

## Monasteries, gastronomy and landscape

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### Abstract

Monasteries can be considered as one exponent of the concept of sacred places strongly related to the landscape where they are placed in. They are an example of how tangible and intangible heritage are interrelated: the buildings respond to specific needs related to the daily routine of the community (also religious needs) but also to symbolic meanings. Catalan monasteries have been one of the main transmitters of the Catalan Gastronomy through numerous recipes books, but also have emerged as a conservative of different products that they manufactured like chocolate or wine. In Catalonia there are several monasteries that stand out for their vineyards such as Sant Pere de Rodes (in the Designation of Origin Empordà), Santes Creus, Poblet and Scala Dei (in the Designation of Origin Tarragona) and Sant Benet del Bages (in de Designation of Origina Pla del Bages). What we propose in this paper is to explore the relationship that occurs between monasteries, gastronomy (specially wine but not only) and tourism in the current context and how it can enhance the value of these assets in order to promote their conservation while becomes a value added for tourism destinations.

**Keywords:** *monasteries, sacred spaces, Catalan gastronomy, wine and tourism, local production, cultural landscapes*

## 1.- Monasteries as a holy place

The monastery is the building where a group of people called monks or nuns live and share work, prayer and life. It is usually a place away from the cities and therefore one that favours a life of prayer and reflection, although nowadays monasteries can also be found in large urban areas (UNESCO Association for Interreligious Dialogue, 2015).

Monasteries spread throughout Europe during the Middle Ages but, as Moreno (2011) pointed out, had their origins in the reactions of the first hermits to the luxury and splendour displayed by the Church. In fact, the word monastery comes from Greek and means “house of a single person”, because they were initially inhabited by a single monk (or hermit), who would retire to a remote area to devote himself to prayer and penance.

It was Saint Pacomi (286-346) who first proposed the shared hermit life and organized cenobitic monasticism under his rule (Estradé, 1998). Later, Benedict of Nursia (480-547) organized the first medieval monasteries and founded the Benedictine order (Rule of Saint Benedict), one of the most prominent religious orders during early centuries of the Middle Ages. In fact, the Rule of Saint Benedict served as a model for other monastic rules. It is noted for its balance, practicality and being based on poverty, chastity, obedience, prayer and work.

Thus, the monastery is not only an architectural space but also a space for finding community life and searching for God via certain religious practices (prayer and worship). This is why they are above all sacred places.

The holy is a complex concept that can be defined and/or studied from different perspectives. Aulet (2012) mentions different ideas in respect of this:

- The holy is all that is irrational and marked by some form of transcendence.
- The holy as a designation of divinity, fundamental reality, pure existence; which in some cases means it is also associated with terms related to clarity, light, purity...
- The holy is that which is spiritual and pure, and therefore separate from the profane. In addition, as opposed to the profane, it involves delimiting inappropriate behaviours and conducts. This is the holy of prohibition and separation.
- The holy as elements that allow us to come closer to divinity, which can be understood as a holy consecration.
- The holy is the root of the spiritual life and is marked by fascination and internal development, which can lead to fulfilment.

The holy is present in all religious traditions as something that brings us closer to divinity, as its manifestation (hierophany). We can conclude that the holy is defined by its opposition to the profane (Eliade, 1981; Durkheim, 1993), that which is ontologically different to it; there is nothing human or physical about it, rather it always manifests itself as a reality of a completely different order to that of natural realities. It is what Otto (1965) calls *ganz andere*. Holy and profane represent two different ways of being in the world.

“The holy equates to power itself, in short, to reality par excellence. The holy is saturated with being. Holy power means reality, perpetuity and efficiency.” (Eliade, 1981, 20)

The holy fact appears as a stable or ephemeral property of certain things (objects of worship), certain real human beings (priests), imagined beings (gods, spirits), certain animals (sacred cows), certain places (temples, sacred places), certain periods or times of the year (Easter, Ramadan). It is a superior quality that is in opposition to chaos.

In the case of monasteries, these can be considered holy spaces for various reasons, as noted by Aulet and Hakobyan (2011).

