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Lleida, Hinterland of Catalonia

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ÀNGEL ROS I DOMINGO

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Lleida, Hinterland of Catalonia

On the westernmost side of Catalonia, Lleida is its backcountry, a counterpoint to the crowded Mediterranean coastline. This book intends to be a new letter of introduction to its reality, in the form of twenty-four chronicles incorporating the personal views of the city of their authors. Of the Lleida of yore and the Lleida of today, a harbinger of tomorrow's city.

They have been written by professors of the University of Lleida, journalists and local writers. The texts come with pictures, ancient and modern, which illustrate the passage of time. They have been taken by eleven photographers led by three masters of the trade: Josep Gómez Vidal, Josep Porta Mesalles and Ton Sirera.

The first part shows the dynamism of Lleida, with the basic communication infrastructures: railways, highways, airport and road systems of the Ebro river basin and the Pyrenees; a small but representative sample of its musicians, plastic artists, littérateurs and scientists; a look at the university, campus of excellence for the new generations, and the transformation of the region's commerce with the setting up of a strong agribusiness sector.

The second part brings us to the Lleida of today, looking towards the future: the Seu Vella (old Cathedral), presiding over the ancient and the new cities; the plazas, an invitation to the social intercourse and daily coexistence; the twelve bridges over the Segre river; Gardeny Hill, from the Templar Castle to the Food and Agriculture Technical and Scientific Park and the Llotja Congress Palace or the Municipal Theater.

Finally, the City of the Senses section invites the reader to partake of our spring and fall celebrations, with its Moors and Christians parades and gastronomical feasts (not only centered around escargots and sweet fruits), the particular character of different neighborhoods. And to penetrate in the winter fog as if it were a magical scenery and enjoy the music of Màrius Torres' poetry, a paean to Lleida's mist.

Therefore, I invite you to immerse yourself in this vision of the city; I'm sure you will emerge wanting to know more about Lleida.

ÀNGEL ROS I DOMINGO
Mayor of Lleida

Editor's Note

To show how the passage of time has transformed the city, such is the basic aim of this book. We refer to the historical time, immune to the meteorological vagaries of an intense cold, torrid heat and our beloved fog. A time propelled by the economy, politics, effort, science, life styles and people who turn these great currents into reality.

Observed through the perspective of time and space, these transformations are reflected in all the spheres of the city's life, from public works to the adaptation of its great monuments, and the new architecture of bridges, squares and buildings; from the river's metamorphosis to trains and planes, without overlooking the eating habits, feasts and the interaction of adults and youngsters.

This book tries to identify these changes through the vision of a group of writers and photographers who are well acquainted with the nooks and crannies of Lleida. In some cases, the transforma-

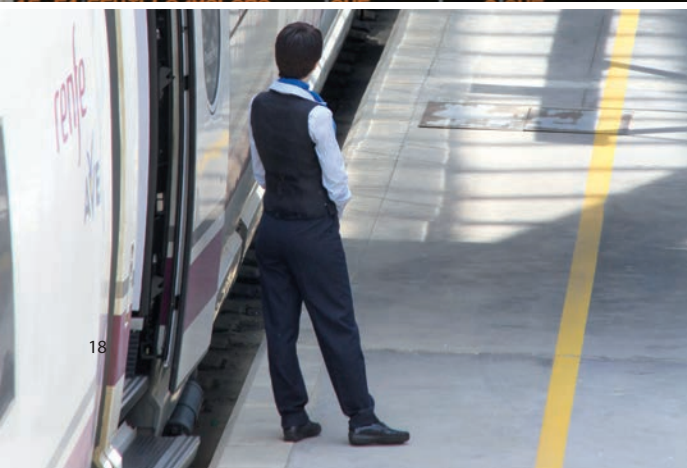
tions are spectacular in magnitude. But in some other instances, we are confronted with changes in the physic and sociological landscape that are not easily appreciated, and only become evident when the small details entail an urban and personal mutation.

Texts and images are grouped in three sections. The first includes the chronicles of the engagement of the city with itself: the efforts of enterprising people and the transformations they have brought about. In the second we find texts dedicated to aspects of the city projected towards the future, from a past that we already know. The third part of this book unveils more personal ambits, such as the gastronomy, culture, leisure and lifestyle of Lleida's citizens. Altogether, they conform an open, plural, work that will connect with all its readers, thanks to its fluidity and variety.

LLUÍS PAGÈS I MARIGOT
Director, Pagès Editors



Salidas Sortides DEPARTURES		adif 15:44		
Hora	Destino	Tren	Via	Observaciones
Hora	Destinació	Tren	Via	Observacions
Time	Destination	Train	Platform	Remarks
	BARCELONA-SANTS	AUE	2 AUE	
	BARCELONA FRANÇA	REX	5 REG. EXPRES	
16:05	BARCELONA-SANTS	AVANT	3 AVANT 8167	
16:15	L'HOSPITALET DE LL	REGIONAL	6 VIA MANRESA	
16:40	IRUN - BILBAO	ALUTA	1	



Gate of entry. The high speed railway station is the entrance door to Lleida for thousands of visitors.

