

Examples of Landscape Transformation in Fore-Pyrenean Catalonia (8th–12th century) as a result of man's influence on grapevine growth

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Lord Valley (Catalonia); 8th–12th century; valley colonisation; human action; vineyards

Preliminaries

In the winter of 2000 Ramon Plana by chance found some artificial structures formed by superposed stone structures in the Lord Valley. This discovery allows us to present this paper at the Basle Congress in order to contrast viewpoints about it.

The Lord Valley lies in the south area of Pyrenean Range, on the north-occidental border of Catalan Solsonés County. It is delimited in the north by Port del Comte Mountain Range and in the south by the foothills of Cadí Sierra. From the latter it is easy to go from Seo de Urgel to the Lord Valley through Coll de Port, where the Cardener river rises. This river and its first tributaries (Mossoll, Riu de la Pedra, Aiguadevalls) enter the valley in the Lerdan Fore-Pyrenean area, which we are concerned with (Riu 1999). An old path went through it, from North to South, from Seo de Urgel to Cardona (Riu 1993), running alongside Cardener river watercourse and flowing by a Roman *villa* (village), known as “villa de Noves” or “Novesana” during the 9th and 10th centuries, on the ruins of which, at the end of the 9th century, the Benedictine monastery of Sant Llorenç de Morunys was built. Four hundred years later this monastery gave origin to the gathered settlement of the same name which is nowadays the capital of the Lord Valley.

The presence of hispanic, gothic and frankish settlers is known in this southern area of the Central Pyrenees from the end of the 8th century. Since count Guifred el Pilós was chosen by King Charles the Bald to rule two counties, Cerdània-Urgel and Conflent in 870, he decided to reorganise the territories placed in the southern part of his counties to protect them

from the Muslims settled south of these territories. Between 872 and 878 Guifré (†897) started the task of colonising the Lord Valley. He attributed it to the condition of “*franquezas*” or franchise land and declared franks (free from taxes) to those who settled there. The valley was divided into military districts, dominated by castles on hilltops, under the authority of a vicar living on Castelltort hill, the central point surrounded by Aiguadevalls river, a tributary of Cardener. And in the valley territory, surrounded by mountains and protected from natural catastrophes, a dispersed population established, constituted of some small family groups who lived in *mansi* (farmhouses) isolated and separated one from another by crops and wooded zones, in areas which ranged from 900 to 1500 metres altitude.

The preserved documentation does not allow us to define the characteristics of the valley colonisation and they were also not stipulated in the privilege granted by King Charles the Bald in 844 to the residents in the county of Barcelona (D'Abadal Vol. II, 415–416), when he permitted them to transform “the barren lands into crops”. Nevertheless, we think that these terracings which Ramon Plana observed in 2000 and in 2001 along Galliners Slope – the southern foothills of Port del Comte Range – may be from this initial period. The terracings consisted of two gigantic walls of granite stone, formed by heavy pieces which extend almost parallel, from North to South, along the slope and were up to 3.5 metres wide. In some zones they are flanked by other perpendicular walls, with a smaller, irregular parameter. That way they form areas of successive irregular fields, like wide steps of a big staircase. Without any doubt, it is a zone where wastelands and de-

ciduous forests were prepared to obtain crops, such as cereals and grapes.

