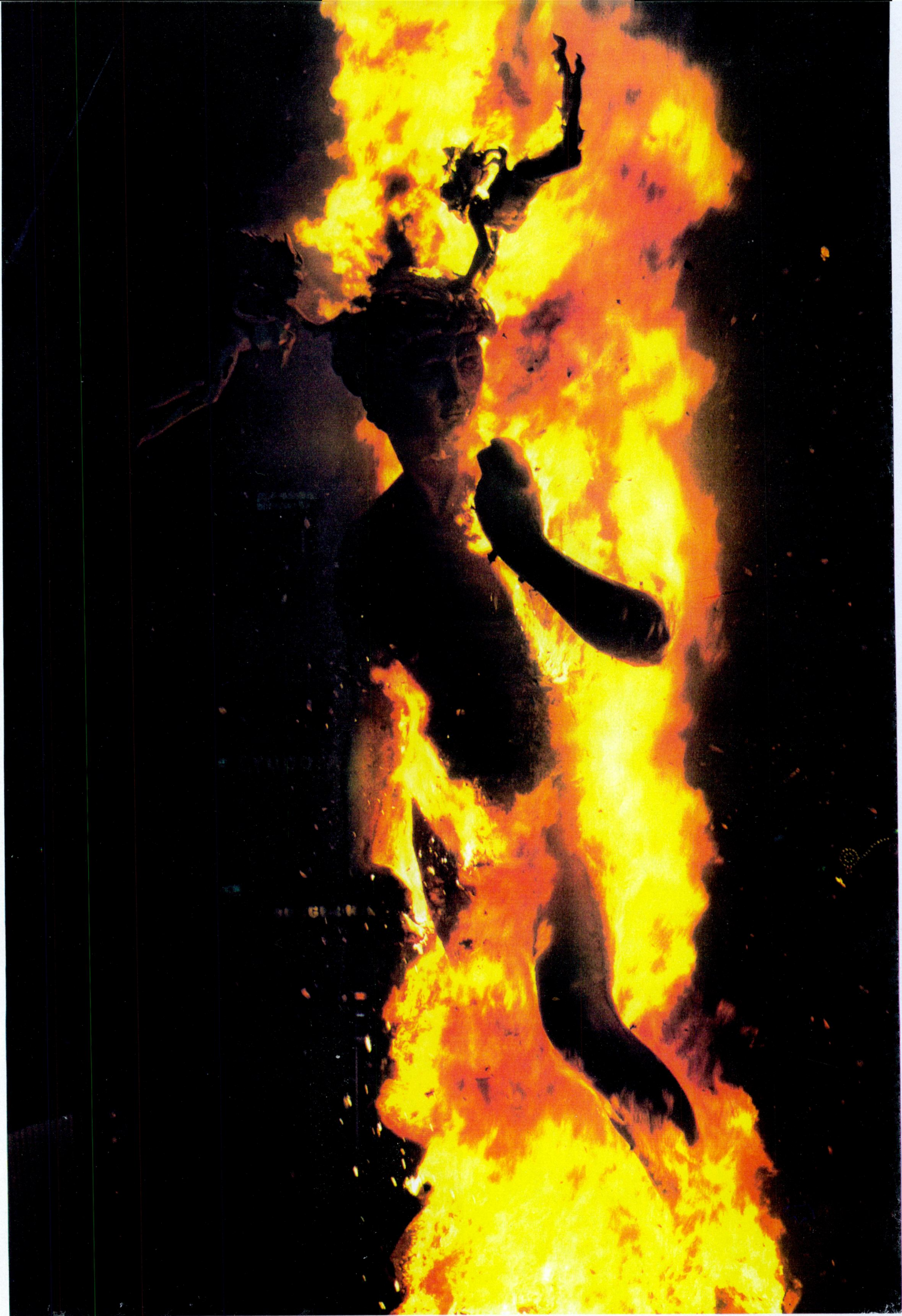


Fig. 21 "The Crucifixion"

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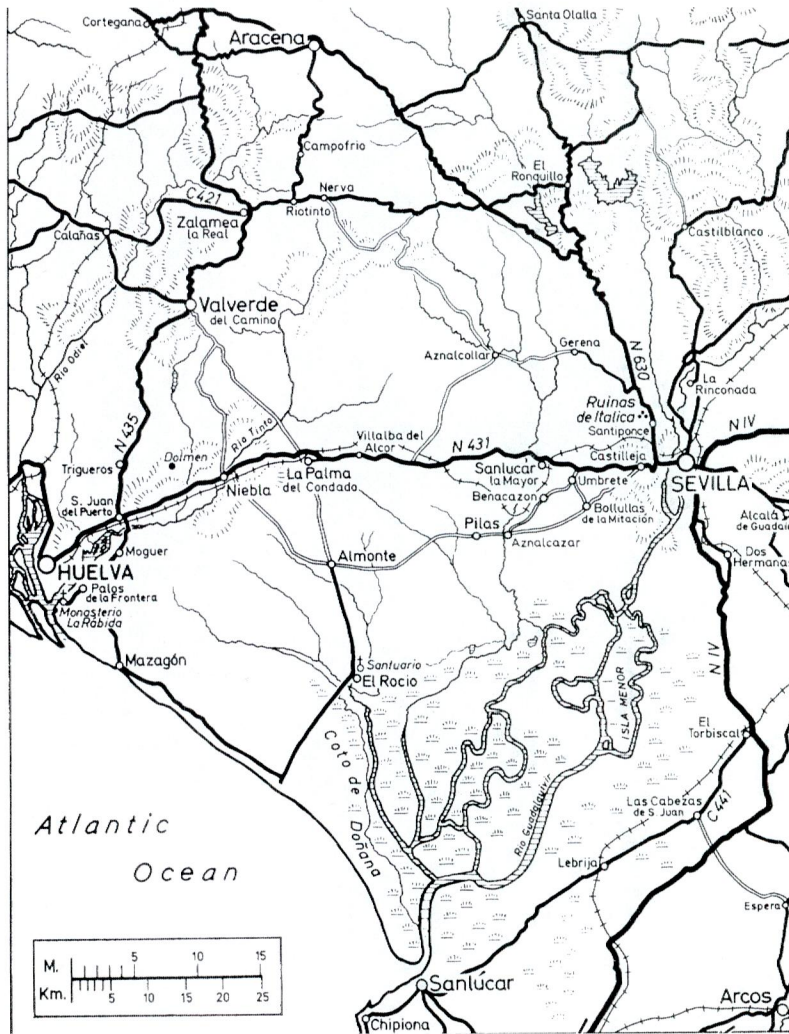


Fig 22. Map of Seville

CHAPTER 4

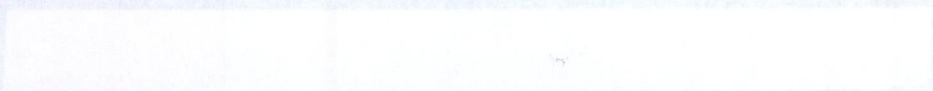
ANDALUCIAN REGION AND IT'S PEOPLE

Andalucia in the south of Spain is a place of continual festivity, twelve months of the year. It is quite unlike the northern regions of Spain such as Catalonia and Madrid. It still lags behind the rest of the nation in industrial development, nonetheless it has felt the wind of change and modernization in recent years due perhaps to Felipe Gonzales, the Prime Minister of Spain, who is a native of Seville and who has used his political prestige and power to uplift these poorer regions of Spain.

The extravagant nature of the Andalusian people contrasts starkly with their northern counterparts. The festivals in the Andalusian region are notorious for the promotion of their Flamenco dancing and bull fighting fairs. These displays have been subjected to media scrutiny in the construction of stereotypical images of Spain as a whole; images that are of an exotic frontier in which the elite and certain sectors of a growing middle class seek its identity. The traditions of Flamenco dancing, Sevillanas style dress, and bull fighting, have all come to be coveted by the rest of Spain. Andalucia continues to nourish this way of life, realizing that it is part of its identity, while other regions know quite well that it purely an Andalusian way of life and is not reflective of their own life styles. Both "Semana Santa" celebrations, and the Carnival celebrations of Andalucia have been considerably revitalized under the local government party in the new democracy. There had been a suppression in the late seventies of the "Semana Santa" while the Carnival celebrations was more favoured.



