



The **Carnival of Tirnavos** is a custom which has its roots in antiquity. It is at least 100 years old. The first written records about its celebration date from 1898 when the Cultural and Sports Association was founded.

Of course, in the early 20th century, there was found a wealth of information on this subject of great historical value.

However, the prohibition of the carnival didn't intimidate the inhabitants of Tirnavos that celebrated it even secretly since to them it constituted an integral part of their cultural identity.

In the late fifties, after the war, the walking division of disguised people incorporated itself into the carnival of Tirnavos.

However, the dictatorship prohibited it once more and its celebration was interrupted until 1980 when the custom was revised.

In recent years, the carnival of Tirnavos is renowned as the biggest and best carnival in Central Greece. It is considered to be an event of Pan-Hellenic range.

On the onset of the three-week period preceding the first Sunday of Lent, the carnival begins to be celebrated and its celebration lasts about a month.

During its celebration **cultural activities** take place while theatrical evenings along with musical and dancing events are organized, too. The festivities culminate on the last Sunday of carnival with the **big Parade of chariots**. Inspired by tradition, the chariots show good artistry and imagination while they also lend distinctive glamour to the carnival of Tirnavos.

Thousands of people take part in the carnival festivities and are the life and soul of the Carnival. They are disguised with original clothes of all colors and the streets are swarming with them. They also dance and revel until dawn to the beat of Carnival under the bright sky of Tirnavos.

### THE “BOURANI”

Customs and traditions are an integral part of the history of a society. In fact, they keep engraved in its memory its ancestors' deeds on various matters and certify its roots and origin. The custom of “Burani” on the day of Shrove Monday is one of the customs that have made Tirnavos famous.

Shrove Monday is a day of merry moral freedom or laxity of morals during which the rules of decent behavior are temporarily violated. The balance of the world is upset and the daily routine falls into oblivion. Taboos and prohibitions are set aside and it is allowed to deviate from the rules.

Debauchery and moral depravity are basic elements of the demonstrations of gaiety at Tirnavos on Shrove Monday. The use of sexual and love symbols are perfectly combined with the traditional folk manifestations of the inhabitants of Tirnavos.

On fathoming this subject it can be claimed that the sacrilegious and obscene elements constitute one of the aspects of our people's culture that has hardly been detected and studied. For many decades and perhaps centuries the middle class simulated morality and prudery has neglected to mention it and has overridden it distorting the truth of this particular cultural phenomenon.

Strictly speaking, the “bourani” is a folk fare but in essence, it is a phallus festival that symbolizes the reproduction and fertility. There are two versions regarding its origin:

According to the first version it has its roots in the age-old Greek festivities: “**Dionysia**”, “**Thesmoforia**”, “**Aphrodisia**”, “**Thargilia**” and mainly the “Aloe”, an ancient agricultural festivity of religious worship. According to the second version, it originated from the Albanians that settled down at Tirnavos, in 1770, before the Orlophian events.

Of the two versions the second one seems to be the stronger as it is historically documented. It is said that in those days there was a **cholera** epidemic as a result of which most of its inhabitants died a violent death. The town was devastated and the sultan of the region brought Albanian troops in order to build the new town next to the old one. This region was called “Bones” because the people that had died from cholera were buried there.

So, those Albanians established this custom that lives on up to this day. This custom takes place at Tirnavos, on Shrove Monday, every year. The inhabitants of the town go to the country church of Prophet Elijah in a free wide area, in the north of the town.

At the head of the procession there could be seen various groups of disguised or not disguised men who carried all the necessary supplies for the liturgy.

When the entire town arrived at the area of Prophet Elijah each group spread a table with various dishes on the ground and a big flagon of wine or of a white colored mixture of “ouzo” or

“tsipouro” with water.

At the same time, they lit a fire on which they prepared the “Bourani”, a spinach soup, to which they added vinegar so as to give it flavor. After the “Bourani” had been served to the “initiates” as part of a communion- participation in the event-people started dancing, singing, joking and teasing each other using obscene language.

A lot of men that participated in this ritual held phalluses as scepters in their hands. The phalluses were made of wood or clay or even of bread and constituted the most important ceremonial symbol. Only men had the right to participate in this ritual while women abstained from it, perhaps for reasons of prudery because of the phallic symbols.

However, women and children attended the festivities as well as swarms of visitors from various regions of Greece. Around the fire where the “bourani” was cooked, a great dance took place while the following song could be heard:

“Stop to choose which song we want to choose  
Cuckolds have made the cuckold’s bourani  
And masked persons have eaten it.”

After the “bourani” had been cooked, everybody went to the banks of **Titarisios** river where they continued their obscene jokes and songs. It is beyond the shade of a doubt that this custom is a hangover from the Bacchic ceremonies that has been preserved up to this day and proves the dedication of the inhabitants of Tirnavos to their customs and traditions.

It is worth mentioning that in the Turkish domination era the person that got dead drunk was declared “King of the Carnival”. Afterwards, they put him on their shoulders and carried him around the square with obscene gestures and words.

According to another version, they put the “King of the Carnival” on the opposite side on a donkey and made him hold the animal’s tail while they were carrying him around the whole town. It seems that this custom was done away with in 1875.

The main features of the carnival in the Turkish domination era most of which have been preserved up to this day are the following ones:

- The procession and its route out of town in a vast area such as a threshing floor.
- The participation of men exclusively in the event.
- The wine or “ouzo” or “tsipouro” are made of grapes.
- The bread.
- The effigies of phalluses made of wood or clay.
- The phalluses have a predominant position in the entire event and are either held as scepters or are tied in an upright position to the participant’s forehead.
- The dances, the eating and drinking, the songs sung to the accompaniment of music instruments (such as flute, tabor, clarinet).

In the late seventies, women started taking an active part in the entire ritual especially after the

creation of the “Bourani Society” in 1979.

Besides that, this once exclusively male society grew to elect a woman as its president in the late nineties.

So, if you decide to visit Tirnavos don't wonder at all if they start teasing you or don't be offended if you are asked to kiss the effigy of a phallus. It is just a custom and everything is allowed on that day. Just accept it and smile!

We expect you to celebrate the carnival with us and to continue your feast the next day.