Habitat Location

The structures detected on Galliners Slope were part of the monastic parish of Santa Creu d'Ollers, which we know was already working in 1040 dependent on Sant Llorenç monastery. Nowadays Santa Creu is a romanic building. It had one only nave, covered by a barrel vault, a semicircular apse rounded off by lime stones and outwardly decorated by buttresses and lombards. A steeple church tower above the door opened to the western wall. It is from the first half of the 11th century and was put up on the foot of Galliners Slope next to the old path from Sant Llorenç to La Pedra i La Coma, which is now an asphalt road. It was also surrounded by a cemetery. The parish consisted of a few farms spread on the foot of the before-mentioned slope – the distance among them was about 200 metres – on the right-hand bank of the river Cardener. Some of them are still standing, although very modified, such as Mas d'Ollers, the primitive structure which probably used to be a watch tower (*turris*), approximately 5 metres high and 4.5 metres wide. In the parish there were other houses, such as Les Ribes, Les Nogueres, Els Plans, Les Tregines, Cal Llentia and La Creu Escapçada. Next to Les Ribes, there was a grey pottery workshop from the 9th to the 12th centuries (Riu 1971–72; 1995), which gave the popular denomination of “Els Ullessus” (derived from Ollers, without any doubt) to the consignment. The map of El Cadí, published by the Electric Current Cooperative in 1922 to a scale of 1:50.000 with equidistances of 50 metres, indicates the situation of these farmhouses among the hermitages of Santa Creu (on the south) and of Santa Magdalena (on the north), at an altitude which ranges between 900 and 1070 metres. However, this type of housing seems to be from the second phase of the territory arrangement. Very few remains can be seen from the first high medieval one. Towards the south-east edge of Galliners Slope sector, on a terrace – about six metres wide and twenty-three metres long – there are, apparently, the remains of a primitive house, half-hidden by weeds. It consists of a rectangular structure built with 12-meter-long thick blocks positioned dried and

subdivided into two different stances: one was 6.5 metres and the other one was 5 metres. The wall which divides the stances is 60 cm wide, and the two side walls were from 2.4 to 3 metres wide. There would be one only single storey building with a solid roof. The external door of the building was on the south-east edge of the structure. The two stances might be respectively: the people's chamber and the one devoted to their small flock. There also could be an orchard or a poultry yard in front of the façade. However, nobody has excavated this structure yet in order to know its characteristics. It probably must be very similar to the oldest mansi, attested in other zones of Lord Valley and corresponding to the 9th and 10th centuries

The two gigantic walls

As we have already indicated, the territory arrangement is dominated by two granite walls – or standing walls – with a natural base or foundation, and two or three courses of big blocks superimposed and perfectly fitted without any mortar. The largest pieces have dimensions of 2.04 by 0.5 metres, 2.1 by 2 metres, 1.2 by 0.6 metres or some other similar measures. There is a distance from 5 to 8 metres between one thick wall and the other one, and advance from the foot of Galliners Slope, in the present-day road from Sant Llorenç to La Coma, on the part of Els Ullessos, until near the top of the hill. These two walls, which nearly run parallel, have a path which is put forward next to the internal side of the structure, and communicates between the different terraces. The two alignments are made of granite and conglomerate, with the bottom part made up of living rock and both sides placed vertically, meanwhile the superior sources superimposed reveal the anthropic action. In some places of its longitude – it is more than 1000 metres long – both structures are up to seven or eight metres high. But, in general, its height ranges from four and a half to six metres. The distance between the two walls is about six and a half metres and they are about two metres thick. Every six metres, more or less, there is a perpendicular wall to the two other walls. It is built without cement and its size is smaller. It forms a higher platform, up to four metres high, in the southern section. These margins which limit the following steps are

carefully built with stones of medium or large size, without any kind of visible mortar although the stones are often secured with sandstone or other little stones.

One of the medium platforms is eight metres long throughout both walls and is 6.5 metres wide, with a total surface of 52 square metres, isolated from the two side platforms by stone margins from two to four metres high. As a whole, it seems like a big flight of steps with wide rows of seats. On the lowest part of the hill there is Mas de Ollers in the middle, and all this land area, including the adjacent fields, was bought by the present-day owner's (Doña Conchita Collell) father for a sum of 1500 pesetas (10 Euros), at the beginning of the 20th century, when the property was called "Vinya del Pusic". Nowadays there is a residual grapevine next to Mas de Ollers. Along the field which stretches next to the farmhouse there is a two and a half-meter-high stone margin, with stones which range from sixty to twenty centimetres width. Some bonding units of some probable adjacent houses were used to build this margin.