Fig 23. The brotherhood (Cofradias) Seville



ANDALUCIAN FESTIVAL OF SEMANA SANTA AND FERIA

The major religious festivals of holy week in Spain take place in the south, in the Andalusian region. At the present time the highest percentage of pilgrims (Romerias) come to Andalusia to observe this extraordinary event which is the climax of the Easter cycle. Throughout this region, from Cadiz (west of the Gibraltar coast) to Malaga, and from Seville to Granada, every town and city has its own unique celebrations. The Semana Santa is also celebrated in Valencia and Catalonia but the one which I thought the most characteristic is without doubt that of Seville, where the festival has become the most important emblem of Andalusian identity and cultural pride. Religious fervour reaches fever pitch in the Holy week cults of "Macarena" and the Virgin of Rocio (1) but, in Catalonia and Valencia the veneration is more sober. In this ceremony Spaniards and foreigners cram together in the narrow streets regardless of age, sex or social position as participants at one level or another. Its charismatic nature has attracted writers who discuss the effect of the celebrations on the inner psyche of the people. Epton Nina Consuelo points out "the most abstemious of visitors feel inebriated in Seville. This is not due to alcoholic spirits but to a mysterious biochemical process that takes place in the inner laboratory over which we have no control". (2).

What takes place is a series of processions of lifesized statues of Christ which portray the seven last days of Jesus's life. Other floats carry similar images of the Virgin magnificently arrayed in velvet robes, embroidered with gold lace, carried beneath rich canopies. These floats or "Pasos" are decorated with colorful flowers surrounded by hundreds of lighting candles. Every parish in the city has its own statues and floats.

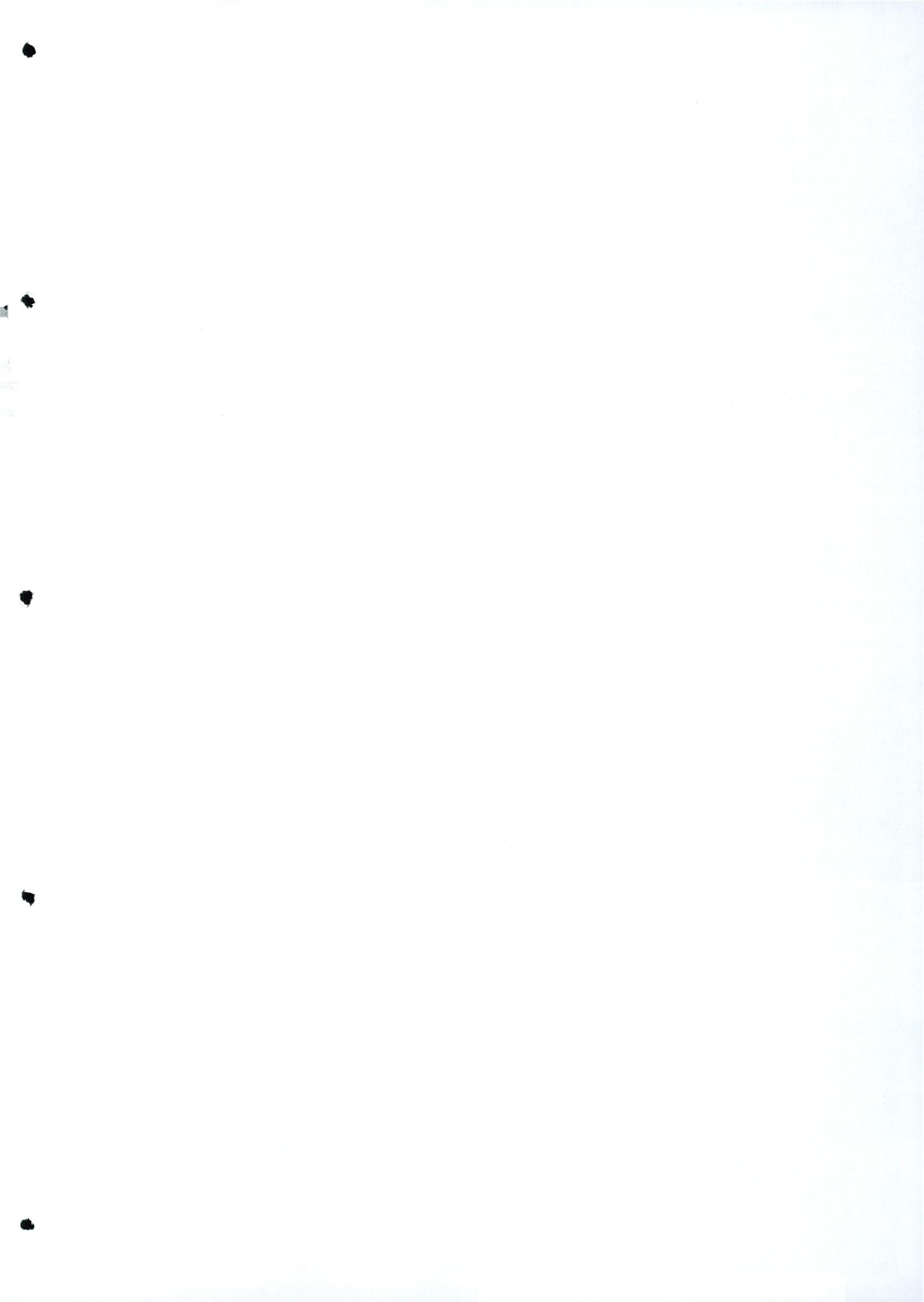




Fig 24. Carriers of the "Pasos"

The most popular "pasos" are the two virgins " La Virgen de la Macarena" and " La Virgen de la Esperanza". They could be compared to life sized dolls decorated in robes and on their faces glass tears symbolise their sorrows. The figures which are most gruesome but which deserve special mention are the "Jesus del gran Poder" from the church of San Lorenzo and the "Santo Cristo de la Expiracion" which depict the dying figure of Christ on his way to Calvary, with the usual blood stained features.

These images have often been sneered at by twentieth century art critics and historians, describing them "as mere baroque, kitch wax work figures". (3).

I would suggest that they were not constructed for the benefit of twentieth century art critics or historians but simply to communicate to devout, illiterate people who in other centuries could not benefit from television, or books which are readily available to us in the modern age. The "Pasos" come in groups of forty to fifty and are carried from the local parishes to the main Cathedral in Seville for the blessing by the cardinal of the city. They are then taken through the main square and finally returned to their original destination. This journey can take up to five or six hours because they are extremely heavy and are borne on the shoulders of sometimes as many as sixty porters who crouch beneath the platform. Other obstacles are the crowded narrow streets which they have to travel through, while enthusiasts push and shove to get closer to the image.

Each Pasos or float is provided by a brotherhood called the "Cofradias", these are lay people who lead the procession wearing long, full, silk robes and tall pointed hoods which completely cover the head and face with only two slits cut out for the eyes.