Firstly, they are holy spaces because they share the symbolism of the centre of the world; the point of convergence, coordination and ordering, balance and harmony.

They are places where there has been a manifestation of the holy (hierophany). This can occur in various ways, but is often linked with elements of nature which are holy in character (water, stone, forests), as well as those natural areas unreachable by man and which somehow convey that feeling of smallness of the human being mentioned by Otto (1965). “All religions, as cultural phenomena, have used natural symbols to come closer to the mystery of the world.” (Duch, 1978, 343)

Finally, there is a whole range of architectural symbols. Religious buildings, especially temples, are from an architectural point of view the physical place where the holy space materializes and their architecture is therefore anything but random. Each part symbolizes or shares one of the symbols representing the holy. An extensive literature with authors exists in this respect (Guenon, Burckhart, Hani, among others).

## **2.- The relationship between tangible and intangible heritage in monasteries**

*“Intangible heritage is not only the site of yesterday’s memory, but also the laboratory where tomorrow is invented.”* Koichiro Matsuura, Director General of UNESCO

Based on what was presented in the previous section, monasteries can be seen as an exponent of the concept of holy space closely related to the landscape where they are located. They are an example of how tangible and intangible heritage are interrelated:

buildings respond to specific needs related to the daily routine of the community (including religious needs) but with symbolic meanings. According to Shackley (2001), holy spaces are linked to different religious traditions but all share some of the characteristics that have been mentioned above. At the same time, they are spaces that contain a series of values (related to worship, nature, culture and architecture, among others) that make them highly attractive, in most cases, in the eyes of tourists, generating a flow of visitors alongside the faithful and devotees who come to these places for religious reasons.

The World Conference on cultural policies organized by UNESCO in Mexico in 1982 defined the cultural heritage of a people as that which “includes the works of its artists, architects, musicians, writers and scientists and also the work of anonymous artists, expressions of the people's spirituality, and the body of values which give meaning to life. It includes both tangible and intangible works through which the creativity of that people finds expression: languages, rites, beliefs, historic places and monuments, literature, works of art, archives and libraries” (UNESCO, 1982).

We understand tangible religious heritage to consist of these tangible and intangible elements. This tangible heritage represents, in some way, the holy space. It also includes tangible heritage objects, such as paintings, altarpieces, decoration, elements of the liturgy that are considered works of art... Thus, we can understand that tangible heritage can represent an interest in art, architecture, and history in general; and we can link it to motivations that are largely but not exclusively secular (let us call this cultural tourism, for example).

In this regard, the majority of European monasteries were built in the Middle Ages, becoming magnificent representations of different artistic styles (such as the Romanesque and Gothic).

On the other hand, intangible religious heritage is made up of the rituals, worship and events that take place in these holy spaces. We could say that this form of heritage is a clear manifestation of sacred time, the devotion of the people towards a particular element, the rituals of integration that occur in these places. Therefore, we could associate these elements to more strictly religious motivations.

We could even go a little further. Bearing in mind that, as already mentioned, these monasteries also have a close relationship with elements related to nature and the territories surrounding them, they can even be considered part of what UNESCO calls the cultural landscape.

According to the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, cultural landscapes are cultural properties that represent the "combined works

of nature and man" designated in Article I of the Convention. They are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic, and cultural forces, both external and internal (UNESCO-ICOMOS, 2009).

### **3.- Monasteries, products and gastronomy: the case of Catalan monasteries**

As Calvet pointed out, in the Middle Ages monasteries came to be considered not only as centres of spirituality and a source of culture, but also as organizers of the country. The close relationship that existed between the monastic communities and feudal authorities is a clear reflection of this. Monasteries played an important role in the economy of the surrounding areas, often being owners of farmland and cattle herds that the monks themselves looked after (remember the main premise of the Rule of Saint Benedict, "*ora et labora*"), while also providing employment for local peasants.

Catalan monasteries were one of the main transmitters of the Catalan gastronomy via numerous cookbooks, and have also emerged as preservers of various manufactured products such as wine.