The fields in Galliners Slope are long, of a medium or small size. Until recently they were devoted to the cereal crops or to pastures for cows, pigs or goats. A wide path has been built to allow the vehicles to go past from La Coma's asphalt road. And when removing the soil, some little fragments of grey pottery from the 11th and 12th century appeared, as well as some fragments of later glazed ceramics (14th–16th century).

Next to the still-exploited few farm fields of the lowest part, there is a wide sloping sector recovered from the pine, evergreen-oak and oak forests and a brushwood plentiful of box and blackberry bushes, and dried leaves, log trunks and branches not taken away when the forest was cut down. This lowest part is at an altitude of about 1000 metres, ranging generally from 925 to 1050 metres, and the big granite walls are necessary to keep wind and cold away from the harvest which faces the midday sun.

Other characteristics of the crops

In the north-west area of Les Ribes territory there is the small cave – today modified – where the fountain which supplies water to the before-mentioned farmhouse comes to the surface. A boundary wall, made of stones and concrete, in

order to collect and to distribute water better, makes it difficult to analyse this fountain.

The stones in this zone are worse-quality ones, except for some detached large rocks which probably rolled down from the upper part. It reminds us of some tertiary conglomerates among clay layers mixed with pebbles. Under a big rock there could be an ancient burial, a point not checked. Going from this area to the middle there is a zone of farm lands. They are rectangular-sized, used lands, whose extensions were converted to the traditional measure units. In particular, the *mojada* (*mujada* or *modiata*) of 4896.5 square metres, more or less equivalent to two *quarteres* or half a hectare, specially for growing first-class cereals, and for grapes the *semodiata* or half a *mojada*. In 1716 the *quartera* became equivalent to 35 square *canas*. And the land *jornal* was equivalent to half a sowing *quartera*. So two *quarteres* were equivalent to four *jornals*.

These terraced lands usually have soil and grass edges instead of stone edges, and they are lower. Nowadays they are used to produce forage for the livestock in wintertime. But the agricultural economy of the roman villas in the county of Solsona investigated by Ramon Cardona, Josep Pou and Victor Revilla (Cardona Collell/Pou Vallès/Revilla Calvo 1995, 518), used to be another. They point out, that "in most of the documents from the 9th to 11th centuries is outstood the importance of the grapevines in the areas surrounding Cardona, Aiguadora, Llinars, Navès and Olius. During this epoch – they add – the country produced wheat, spelt, oats, olives, hemp, saffron, wine, vegetables, sheep, cows, pigs and several wild animals". Linen and pulses could be added to these products as well as the forest exploitation. The forest wood was lowered from Port del Comte to Manresa through Cardener and Aiguadora rivers. Among the wild animals we must remember that the name of Costa de Galliners (Galliners Slope) is based on the black cocks which bred there.

The land in this south-west zone had a different aspect from the land in the eastern part which seems to have been for crops some time later (11th and 12th century). Nowadays, the whole territory belongs to the town council of Guixers, bordering on La Coma i la Pedra and Sant Llorenç de Morunys. Previously it belonged to the monastery of Sant Llorenç and its parish of Santa Creu de Ollers.

The parish of Santa Creu

There is documentary evidence, that in 1040 the parish of Santa Creu was already there, made up of five or six farmhouses widely spread around its territory. It depended on the Benedictine priorship of Sant Llorenç de Morunys, and this one was at the same dependant on the abbey of Sant Serni de Tavèrnoles, since it was reformed by the abbot Poncio de Tavèrnoles in 1019 (Riu 2000, 336–340). The parish of Santa Creu de Ollers was probably organised in the 10th century, because it is not mentioned beforehand. During this period, its terra nigra (grey ceramics fired on a low heat) was developed.