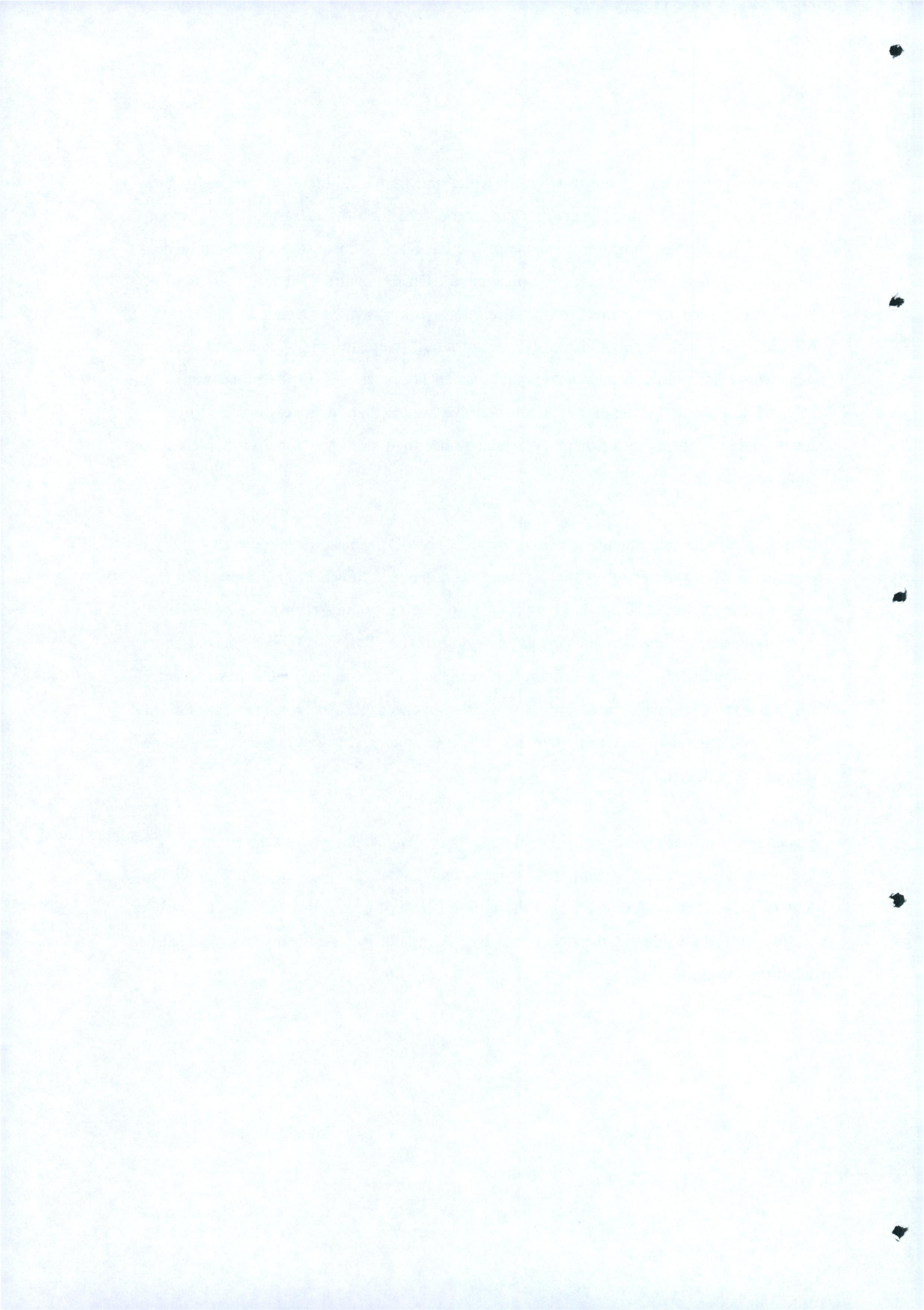


Fig 25. Cofradias in Procession

The robes vary in colour but usually are white and purple, although occasionally they appear in red. Originally the hoods were intended to hide the identity of the person. They are sometimes compared to those of the Ku Klux Klan but have absolutely no association what so ever, except in appearance. On the contrary, it was the Ku Klux Klan who copied its costume from this religious procession, according to James Michener in his book about Iberia. (4). "Cofradias" were originally repentant sinners who wore chains around their ankles and carried heavy crosses in the procession. Some referred to them as penitents but Alfonso Lowe argues that "it is very wrong to call them penitents for many of them expressed rather their gratitude for divine intercession in answer to prayers". (5).

Today in Seville this practice does not occur. The "Cofradias" do almost all the organization and financing of the "Semana Santa" event. Each brotherhood can get well paid in this week long celebration. Up to five thousand Pesetas can be earned by each individual, by participating in the carrying of the "Pasos". To become a member of the brotherhood is quite a difficult achievement. One's father would have to enter one's name at the registry of births, without this one cannot be considered. Seniority in the brotherhood is very important because it entitles you to get closer to the image during the procession.

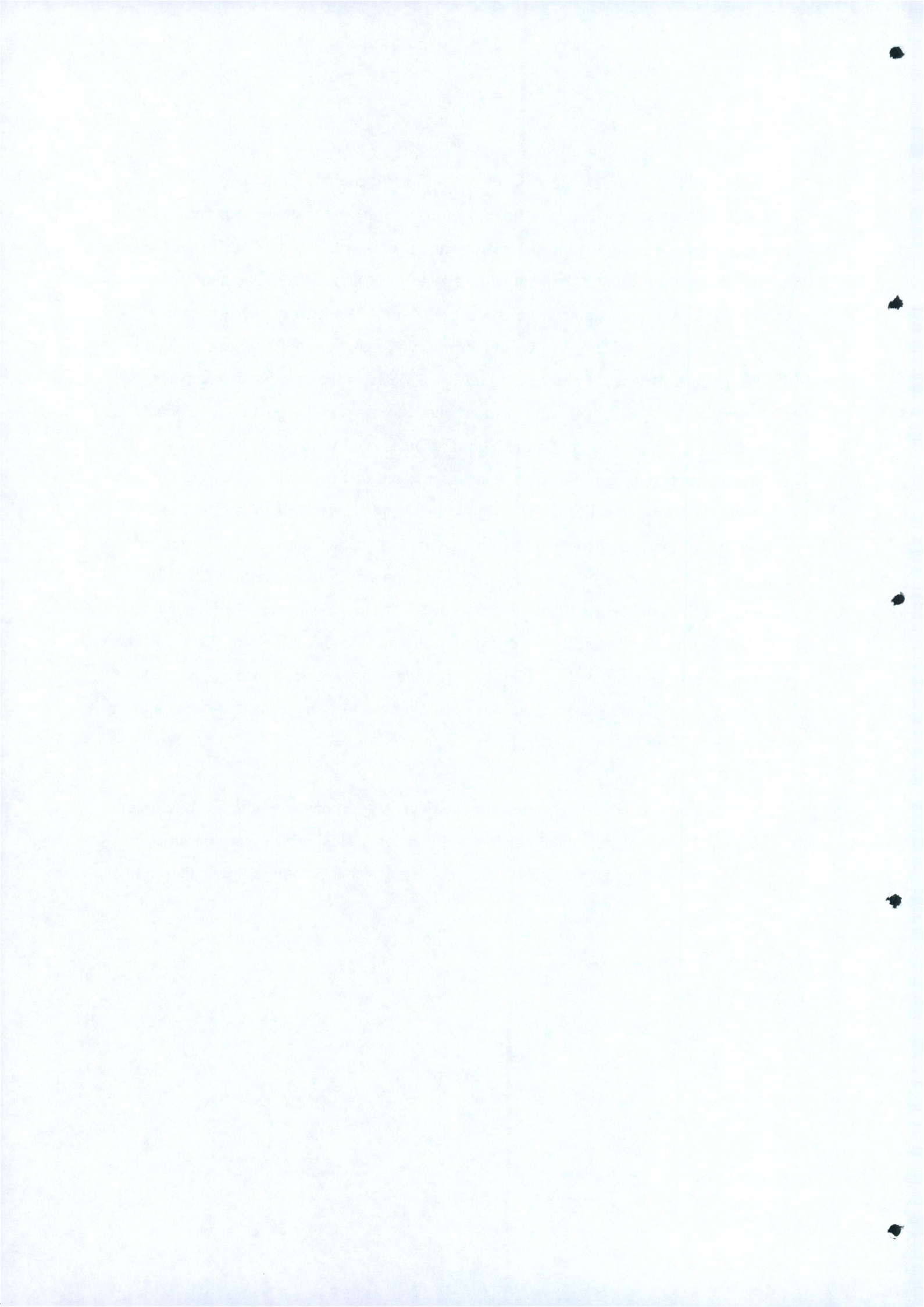
Depending on the importance of the float, a brass band belonging to the police or La Guardia Civil plays and accompanies the procession. As the days approach Good Friday, tens of thousands conglomerate and the atmosphere is further stimulated by the public singing from balconies as the floats pass by. At regular intervals they stop and start to facilitate the porters taking over the carrying of the float.



Gipsy like singing sounds, redolent of oriental influence resound in the air, this is called the "Saeta". These are spontaneous singing tributes to the pasos as they approach the cathedral. They are straight from the heart of the people with words like, "I don't know how you can go on bearing it", others addressed to the Christ figure sing "don't give up your strength". A more humorous anecdote from James Michener's travels recounts how he heard one saying "my Virgin, my Virgin, you make the other virgins of Seville look like a bunch of putas" (whores). (6). All the floats in the procession compete against each other, vying for the best honour and esteem from the public. The people believe the Virgin is a living person and almost feel a need to express their love openly. This form of veneration can only be found in the south of Spain where they are not inhibited in their inner emotions. "For Christ and Mary they appeal to Andalusian emotions and to their deep seated need for traumatic transition between wild grief, or ecstatic joy, the exultation of life and death, acted and felt in the innermost fibres of their being, during the drama of the Easter cycle". (7). The ceremonies of Easter comes to a close the Saturday before Easter Sunday in the main Cathedral where the statues are covered in purple clothing and the high altar is covered by a purple curtain. At ten in the morning the veils are removed and the bells ring out to bring Lent to a close.

FERIA CELEBRATION

Easter Sunday brings the "Feria" celebrations which last six days and nights. Work stops for this annual affair of traditional singing and dancing. This event occurs in various cities throughout Andalusia, such as Cadiz and Granada, but Seville is the main venue of activities.





