SOLSONA AND ITS TERRITORY

The town of Solsona is located in the centre of Catalonia and it is surrounded by an agrarian area. The Solsonès land limits in the North with the Pyrenees, in the South with the Segarra plain, in the East with the Cardener river and in the West with the Salada river. Except for the two only towns (Solsona and Sant Llorenç de Morunys), the population live in rural houses ("masies") and small villages. Because of this, Solsona is known as the "one thousand rural houses region".

During medieval ages this territory was the boundary between what we know as Old Catalonia (Catalunya Vella) and New Catalonia (Catalunya Nova). For instance, we can still see defence towers which protected the inhabitants from the attacks. The first references are from 999. The family was organized around the rural house (nowadays it’s still like this). Different families lived under the same organization: the owners and the “masovers” (people who live in the rural house and pay the rent with his work). The house was very autonomous: children learned at home and the heir (hereu) and heiress (pubilla) kept the family’s organization each generation perpetuating the family saga.

The landscape is populated by woods, fields and ancient rural houses. From the distance, they look like small villages settled in sunny places. Municipalities are located around small villages dominated by the church or the medieval fortifications.

Solsona gathers the influential area from all the territory as a commercial and financial centre. It is also the judicial, political and diocesan capital. People from all the territory come to Solsona every Friday at the open market that takes place in the Major Square and the Camp Square (Known as el Firal in the old days).
Even its importance, the town has only got 9,000 inhabitants and el Solsonès, 14,000.

Industrial revolution didn’t set in the town because it was far away from big communication ways and big rivers. The area was governed by the church and landowners.

Solsona’s surroundings were divided into four Castles; the municipality, into four Divisions and the town, into four Neighbourhoods. The four Castles are not defensive fortifications, but an area of influence around the four churches that surrounded Solsona. These are Castellvell, Llobera, Lladurs and Olius. The Casteller, the one in charge of each area, still exists in our tradition symbolically.

**THE VINEYARD**

The town is surrounded by the Vineyard, the name of the fields where people grew up grapevines for centuries. When the phylloxera appeared in the 19th century, the growing of grapes ended. Nowadays, some houses still keep the presses that were used to make wine.

The four divisions of the municipality are dominated by a chapel. This organization exists since 1604. These are Sant Bernat, Sant Honorat, Santa Llúcia and Sant Pere Màrtir. There used to be more small divisions; in 1683 there were fifteen.

This is Solsona in 1781. You can see communal grounds and pastures for farm animals, rich houses and the “CABANES” that surrounded the town. The town is in the centre, the Castellvell is on the left and the Frau aqueduct is at the top.
SOLSONA'S CONFIGURATION

You can see Solsona, dominated by the Castellvell, from almost everywhere in the region. Behind the castle you can see the footprints of the first inhabitants of Lacetania. During the Roman Empire they had to move to the riverside of the Riu Negre. The new town was called Setelsis.

After the Francs and Sarraïns, Solsona was settled again by Guifré el Pilós in 886. However, the current Solsona was shaped in the 13th Century by the union of two independent villages, one from the church and the other one from the castle. They were both born in the 10th Century. The first references that we have of a walled-village date from 1190.

The union of the two villages began with the creation of new walls on 17th April 1303 with an agreement between two lords. With this union, a serious conflict began. The viscount wanted to divide the village and the church. Even the duty to protect the two villages, Folch de Cardona declined the orders of the king Jaume II and burned the houses that were outside the walls. The town was then completely protected in the 14th Century with two metres wide and six metres high walls, nine doorways and twenty-one towers.
The main doorways are Llobera and Castell, and they used to be the entrance from Cardona through el Miracle. The opening of the town towards the bridge didn’t start until the 18th century. It was necessary to save the Negre River’s bed, so they decided to build a bridge. The builder was Francesc Pons, one of the most famous architects in our country. This alteration ended in 1803 with the construction of a new doorway.

**BAROQUE, the golden ages**

Solsona lived a big social and financial boost because of the setting up of the bishopric in 1593 and the granting of the title of “city” to Solsona. Thanks to this, the town became a strategic place in Catalonia. During this period, the Literary University was created and Solsona acquired the privilege of minting coins.