If we refer to the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage and landscape, a clear example of how these relate to one another is gastronomy. According to the Institute of Catalan Studies, "gastronomy is the knowledge of everything related to cooking, processing and preparing dishes, the art of tasting and appreciating food and beverages". Montecino (2012) adds that "gastronomy is the reasonable art of producing, creating, transforming, developing, preserving and safeguarding activities, consuming, healthily and sustainably, enjoying natural, cultural, intangible, and mixed World Gastronomic Heritage and all in respect of the human food system".

We therefore find that gastronomy constitutes the relationship between food and culture, including all of the culinary processes and traditions of each place. We have seen the definition of intangible heritage and its relationship with monasteries; this is also evident in the case of gastronomy. We can cite as an example the inclusion on UNESCO's list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity elements such as French cuisine (2010), followed by the Mediterranean diet and traditional Mexican cuisine. Catalonia has a long culinary tradition that can be documented back to the Middle Ages. It is worth noting that the Institute of Catalan Cuisine Studies is promoting the candidacy of Catalan cuisine for inclusion on the above list.

As Aulet i Majó (2016) mention "Catalan cuisine is Mediterranean but with contributions from many different places: it is a "bridge" cuisine, linking Portugal to Istanbul with

features from southern France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and North Africa. In fact, it is the result of centuries of evolution and receiving influences from peoples and cultures that have settled in the region: Iberians, Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans bring the Mediterranean touch; Arabs incorporate spices; to this great cocktail are added products from 15th-century America... Therefore, behind modern Catalan cuisine is the story of a country, a territory”.

This tradition dates back, as we have said, to the Middle Ages. As pointed out by Fàbrega (2013), the only known cooking books from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were written by monks. It is in monasteries that the traditions of writing cookbooks and medieval cuisine were perpetuated. It is in all likelihood in monasteries where products from America were first used in the fifteenth century, such as peppers, tomatoes, beans, and also chocolate.

There are several monastic texts on food, rations, expenses, etc. written by monks or nuns, indicating ingredients, dishes suitable for days of the year and religious festivals, how to manage shopping... The earliest of these manuscripts are preserved from the fourteenth century. One of the most important is “The Book of Sent Sovi”, a Catalan cookbook by an anonymous author. Another manuscript is the “Book of Cóch from Tarragona canonry” from the same century, which is a compendium of rules for meals for staff at the Church of Tarragona.

Francesc Eiximenis, a Franciscan monk, was the author of another manuscript, “Terç del Cristià<sup>1</sup>. How to use food and drink well”, which describes food and culinary customs of the age. It is an exceptional book on gastronomy and wine in the history of European cuisine, among other reasons because it is the first of its kind.

A further element that confirms the important culinary legacy of monasteries are the facilities themselves. The architecture, especially of Benedictine monasteries, were clearly designed to respond to culinary needs. Life in the monastery was structured around the church and the cloister, which were the most important elements around which the other areas were built.

The cloister tended to be square or trapezoid in shape, each of its sides covered by a gallery with an archway. At the centre of this space there used to be a small garden or a vegetable plot (where they used to plant herbs).

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<sup>1</sup>Terç is an ancient catalan word that means third; it's the third book of a collection about how to be a good Christian.

The refectory was the monastery dining room, where frugal meals were served, usually around noon. While the monks ate, one of them read the Scriptures from a pulpit. “There must always be reading when the brothers are at table. There must be absolute silence and no other voice than that of the person reading may be heard. Everything needed to eat and drink is to be served by the brothers to one another, in order that nobody has to ask for anything. If anything has to be requested, this is to be done by making a sign” (Rule of Saint Benedict, Chapter 38).

Next to the refectory there was the kitchen and close to that the store and warehouse. Around this complex there was the land (covering more or less territory according to the monastery’s importance) as well as other buildings such as mills, workshops and stables. In fact, the winery was a very important element. Monasteries played a crucial role in preserving the culture of wine. In fact, with the risk of this culture disappearing following the Islamic invasion, monasteries were responsible for continuing to plant vines and produce wine for liturgical reasons.