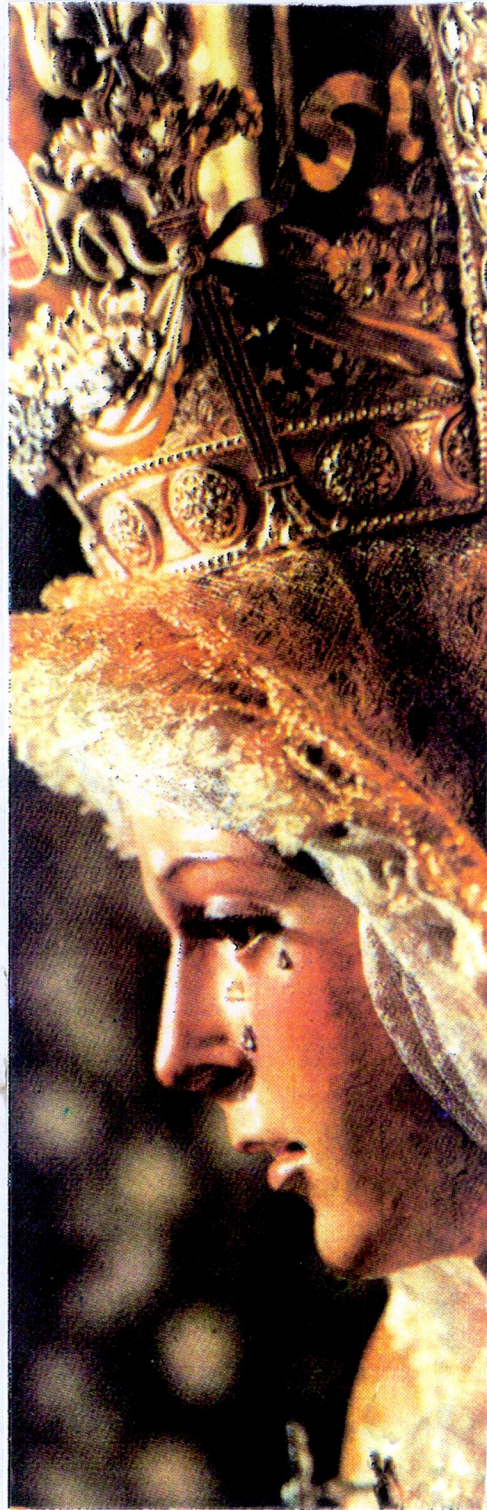
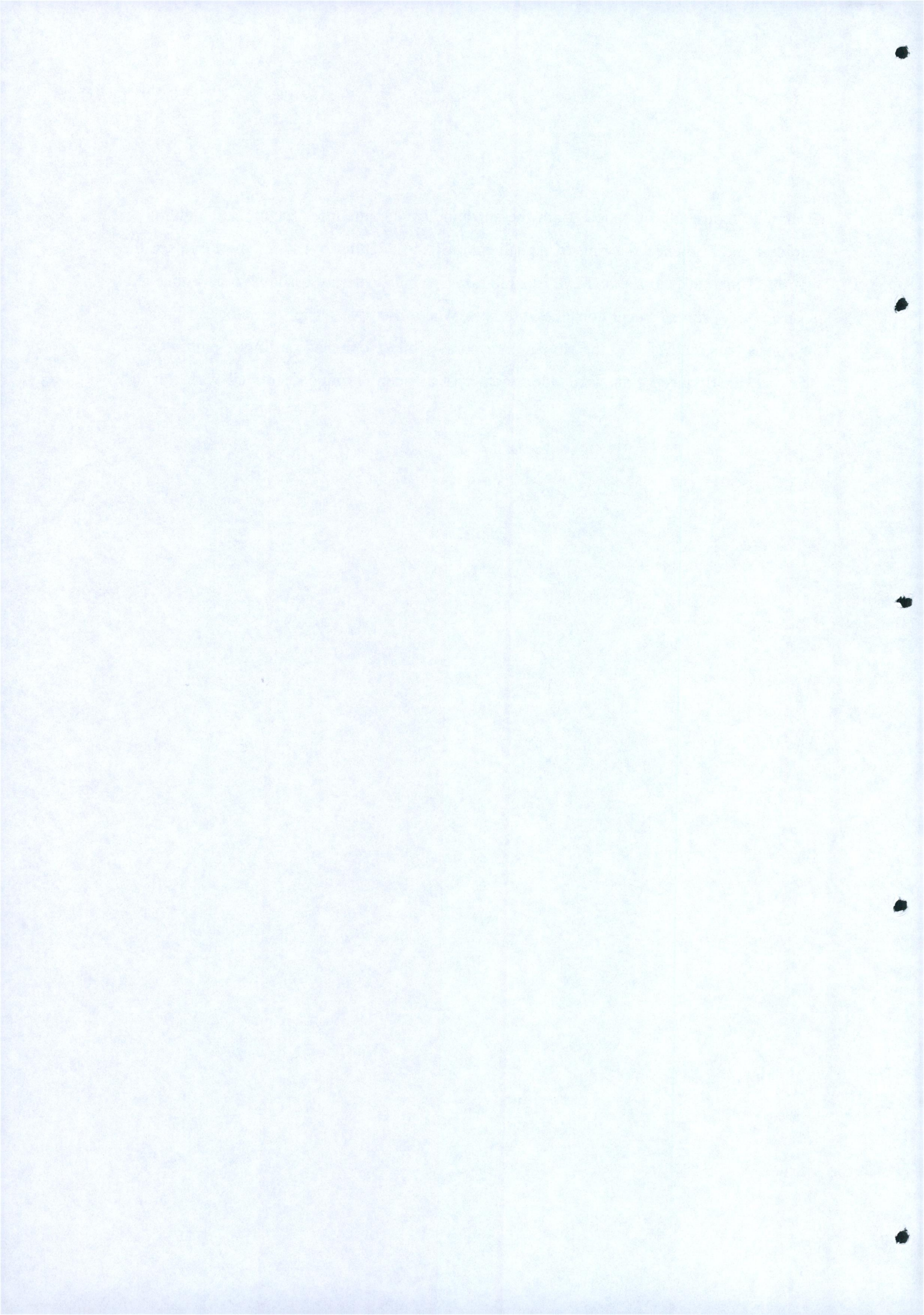