It was in the 20th century when Solsona’s morphology was substantially altered. Except for the Hospital Pere Màrtir Colomés, built outside the walls in 1638, and the Caputxins (a church), at the end of the avenue in 1619, the other buildings still remained inside the walled town.

The society was the mirror of the events of the moment: Solsona’s bishop, Miquel Santos, was also the viceroy of Catalunya; different artists such as Francesc Ribalta were born in Solsona. He was a Caravaggio follower and Josep de Ribera’s master. Moreover, different sagas of artists like the Morató family or the Pujol family and organists like the Bordons were also from Solsona.

However, the sacred and the biggest expression of the Baroque took place in the streets: the procession on the 8th September during Solsona’s annual festival, the Corpus Christi, the celebration of the 15th August or the Holy Week were the best examples. Some
of them were established in this period, and others were born again.

Solsona’s morphology was altered very little this time. If we compare the old maps that date from that period with the present ones we can see the same organization. The first map of the city that we have, dating from 1743, was made because the lords wanted to be aware of all the houses and buildings they owned. The Duke’s possessions were painted in blue and the Episcopal ones in red. The biggest alterations are the ones made in the Plaça Sant Pere and the Plaça Sant Roc, where there still was the hospital and a block respectively. Around the walls the houses were built leaving a gap because of the defensive work the walls still did.

In the 18th century Solsona was prosperous, quoting Zamora 1787. In that period there were nineteen builders and fifty-eight knife-makers (masters and apprentices).
The engravings that still exist show the survival of the most singular buildings. In most of the maps the town can be seen from the South with the Castelvell Hill, la Borda and Sant Bartomeu behind it. At the Castelvell can still be seen the watchtower from the Iberian times (and we can check that in the 19th century it still existed). Outside the walls there are the Old and the New Caputxins (two convents), the Hospital, different chapels and the bridge that leads into the town.

Inside the walls, the bell tower of the Cathedral and the clock tower dominate the view. In the West we can see the former castle and next to the clock tower there is the town hall. At the other side of the town there is the Cathedral and the Episcopal Palace. In second place we can see the Escolapis building and the Dominics, where the Literary University used to be.

**CARLISM**

The enlargement Solsona had undergone was going to change in the 20th century. In less than a hundred years the town suffered from four wars. The first one was the Independence War (Guerra del Francès), when the Napoleonic tropes commanded by General MacDonald set fire to the Cathedral on the 25th October 1810. During that period, Carlism took roots deeply. This was because of the idea of rurality closer to the one that people had and also because of the uprising of Tristany family from Ardèvol, who headed the revolt. The confrontations between Carlists and Liberals took place near Solsona. The town was dominated by Carlists and General Tristany tropes fought against Ramon de Meer Kindelan tropes. De Meer got into the city and took the monastery, but Carlists pressures caused the expulsion of De Meer tropes, who set fire to the city before leaving.
During the First Carlist War Solsona was the seat of the Junta Suprema del Govern del Principat (the highest entity of the government in Catalunya), so it was the Carlist capital, headed by Carles the 5th. To control the city a big house was built in 1845 in the Camp area. At the end of the war the inhabitants decreased from 3150 to 2300.

The Second Carlist War began in Solsona, where Father Benet Tristany was condemned to death in 1846. In 1878 Benito Pérez Galdós wrote that Solsona “was one of the ugliest and saddest towns of the Christendom”. It is said that he probably never visited Solsona.

SOLSONA IN 1875

The majority of the town was destroyed by the wars. In 1848 there were 509 houses, but at the end of the wars there were only 151. Moreover, because of the abolition of the legal jurisdiction and the diocese, the morale was very low.

The Bishopric was suppressed in 1839 and until its restoration Solsona was governed by a vicar. It was so important for the town that the Town Hall sent some committees to Madrid in order to have the Bishopric back. In 1875 Solsona had 2360 inhabitants. The Carlists still stayed in the town for two more years. The king Alfons the 12th appointed the mayor of the city, since the two mayoralties had been eliminated in 1815.
It was a generation marked by the wars but with the ability to fight and the capacity to reach the magnificence for the town and to restore the institutions the town owned. A great way to move forwards.
AN ARCHITECTONIC LEGACY: BAROQUE AND CLASSICISM IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURY.