Farms related to the monasteries dedicated themselves to farming and keeping livestock in a planned, rational and autonomous way. The farm was not be more than one day’s distance from the monastery, in order to be able to attend Mass on Sunday, and tended to be run by converts (those who professed to the order but had not joined, or could not). One of the important functions of the farm was to meet the community’s needs with regard to food, with all kinds of crops, wine and savoury meats. Another function was to have surplus production to sell it or trade for products they could not produce. The most common crops were cereals (wheat, barley, and oats), olives, grapes, vegetables, fruit and herbs for cooking. Livestock was important and included pigs, sheep and goats. Poultry, if there was any, was reserved for special occasions. The forest was also exploited for firewood. Each monastery enjoyed complete economic independence, although they did exchange experiences, plants, seeds, and mushrooms, among other things, with one another.

Thus, the culinary tradition of monasteries stems from a combination of observing the monastic Rule to be followed and the products that were most accessible. The monks’ diet was composed of vegetables, fruit, eggs, fresh and salted fish and cheese. At ceremonies they were allowed sweets such as biscuits and nougat. Fish was much more present than meat or meat products. Monastic Rule prohibited red meat but said nothing about poultry. “Therefore, for all the brothers two cooked meals is sufficient, and if it is possible to have fruit or vegetables, a third should be added. A good pound of bread is enough for the whole day, whether for a single meal, or for lunch and dinner. All brothers must absolutely refrain from eating meat from quadrupeds, except for the very ill” (Rule of Saint Benedict, Chapter 39).

Tradition also reveals a clear trend of nuns making jams and sweets, normally to use up any surplus fruit and vegetable production or as gifts for benefactors and relatives. Today, many of these products are the main source of funding for many monasteries, as well as a somewhat commercial attraction.

Our case studies will focus on three products present in traditional Catalan and also Mediterranean cuisine: wine, oil and chocolate

### **3.1.- Wine**

One very interesting aspect to study is the relationship between wine and monasteries. In Catalonia and in many other parts of Europe, monasteries have traditionally played an important role in the production of wine. With the fall of the Roman Empire, the Christian monasteries became winemakers. Throughout the Middle Ages, monasteries played a significant role as wine centres, and it was a key element in the liturgy, as well as an good for exchange.

Wine and vineyards form part of the cultural heritage of a region and have proven essential in understanding the economic, social and cultural evolution of different wine-producing regions, while also helping forge a European cultural identity. But the culture of wine is more than that, it means loyalty to origins, learning to enjoy local products related to the territory. As Josep Roca, the sommelier at Celler de Can Roca, has pointed out, behind every wine there is a philosophy that speaks of the territory and the people who produced it.

Winemaking came to Catalonia across the Mediterranean from the hands of the Greek and Roman civilizations, and has been part of Catalan history, heritage and cuisine since those early times. Currently, according to the Catalan Institute of Wine and Vine (INCAVI), wine and cava represent the third largest sector of the Catalan food industry, with revenues exceeding €1.1 billion, and more than 490 million bottles of wine and cava exported to over 140 countries, mainly in Europe, America and Asia. It is a well-established industry, with more than 780 wineries and 12 designations of origin (as can be seen in Figure 1). Wine has therefore become an ambassador of Catalan identity.

Various monasteries are known for their vineyards in Catalonia, including Sant Pere de Rodes (DO Empordà), Santes Creus, Poblet i Scala Dei (DO Tarragona) and Sant Benet del Bages (DO Pla del Bages).

The Sant Pere de Rodes monastery is situated in the region of Empordà, in northern Catalonia, almost touching the French border. It is one of the most interesting complexes for discovering the Mediaeval world. “The outstanding element of the complex is the monastery church which, for its originality and antiquity, is an exceptional piece of Catalan



Romanesque. Built between the 10th and 11th centuries to house the pilgrims, it enables us to grasp the splendour of the monastery. The building is notable for the great height provided by an original system of pillars and double columns, and for the richness of the ornamentation on the capitals and the almost vanished doorway” (Museu d’Historia de Catalunya).