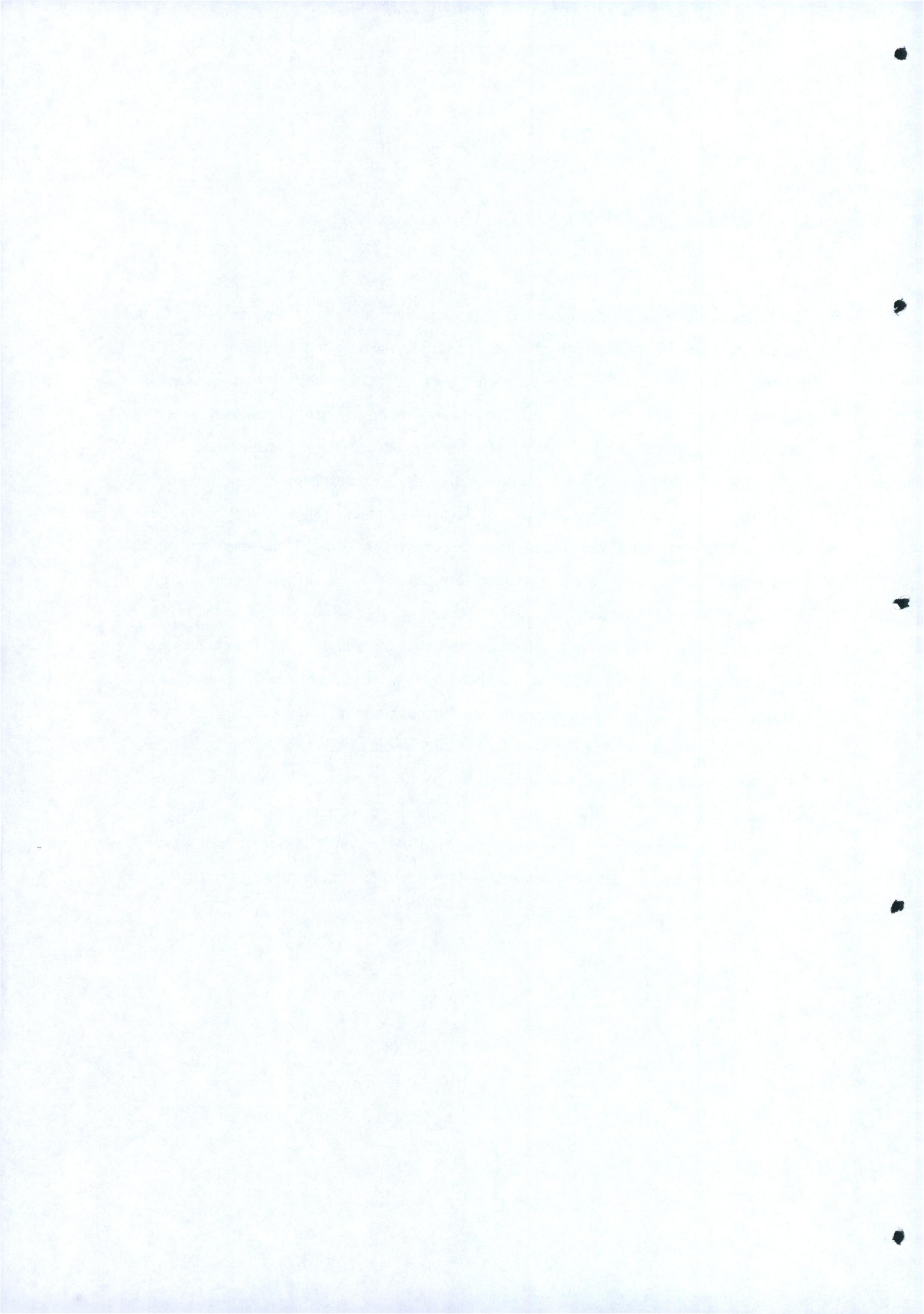
Fig 26. Virgin of the Macarena

It attracts thousands of people from the surrounding communities to the Bull fighting exploits and flamenco dancing of Andalucian Gipsies. Other events of the Feria are the livestock markets, horses and cattle exhibitions. This is merely a show piece rather than a business venture. Local costumes are seen where men wear short jackets and broad brimmed hats, and take to the streets on a horse while women wear flower embroidered shawls with flounced skirts and ride together in a open carriage decorated with flowers.



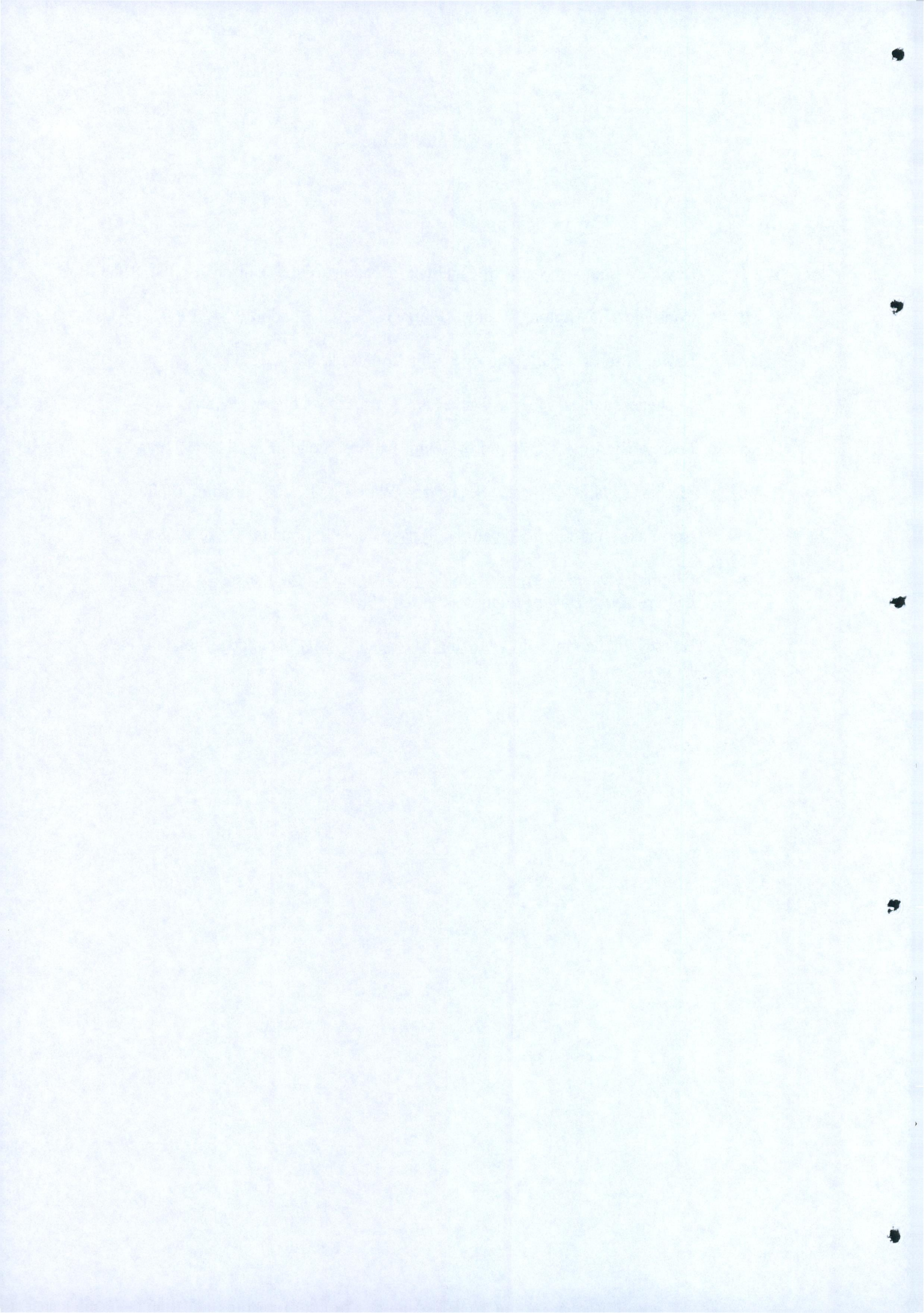
THE FUTURE OF SEMANA SANTA AND FERIA

The future looks bright for the Semana Santa and-Feria despite its decline in the fifties and sixties when huge migration in search of employment to the northern regions became a way of life, and so the celebration suffered. Other obstacles in the way of progress was in the late seventies after democracy when the new government was formed in the region. It was made up of a left wing coalition of Socialist and Communists and they passed a legislative act in 1978 which changed the emphases on this religious spectacle. They diverted the local government funding away from the religious festival to the Carnival celebration because they decided that the Carnival was the peoples festival.(8). They also wanted to restrain the Andalucian people's religious beliefs because it was reminiscent of the Franco era which they wanted to avoid like the plague. This was an annoyance and an outrage to the community, and a request was made for equal distribution of funds for these events. It was not until the nineteen eighties that they began to respect again the "Semana Santa" celebrations. This was mainly due to a resurgence of interest in the holy week celebration as tourists flocked to the festival in great numbers, and it became a media spectacle. Furthermore, the fact of slowing emigration meant that it could be organized by younger, more educated individuals. In addition they began to have a renewed interest in Spring and Winter festivals which are more closely associated with tradition and local identity. (9).



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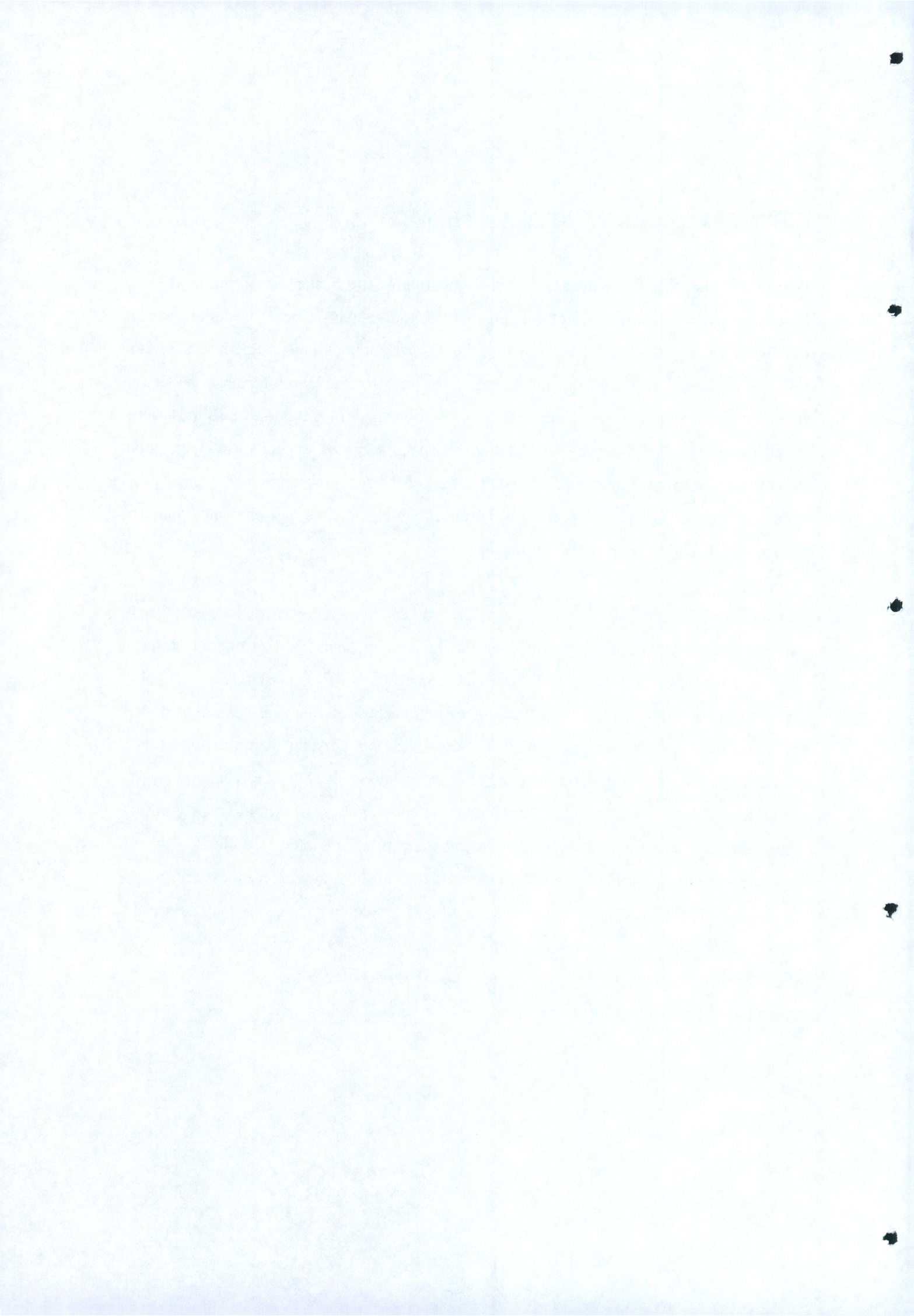