Lleida Destination

Vidal Vidal

In 1860, the arrival of the railway brought an unprecedented flow of visitors to Lleida. A century and a half later, high-speed trains have been a multiplying factor. The airport, although still in the process of consolidation, will probably contribute to turn the capital of the Ponent ("land where the sun sets") into an undreamed of commercial center and tourist destination ("It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves", if it will please the linguistic purists.)

In the first trains that arrived on that northern new railway line traveled what we could call the first tourists. Since the beginning of time, the place had seen its share of outsiders traveling there not only for practical purposes, but because they were moved by the desire to see new landscapes. But now we are writing

about a more global phenomenon, one that already implies huge numbers of people: the modern traveler who searches for intellectual experiences (monuments and panoramas) and expects a certain degree of comfort while doing so. The railway made traveling easy for those with the itch to visit new places; it was a big improvement over treading upon rough roads on horseback or in stagecoaches. Back then four or five hours, were enough to reach Lleida from Barcelona, with only the minor nuisance of the locomotive fumes seeping through the coach's windows. That was the origin of mass travel, of "tourism" as we know it.

Besides the primitive systems of urban transport (horse-drawn carriages first; motor vehicles, later) for the service of that host of travelers, mention must be made of the first hostels created with

Tucking in. Soldiers eating in the railway station restaurant managed by the Colavidas family.



modern standards regarding comfort and customer attention. One of the first, inaugurated in 1876 in the avenue leading off from the station, now Ferran Street, the Gran Hotel España (nothing less!), survived until fifteen years ago though in a run down condition, a ghost of its former splendor at the moment known as Fonda España. Mr. Pleyan de Porta, in a guide published the following year, recommended the establishment to "the traveler wishing spacious accommodation". A decade later, in the Guia de Lleyda this ad appeared: "Large and opulent rooms, copious meals, fine service; everything a traveler could wish for can be found at reasonable prices in this famous fonda managed by Mr. Gabriel Tomàs. English Spoken. On parle français. Man spricht Deutch." Some years later, in the 1930s, with the street renamed Avenue of the Republic, the Gran Hotel de España was advertising itself as the oldest in the city with a garage in the same building.

The advertising of its polyglot capacities, French, English and German, is —what doubt can there be— a sign of Lleida's popularity

with tourists and an indication of the desire to attract costumers from beyond the kingdom's borders. In an effort to turn the Segrià capital into a communications hub, the first motor vehicles seen in the province were purposely kept on the ground floor of the hotel: two steam powered De Dion-Bouton, purchased by Automóviles de Lérida in the year 1900, that covered the service from Lleida to Balaguer, Artesa de Segre and Ponts.

For many years, the city had been a thoroughfare. Although, as we have seen, the place did not lack in amenities, those traveling by railway or road either went through or skirted the city altogether. Only recently, Lleida has been perceived, also by its own citizens, as an interesting place in itself. Even though the city always enjoyed its resources, they had not been converted into a tourist product, and resources, by themselves, are never sufficient to attract visitors, at least not in a steady and copious flow. Resources have to be prepared, packaged along with services and facilities for visitors and advertised, before they can become products.



AVE. A high-speed train entering the city.



Templars. Recreation of life in the Templar Castle of Gardeny.

And this had not been done here until relatively recently. Perhaps it wasn't an easy task: Lleida's emblematic monument, the Seu Vella (a prime tourist attraction), has only become available for this objective in the past few decades. Finally rescued from a long period of military use, with its architecture nearly entirely restored, it's now an icon of the region. Although its devastated interior cannot be compared with some other Catalan cathedrals, the magnificence of its opened cloister, with spectacular views, turns the Seu Vella into a must see monument, that is unique and exceptional.

Fruit of an intense effort to dignify and promote other city monuments, the Church of Sant Llorenç, the Castle of Gardeny, la Paeria, the New Museum, the Park of the Mitjana, the modernist route or the carrer Major (the "main St.") with shops and fine buildings, to name just a few, now appear in all the tourist guides. If you add to this the by now renowned gastronomy (beyond the popular escargots a la llauna) and the fine wines produced in the

province, we will have to reach the conclusion that the city is attractive enough to make it an overnight stay and not just a place to cross through on the way to somewhere else. Lleida now enjoys 25 hotels (one 5-star, six 4-star and four 3-star hotels) with a total of 1250 rooms and 2315 beds. That is quite a change in just a century and a half. The Romans used to say "Ilerdam videas" (an ambiguous "May you see Lleida", directed to their enemies). Things, in spite of the winter fogs, have changed, and the increase in the facilities of traveling, by land and by air, can only result in a greater number of visitors, avid to see Lleida for themselves.



Garrafeta (the "little carafe"). The station master signals for the steam locomotive to start.