The monastery is located in the territory of the PDO Empordà. It was precisely on the lands of this DO where the first Greek colony settled, in Empúries, in the sixth century BC. It was therefore one of the first areas which began to grow vines, and the monastery of Sant Pere de Rodes became one of the main producers of wine in the Middle Ages. “In the Middle Ages, when vines grew in the shelter of abbeys and monasteries, the slopes of Mount Rodes were layered with terraces planted with vines protected by Sant Pere de Rodes monastery, where the winemaker monk Ramon Pere de Noves seems to have excelled in the art of winemaking, to whom a treatise on the subject is attributed” (Designation of Origin Empordà).

According to el Consell Regulador, El Empordà has a great variety of wines. “The red wines are high quality, full-bodied, well-structured and harmonious, sometimes with added hues thanks to careful aging. These reserva and crianza wines boast special aromatic notes. They are complex, with a subtle fragrance and a hint of spice, always preserving the aromas of the fruit and the vine. On the palate, they are full, flavoursome and pleasant. Fresh and flavoursome white wines are elaborated with autochthonous varieties and other high quality single varieties. Rosé wines are also produced with a well-defined cherry colour, great personality, a delicate aroma, fresh with a moderate alcohol content. A speciality of the area is the Garnatxa de l’Empordà, a naturally sweet wine produced from the Garnacha grape. Full-bodied, with the flavour of the grape itself, mature, warm and smooth — virtues giving it the features of an exceptional dessert wine, together with the area’s own sweet wine, the Moscatell de l’Empordà.”

Tourist activity is one of the major economic sectors in the Empordà region, leading to a proliferation of various initiatives related to wine tourism, by both the Regular Council and tourism institutions (the County Council and Costa Brava Girona Board of Tourism). Recently, this DO has joined the “Rutas del Vino de España” (Wine Routes in Spain) promoted by the Spanish Association of Wine Cities (ACEVIN).

The Wine Routes of Spain constitute a large and representative cross-section of the wine-growing territories of the different designations of origin. The manual defines a series of requirements that must be met by the organisation managing the route, for example its management system, route signing, promotion initiatives and marketing support. It also regulates the types of establishment that can become partners: restaurants, accommodation, wineries, shops, etc. The Wine Routes of Spain brand therefore imposes quality criteria that

set these routes apart from other wine tourism schemes and give confidence to visitors who choose them. The Wine Routes of Spain brand only admits routes that have been thoroughly prepared, offering the best of themselves and their people so they can be sure never to disappoint their guests.

In the case of the Empordà, this route comprises 80 wine tourism companies, with a wide range of wine and culinary products on offer: 24 wineries, 9 hotels, 11 restaurants, 3 bars and establishments specializing in wine, 11 activity companies, 3 museums, 2 wine therapy treatment centres, 3 reservation centres and various information points scattered throughout the region. One example is the visit “From the vineyard to the monastery”, which consists of a walking tour through the vineyards, a visit to the monastery and wine tasting at the end.

### **3.2.- Oil**

Catalonia. Aside from being a staple food (the Rule of St. Benedict mentions it), it was also considered a basic product in medicine, hygiene and cosmetics. Monasteries also became producers of this item because it was one of the elements used in rituals (for anointing). It was also needed for lighting lamps. The origins of olive cultivation date back more than 6,000 years and, like wine; it was introduced by the Greeks and Romans.

In this case we can give the example of the monastery of Vallbona de les Monges and Les Garrigues DO oil. As with wines, in Catalonia there are five DO for oil production recognized at European level: Siurana, Empordà, Terra Alta, Baix Ebre - Monstia and Les Garrigues.

The territory of Les Garrigues is one of those with most tradition and excellence in the production and marketing of oil in Catalonia. It was the first DO oil to be recognized in Spain (1975), and was certified as a PDO by the EU in 1996. This oil is produced and sold by various cooperatives, one of which is the Cooperativa de Vallbona de les Monges, which produces oil on the ancient lands of the monastery.