Chapter 5

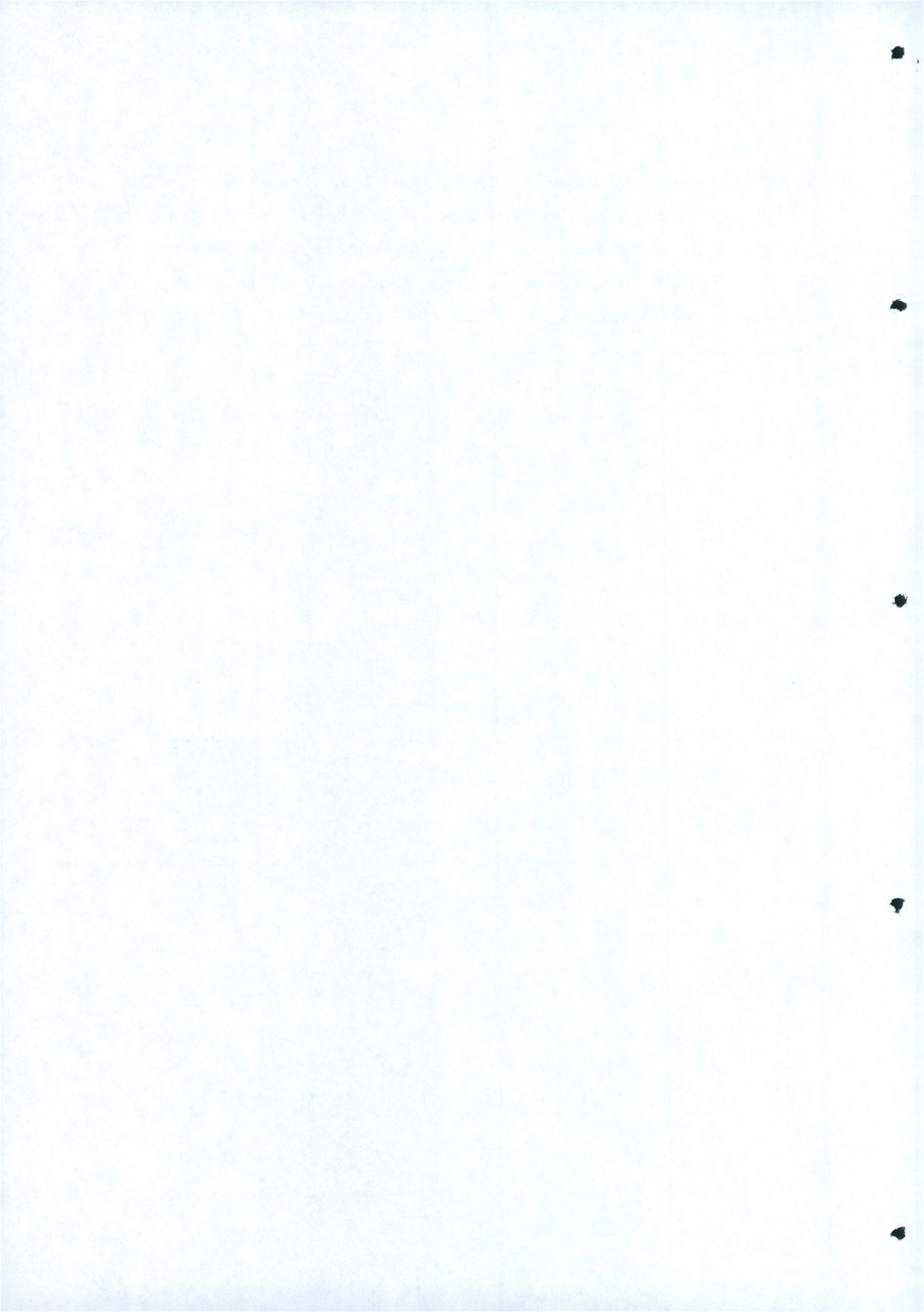
COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE FESTIVALS:

Despite the fact that the Winter and Spring festivals of the Easter period are held at a time of the year which is void of foreign tourists, the festivals nevertheless continued to be held and enjoyed. Indeed the fact that the district councils and brotherhoods in the last year collected up to three million pesetas in funds for the development of these festivals says something about the communities response. In Catalonia the funds were raised by charity performances, local lotteries and, to a certain extent, local government support but the smaller towns of Catalonia had to fend for themselves and finance their rituals by selling agricultural products. Despite their difficulties and hardships some of the smaller festivals have come out on top.

The Fallas of Valencia and Semana Santa get tremendous support from the Spanish national government through the minister for Information and Tourism mainly because they are established festivals. They are made top features of "Tourist Interest" (Spain's official Tourist Board Brochure). Because of this backup of financial support and exposure, the festivals have blossomed and done wonders for their community life. Social clubs have developed out of the Fallas celebration where people converge, integrate and plan the events together throughout the whole year. Children play an important part; last year they were granted a parade solely devoted to children. In Valencia, where children play a very important role in the community, they help to construct a children's "Fallas" and have introduced a solemn presentation of the juvenile 'queen of the Fallas' competition. Alongside these events is the parade to the patroness of the city, when the girls carry heavy armfuls of flowers. For these girls it is an emotional and moving experience.