We have already mentioned the parish church of Santa Creu de Ollers situated in the hill-fortified district of La Pedra and in the *villa* (village) of Ollers. With third part of the tithes and all the first fruits, oblations and rights to bury, it was given back by the count Ermengol IV and his wife Adelaida to the monastery of Sant Llorenç, which has taken all its rights under some unknown circumstances on October 14, 1084 (Riu 2000, 346–347). Nevertheless, now we know the names of the household heads who lived in the parish of Santa Creu: Ramon Albert, Arnau Oliba, Mir Enecó, Guillem Oliba, Arnau Sinfità, two Bernat Onofre (perhaps only one Bernat, the other one was perhaps due to an error of the copyist) and the priest Ramon who was probably the parish priest and who wrote the document. It must be deduced that six or seven families lived in the *mansi* in 1084. These families dedicated themselves to the pottery production and grew open fields in the wooded zone of the southern side of Serra del Port del Comte.

The houses were reformed successively. Mas de Ollers (a farmhouse), semi-detached to a stone margin, had a surface 7 by 5 metres (about 35 square metres) and on both sides of the farm stone margins up to two metres high were built taking profit of the stone faces of previous constructions. The family who lived in that house was probably known by the house name still in the late Middle Ages. There is a sarcophagus or ossuary caved in limestone from the end of the 14th century or the beginning of the 15th century which has a border with the inscription on the cover of a triangular section: OBIT PETRI OLES ET UXORIS (=The Burial of Pedro Ollers and his wife).

Bernat d'Ollers was probably the son of the before-mentioned and it is said that on October 16, 1412 was consol of the village of Sant Llorenç (Riu 1998, 139 doc. 37), where he lived and had his own residence in 1410 (Riu 1998, 141 doc. 40), although in 1439 he still owned land in a spot called "La Coma de la Sierra dels Hiverns" (Riu 1998, 144 doc. 44) which is in Galliners Slope. On June 10, 1438 the farmhouse of Ollers appears among the twelve farmhouses in the Lord Valley which Joan Ramon Folc declared free from paying quisties and talls in the district area of Castellort, except for those usual payments already made by then (Riu 1998, 147 doc.54).

A priest called Antoni Ollers, probably a relative of the farmhouse family, lives in the village of Sant Llorenç de Morunys in 1445 and is mentioned as a witness in a census institution of mortgage (Riu 1998, 148, doc. 56). On the other hand, on February 3, 1468 Gabriel Samunt is declared the heir and the owner of the farmhouse Mas de Ollers He lived in Seo de Urgel and with the consent of his sister Magdalena sold Antoni Fexes a piece of land called "lo Comelar de les Peres" belonging to the Mas de Ollers for a sum of 22 gold florins (Riu 1998, 159, doc. 78).

By then, the merchants, father and son, called Pere Joan de Ollers also lived in Sant Llorenç. In 1470 they received thirty-six pounds from the Community of Parish Priests and implicated to the paying an annual tax of pays of Barcelona in trio currency (Riu 1998, 159, doc. 79). Those merchants still owned some grapevines bordering on Plans, a farmhouse next to Mas de Ollers, on Costa de Galliners (Riu 1998, 163–164 doc. 87). On April 27 of the same year, Jaume Berenguer and his wife Clarona bought a vineyard from the area of the adjoined parish of Sant Lleir from the reverend Antoni Ollers who we have mentioned before (Riu 1998, 162 doc. 85) and, as a security or guarantee of paying that sum, they put "a piece of land" that they owned in the area of Santa Creu de Ollers and which had belonged to Mas de Ollers in bond. That piece of land was placed in the tax-free part of the priory and bordered on vineyards and other properties of Mas de Ollers.

Conclusions

After analysing this part of the Fore-Pyrenean landscape, one deduces two different periods

in the anthropoid action. One first period, developed from the 8th to 10th century, in which the forest trees from La Costa del Galliners are cut down and the land is terraced in places protected from winds and the cold winter, using gigantic granite walls to keep the crops safe and through that, making the development of the local cereal agriculture easier as well as introducing little vineyards as something new. And a second period, between the 11th and 12th century (although it continues during the

following centuries), in which those crops became mixed, adding vines and olive trees to the old cereal fields and alternating the old and the new products. At the same time the cultivated fields were redistributed into smaller portions and the cultivated zone was extended by means of ploughing in the forest area until then not converted. As these last ploughings were made in a hurry, due to the great population increase, there was no time to build protective stone margins.

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