Santa Maria de Vallbona is the most important female Cistercian monastery in Catalonia. It began with several groups of hermits that later became nuns and monks, a sort of double community that lived under the crozier of their founder, Ramon de Vallbona, and lived according to the Benedictine rule. In the XIIth century they joined the Cistercian Order.

It is worth mentioning here that the monastery is located in the centre-west of Catalonia, a predominantly agricultural area where tourism has not yet evolved to the level of the Empordà region. This means, for example, that there is a lack of infrastructure and, above all, a lack of tourism products revolving around oil and the monastery.

### 3.3.- Chocolate

The third product we present here is chocolate. Cocoa entered Europe via Spain, being introduced almost simultaneously with other exotic drinks such as coffee and tea. Bufias (2015) relates the story of Cortès being presented with a golden goblet of liquid cocoa by the Indians because his physical features resembled those of their god.

The next country to adopt chocolate after Spain was Italy. Some Italian regions were under Spanish rule and brought chocolate from the Iberian Peninsula, thereby beginning its tour of Europe. Although the drink had a strong and bitter taste, it was imported to the Peninsula because it was easy to transport in grain form (it could not be cultivated on European land). Chocolate was introduced to Europe from Spain through the monasteries and royal courts. France was the third European country to embrace chocolate, and it rapidly spread through the French aristocracy.

In the case that concerns us here, it was Cortès who brought chocolate to the Peninsula, giving Friar Jeroni d'Aguilar a sack of cacao beans and the recipe for chocolate to take to the port of Barcelona, and from there to the abbot of Pedra monastery in Aragon. Bufias (2015) explains that it was in this monastery where the first chocolate was made in 1534, relating the chocolate-making tradition of the Cistercian order and its reformist branch, the Trappists.

In addition, the production and consumption of chocolate in monasteries is well documented throughout history. Seventeenth-century chocolate, being liquid, did not violate ecclesiastical fasting: *Liquidum non frangit jejunum*. This allowed it to be drunk without incurring capital sin. After its spread throughout Europe, in Catholic countries (Spain, Italy and France) theological doubts arose as to whether consuming chocolate broke the rule of fasting. This began in the early sixteenth century in Spain, and the debate between the two sides gradually grew until it reached the papal level, with the Pope being asked for a resolution on the matter.

Chocolate has a strong presence in Catalan cuisine, not only as a dessert. The Catalan Institute Foundation for Gastronomic Cuisine and Culture has performed the huge task of making an inventory of the different recipes considered to comprise Catalan cuisine and its variants in the Corpus of Catalan Cuisine. According to this institution, apart from desserts and sweets, there are several other traditional recipes that use chocolate: rabbit with chocolate, bacon stew, prawns with chocolate, Catalan lobster, hare with chocolate, *ofegat de la Segarra* (a pork stew), and pork trotters with crayfish, among others.

At Pedra monastery in Aragon, apart from touring the facilities, visitors can attend an exhibition on the history of chocolate. In parallel, the city of Zaragoza tourism authorities

have created a tourist product based on chocolate, called Chocopass, which is a pass that can be used to sample five different chocolate specialties from more than 20 outlets, plus a tasting session at Pedra monastery.

There are other monasteries that traditionally produced chocolate in Catalonia, such as the Cistercian Poblet monastery and Montserrat Abbey, although they no longer do so today (they do, however, sell chocolate produced locally as a souvenir).

#### **4.- Summary**

As we have seen, the relationship between heritage (tangible and intangible), territory and gastronomy constitutes an opportunity for territories to develop tourism around monasteries and to gain extra income to help with the maintenance of these infrastructures.

Thus, cultural tourism and gastronomic tourism can bring significant benefits to regions where it is implemented, if properly planned. It can benefit small food producers and artisans, and lead to the recovery (or prevent the loss of) ancient crafts, traditions, recipes and products. In this sense, the trend to award new value to the local product produced throughout the territory is key.

Gastronomy may still be difficult to find as the main reason for travel, except for establishments with Michelin stars or having the best restaurant in the world (in 2013 and 2015 this was a Catalan restaurant, El Cellar Can Roca), but the perception and creation of a place in potential visitors' tourist image is key to promoting the region.

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