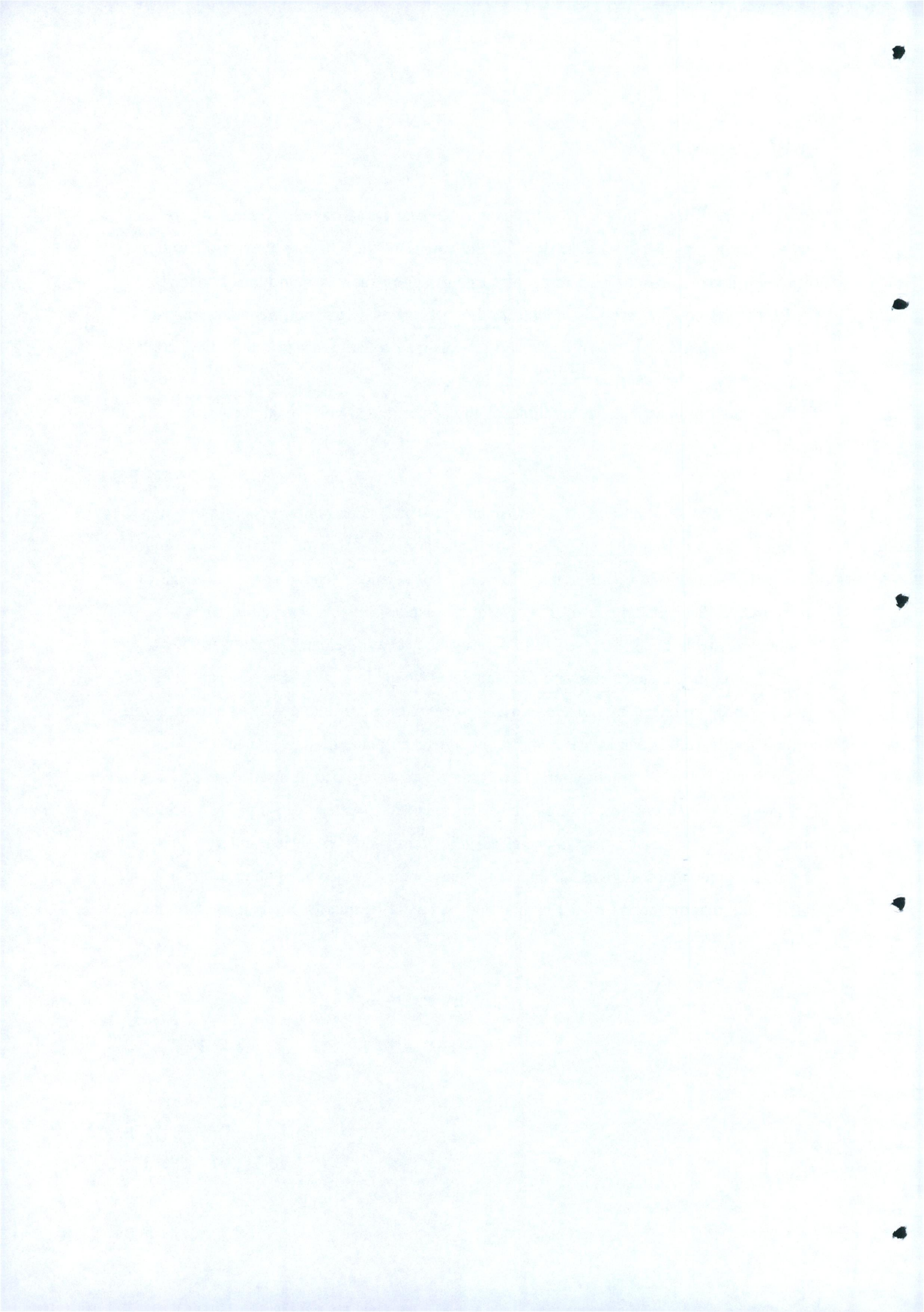
In Andalucia, in the Feria, the children enjoy parties and park amusements in the "Calle del Infierno" (1), and like adults they can play a big part in competitions and other artistic events planned for them. When the festival is structured for the community there is no distinction made between artists, communities or financial cooperators. There are no individual creators, nor personalities nor public recognition, nor distinction between art and artists. They are all equal.



CONCLUSION:

The festivals of the Carnival, Las Fallas and Semana Santa have survived with merits as the leading Spanish festival rituals. In the course of their history they have become disjointed and fragmented as a result of varying factors such as migration, financial hardships and political suppression but in the last twenty years the three autonomies have witnessed a democratic process and have helped to fashion and mould the people into becoming more appreciative of their own regional traditions and customs. These festivals have promoted the recognition of the aesthetic and communal feature of its people.

Democracy was slow to take effect in Andalucia which, as a region is below the level of the European standard of living remaining static and undeveloped. I have to ask myself here if this whole way of life is that vital to their existence. They evoke the image of an excessive merrymaking race of people at the expense of the work ethic. The Southern festivals have increased in popularity and today "Semana Santa" and "Feria" have become media spectacles and have attracted wider foreign interest. Their festivals have not been reshaped by outside currents, of Americanisation, but, they have held on to their rich cultural identity. Revitalisation has taken place though, not in the ritual ordeal itself, but in its organisational structure where young people used their educated and talented minds to inject a whole new dimension of a wide range of ideas, including brass band clubs, social clubs, financial aid like "tombolas" which is a lottery equivalent, and many other innovations. The Fallas seems to be growing with public awareness and suggest the manifestations of the uninhibited nature of Spaniards, after the suppression of the Franco years.



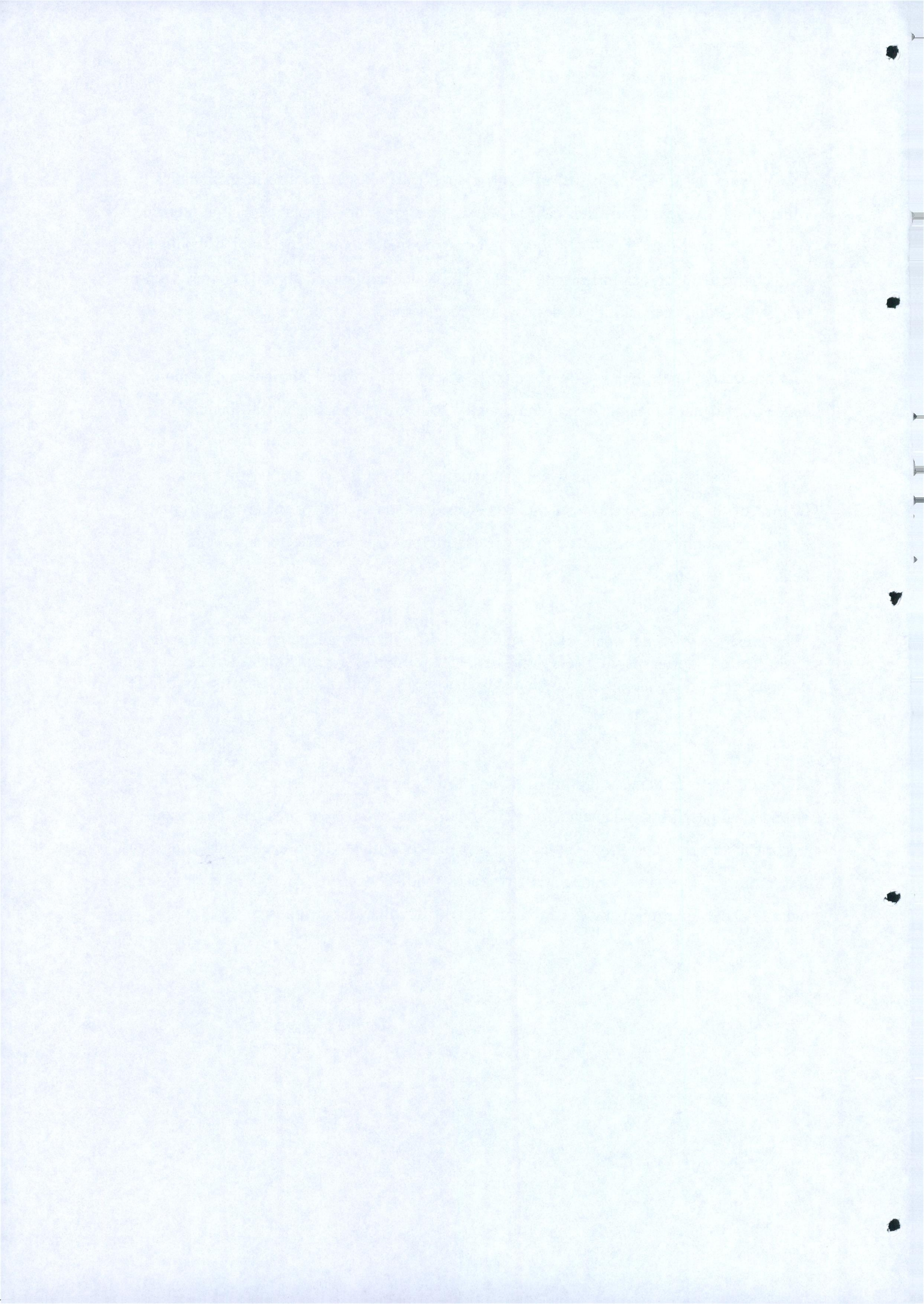
The Valencians are not ashamed to resort to political jokes and satire in their Fallas which for forty years had been banned. Two years ago they displayed Felipe Gonzalez (Spain's Prime Minister) in Velazquez "Venus" as the baroque angel, which would have caused a general uproar in Franco's time. The Valencian imagination is conjured up in the "Fallas" and their ability to destroy and reconstruct.

The political climate today is more tolerant of political satirical humour and is more concerned about social matters in the country than groups poking fun at them.

The Americanisation of Spain which I mentioned earlier is over emphasized in the themes of the "Fallas" and I feel this has shaped the spectacle for the worst. Certainly Spain has caught on to the American way of life and this has affected its social behaviour, as James W. Cortada wrote "

"The increase in recent years of the study of the English language, American movies, Coco Cola, American style dress, T.V. serials, McDonnell's restaurants and the change of Spanish working hours are all elements that pose a threat to the Spanish way of life". (2).

Although these influences are mirrored and reflected in Las Fallas there should be a stronger emphasis on Valencian folklore which once radiantly expressed the regions historical and rich customs. Certainly today the committees have decided to bring back the traditional costume parades and Valencian folklore dancers which Marten Barbera claims "they" give the parade a folkloric flavour for the tourist industry. (3).

