



The *Corsa dei Ceri* race is one of the oldest Italian folklore events.

Talking about the history of the *Festa dei Ceri* is not easy. It is one of the oldest, if not the very earliest, Italian folklore event. The celebration had and still has a crucial role in the community of Gubbio. There are two hypotheses about its creation: one is religious and the other is pagan.

The first hypothesis, which is widely documented, explains the celebration as the solemn act of devotion of the inhabitants of Gubbio, to their Bishop Ubaldo Baldassini, since May 1160, the year of his death.

Since then, every year, on 15th May, the eve of the day of mourning, the devotional offering to the patron saint became a permanent occurrence for the people of Gubbio, who would participate in a mystical procession, carrying a large "Luminaria" of wax candles along the streets of the town and up to Monte Ingino (where the body of St. Ubaldo has been resting since 11th September, 1194 in the Basilica of the same name).

The wax candles, which were offered by the Arts and crafts guilds, probably became so substantial over time that it was difficult to transport them. In fact, at the end of the 16th century they were replaced by three agile, modern wooden structures, which were rebuilt several times but are still in their original form today. Even the date and almost the entire route of the race has remained unchanged over time.

The second hypothesis, which is not very well documented, is that the race is the reconstruction of an ancient pagan festival, in honour of Ceres, goddess of the harvest, and reached us through the glories of the Renaissance communes, the Papal rule and the struggles during the

Risorgimento.

THE RACE

After the Bishop's blessing, the long-awaited race begins, palpitating, impetuous and dramatic like few others in the world. The *Ceraiooli* (carrying the *Cero*) and the people are united in the exaltation of these first moments, when the Captains, Standard-bearers and Trumpeters gallop ahead of the *Ceri*. The Captains from the previous year kick off the race.

The crowd rejoices, bursting into a unanimous, choral cry of "Via ch'eccoli" (there they go). As if by magic, the sea of colour opens up, to allow the passage of the racing *Ceri*, firmly resting on the sturdy shoulders of the *ceraiooli*.

The race unwinds through the narrow medieval streets, with the *Ceri* swaying dangerously, often brushing against walls and windows. With great skill and years of experience, the *ceraiooli* swap places while running.

They manage to prevent any serious accidents, even though they often slip and fall, especially if it is raining. It is a trial of great strength and skill to keep the *Cero* vertical, as much as possible, by avoiding "falls" and "pendute"(swaying). This is the victory, taking into account that overtaking is not allowed and that the candles must arrive at the top of the mountain in the same order they started in: Saint Ubaldo, Saint George and Saint Anthony.

The route covering the race of the *Ceri* is about 4 km and 300 metres long, starting from the *Alzatella* and finishing at the Basilica at the top of Mount Ingino.