In modern ages we can know the name of the architects and the name of the master builders because of the contracts signed for the building works done in Solsona since the 17th century. The city became more important through the years and the investments in buildings and other urban projects grew up. We need to know all the main architectonic buildings that still remain to understand this legacy and the transformations of the 19th and 20th centuries.

THE CATHEDRAL

The first references we have of Solsona’s church are from the 977 when it was dedicated to Saint Mary. The number of inhabitants increased because of the repopulation and in 1070 a new temple was consecrated using the same name: “it was very beautiful and worthy of all the honors”. It still remains three apses, a part of the main nave and the left nave from this period. This temple is considered from the Romanesque period, unlike other churches that are from the
Lombard Romanesque.

A century later, in 1163, it was the third consecration with Pere de Comes and Gilabert de Tolousse, the sculptor of Mare de Déu del Claustre and the cloisters. Beside the church, where there is the Bishop's Palace, the canonical lift. It still remains the main nave joined to the cloisters, where the wine cellar, the refectory, Sts. Màrtirs chapel and the Abbot's Palace were.

The main nave was built in 1333 following the gothic lines. We can see two different constructions: the first one, the space between two supporting walls of the main nave covered by vaults and the nerves supported on the decorated capitals. On the capitals we can find some shields: the Llobera one, the one from the Urgell County and the one from Cardona because all they funded the works.

Because of the economic crisis and the Black Death all the works stopped. The Romanesque Cathedral was then annexed to the gothic nave. The works restarted again in 1593 when Solsona became an Episcopal see.

The first big work in the 17th century was ending the Cathedral by Claudi Casals. Although the Cathedral works finished around 1623, the main lines were still gothic.

The works finished on 4th December 1627 and they costed 4,000 Barcelona's pounds. In the altar there is an inscription: "They were extracted for this chapel by Claudi Casals, master builder". In the 18th century a transept was built with two new chapels, Capella del Claustre and Capella de la Mercè.

Claudi Casals was also on charge of the Peremàrtir Colomés Hospital works. It was built out of the walled-area trying to avoid
infections and contagions. This became one of the first examples of urban distribution. Casals signed for the construction in 1638.

During the 1810 fire part of the vault on the major altar collapsed and the altarpiece disappeared. Any architect from Solsona dared to restore the vault so Canudes de Casserres was asked to do it. In 1834 the works were finished.

It was now the Romanticism period. The artists quit Baroque and Neoclassicism and began a new movement, Medievalism. The Cathedral's restoration was in charge of Josep Oriol Mestres, architect, and Claudi Lorenzale I Sugrañes, painter. They made the main altar following neo-gothic style. Mestres was the artisan of this restoration; he designed a new Corpus Christi’s monstrance following the Christian art of the 15th century. It was made in 1854 by Francesc de Paula Isaura. Mestres also designed the lamps, following the same lines, in 1855. The restoration of the stalls, failed during the French War, it was a work done by him too in 1859.

He was the author of the new municipal cemetery in Sta. Magdalena’s fields. The Town Hall ordered him the project on 27th December 1855. When the new cemetery was already built
the old one behind the Cathedral lost its usage.

**THE FOUNTAINS**

In the mid-18\textsuperscript{th} century one of the biggest problems was to equip the fountains of the city with more water. Water had always come from Miravella’s fountain (Mare de la Font) since 1426 but the quantity was not enough for all the population in this period. In 1742 the Caputxins (a monastery) made its own water pipes from Frare’s fountain. But for years the biggest construction had been the water pipes coming from Lladur’s fountains. From all these constructions two aqueducts still remain: Afrau and Olmeda. They were built in 1758 and 1765 respectively by Jeroni Peró. The water reached Solsona’s fountains in 1763.

**EDUCATION**

Prosperity periods allowed different Religious Communities to settle in Solsona and deal with infants education. Since 1758 girls education has been taking place in the ancient castle, thanks to Companyia de Maria nuns. In 1774 boys education took place in Els Escolapis under the direction of priest Esteve. The building was made by Francesc Pons.