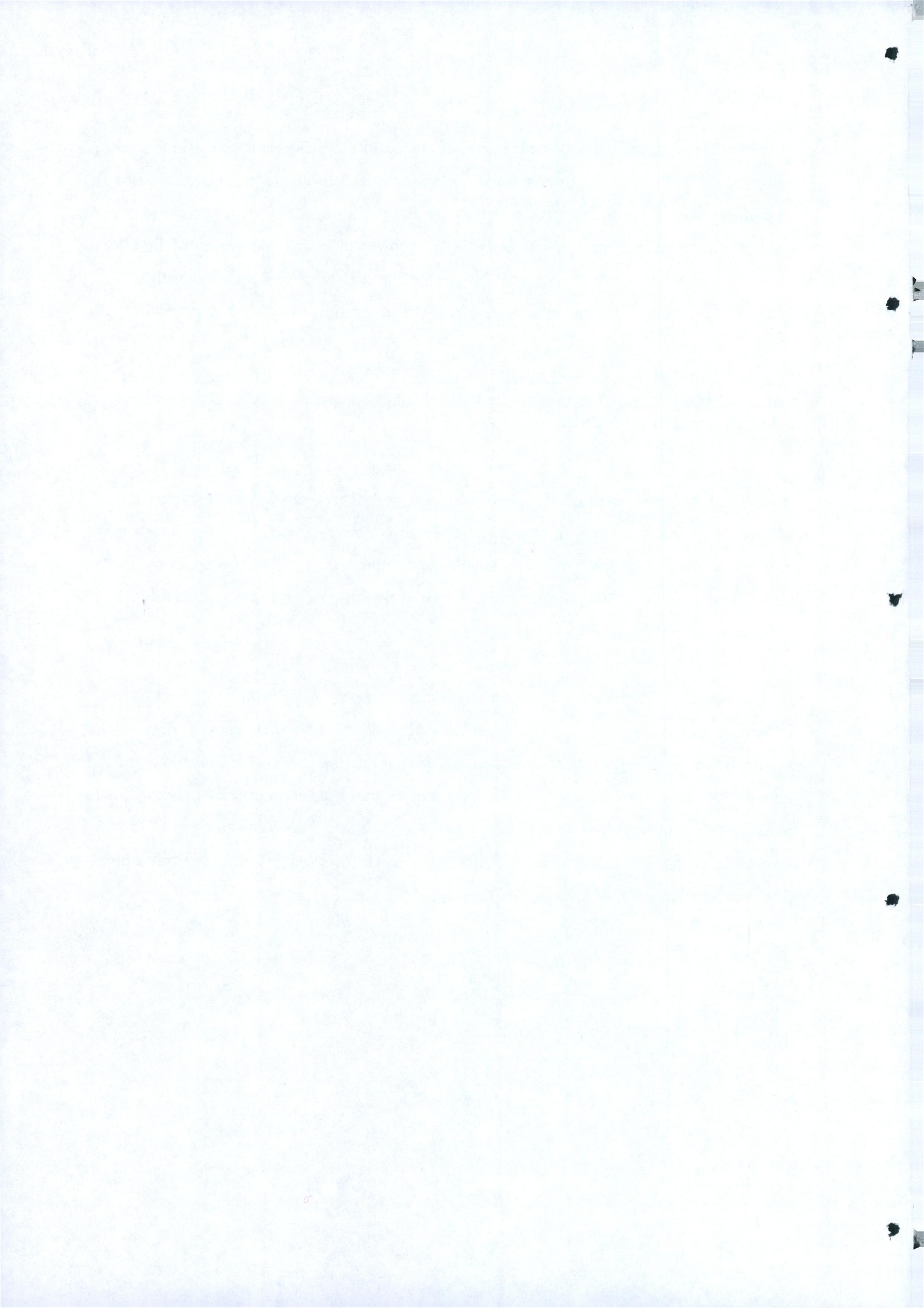


Catalonian carnival has followed a parallel course to that of its language which was repressed for more than fifty years while the political leaders in Madrid kept the lid on its cultural liberty. Both language and festivals have a strong sense of identity and nationalistic sentiment. This is why after the Franco regime Catalonia requested firstly to become an autonomous community, well before the Basques country demanded their independence. Today Catalonia favours European integration. David Gilmore adds

"the future of Catalonia is inextricably mixed up with that of Europe. It is emblematic that the flag of Europe flies next to the Catalan Flag throughout Catalonia's town halls, hotels and popular festivals". (4)

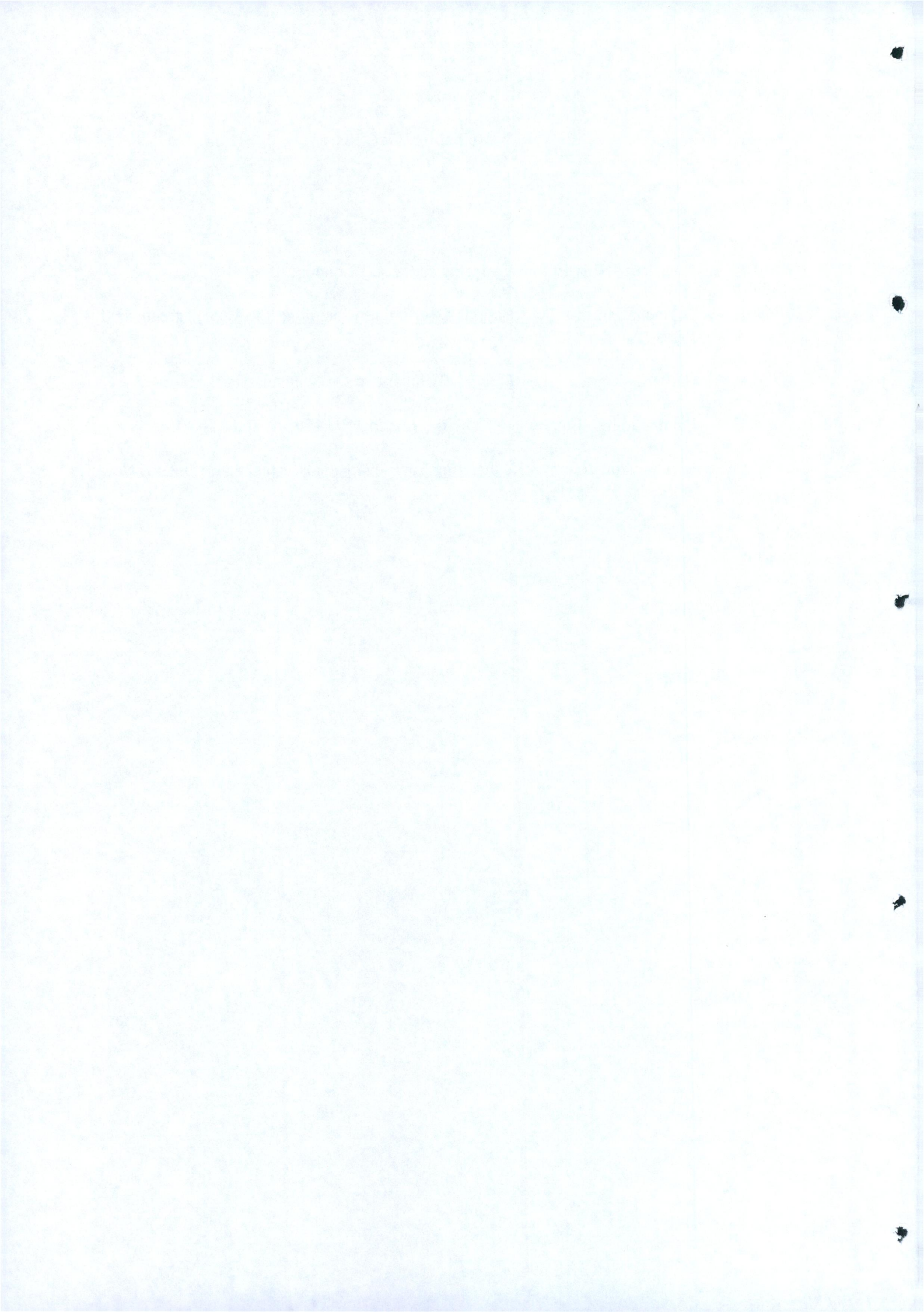
If the future of these festivals is to be secure and grow I recommend that they retain their identity, without letting it stagnate. As Jeremy Boissevain writes "there must be a growing and increasing awareness of identity and boundaries, and a growing interest in history and tradition a shift in the seasonal festive rhythm and an increase in the ludic dimension of celebrations".(5)

In the course of democratic change each regional autonomy should not let the outside influences of European culture and Americanisation dictate how their popular fiestas should be run. The richness of their regional heritage is too precious a commodity to throw away or to allow to die. As Europe becomes more unified the homogenising pressure of Europeanism is evident, this will generate more ritual activities at various levels and each regions will have to defend their identities by celebrating and projecting their own festivals.



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