Until then, the most important educational institution that the city had was the Literary University. It was placed in Hospital de Llobera, where nowadays Consell Comarcal is. A gothic squared building with a central courtyard where the main staircase is located. The second floor consists of a series of pointed arches. This building is a testamentary work of Francesca de Llobera, made in 1411. The first reason for this building was a hospital for poor and elderly people.
In 1614 the building became a Dominicans property in 1614 to teach Philosophy and Theology there. In 1620 it was elevated to the consideration of University but in 1717 Philip V centralized all the universities in Cervera. However, the courses of Philosophy and Theology continued until 1821 when the confiscations deleted the lessons in this building. Hospital Llobera is one of the most successful examples of late Gothic in Solsona.

The two most extensively cultivated and popular movements throughout the centuries have been the Romanesque and Baroque. Many Romanesque chapels which inhabit this area were covered by Baroque altars, hiding their origins. The need to create a large number of altarpieces in a short time brought the arrival of different workshops of sculptors, master builders, etc.

The slowness the current style came to the territory resulted in different styles applied in the same work. This, however, does not devalue the quality of existing works. For example, the best combinations of the late Baroque and Neoclassical schemes are in Solsona. In particular, the Shrine of the Miracle, the chapel of Els Colls de Sant Llorenç and the church of Sant Pere de Matamargó.
together with a large number of altars scattered throughout the territory.

**THE CLOISTER**

One of the most promising lineages was Morató family. They worked in the chapel of Mare de Déu del Claustre. In 1698 the works on the new chapel began. They had replaced the second one, made in the sixteenth century. The architecture works were directed by Josep Morato and were inaugurated during the Major Feast in 1727. Thereafter, the construction of the monumental altar began, and it was completed in 1752. This one, burnt by the Napoleonic army in 1810, was one of the most spectacular Baroque examples.

Jacint Morató also made the main altar of the Cathedral in 1729 and La Mercè altar in 1754. If Morrató worked in Solsona, it was família Pujol in St. Llorenç who made Els Colls chapel. With the Bishop Rafael Lasala Locela came the spirit of the neoclassical, which included a renewal of ideas and new ways of understanding society. His right hand in the field of architecture was Francesc Pons, an architect born in 1744 in Solsona. Under his direction it was made the bridge to entrance to the city following the neoclassical canons, and the new doorway of the bridge, completed in 1806. But the most important work was the Bishop's Palace.

**THE PALACE**

When the Bishopric was established, the rooms of the monastery of Santa Maria became the Bishop's Palace. It was not until August 27, 1776 when it was laid the first stone of the new neoclassical style building and completed in 1779. The architect was Francesc
Pons. According to the "diary of tours made in Catalonia" he could not read or write but he performed palaces and houses instead.

There was a way of taking advantage of old installations while expanding them with the new building. The problem was to connect the old monastery with the façade projected next to the door of the Cathedral. Therefore, the main and rear walls were joined by a gradual volume and in the center they placed a scale that runs the two parts of the building.

The main façade, overlooking the door of the Cathedral, is one of the most important works of neoclassic architecture of our country. It enjoys all the solemnity and importance that a building of its kind had to have during the 18th century. The rear façade, that wraps the Gothic wing, is far more austere. However, it is notable for its large number of openings. We have to bear in mind that the building was in the same line of the defensive walls of the city and the old wall remains inside. Unlike the main façade, the rear one had got a popular character.

Without any doubt, the Bishopric brought the best architects of the moment to the city. The diocese had its own architect in the
middle of the 19th century but there was not a municipal architect. This is something that shows how important the church was over other institutions at the time.

There were few urban standards. That year there was the current requirement to submit plans before building, instituted in 1852. Later, in 1878, the buildings of the Major Square were regulated.

But, of course, not all buildings were large. Most were redone after the Carlist Wars, although the walls and old lintels were kept, the interior were remodeled. Precisely the lintels are a good guidance for the remaining buildings because they have the construction date. They are closely linked to periods of expansion of the city in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or the recovery from the nineteenth century wars.

The houses had two or three floors. In the low one the family workshop was placed. The walls were made of local stone and lime with simple stucco as exterior. The roof was made of Arabic tile. It was not until the nineteenth century when flat roofs began to be built. Emphasize the eaves embellished with heads of beam, a very popular item in Solsona’s homes. The first ones were Gothic and they have been followed by many others that have been modeled following the canons of the time. Some of them had galleries called “eixides” on top of the buildings. The balconies were made of wood first, but now all them have been replaced by iron railings.