



SANT SOPAR. JAUME FERRER

# THE SOLSONA DIOCESAN AND REGIONAL MUSEUM

THE DIOCESAN MUSEUM OF THE BISHOPRIC OF SOLSONA WAS CREATED IN 1896 TO SAFEGUARD THE INSTITUTION'S HISTORICO-ARTISTIC HERITAGE AND MAKE IT AVAILABLE FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH.



ORANT. SANT QUIRZE DE PEDRET

ÀNGEL MAURI AUTHOR

**W**hile religion has been at the forefront of all cultures previous to modern culture, the omnipresence of religious monotheism was an essential element throughout the Middle Ages and, as such, one of the roots of European identity, something that neither atheists nor pagans can forget. It is therefore not surprising that the most important works of art of the medieval period should be concentrated in the Catalan bishoprics. One of these is the bishopric of Solsona (at present made up of 171 parishes), which has had a Diocesan Museum since 1896, when Bishop Ramon Rius i Cabanes decided that the protection and scientific diffusion of the institution's historico-artistic heritage made it necessary. At that time, the collection comprised some forty sculptures, a few chasubles and dalmatics, and a wide variety of other objects, all of which came from the cathedral and the churches of the area and was kept in the town's former hospital.

The collection has grown since then, and in 1920 it received the prize for the best Catalan museum of the year. Later on, during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the Solsona revolutionary committee, unlike other committees of the period, did not destroy the religious works of art. Since 1928, the Museum, which is now called the "Museu Diocesà i Comarcal de Solsona", has been run by a trust representing the bishopric, the *Generalitat de Catalunya* and the Solsona Town Council. The eighteenth century Episcopal Palace has been restored in accordance with the museum's needs, and the first floor now houses the exhibits covering the neolithic period, the bronze and iron ages, Iberian and Roman culture and part of the Romanesque, which continues on the second floor, where there are also rooms devoted to Gothic art, the Renaissance, Baroque and the nineteenth century.

Two years ago, the museum published its *Catàleg d'art romànic i gòtic*, a de luxe edition listing all the Romanesque and Gothic works in the collection and spanning the fifth to fifteenth centuries. A glance at the catalogue reveals the importance of the works kept in the museum, whether Romanesque —severe and functional, developed after the eleventh century, following the collapse of the Carolingian Empire—, or Gothic —a more ethereal style, between Romanesque and Renaissance, and more



closely linked, on a figurative level, to the laws of anatomy and perspective.

As regards Romanesque art, amongst the works contained in the museum are the murals that decorated the central apse and some of the walls of the church of Sant Quirze de Pedret, one of the most complex and best-preserved examples from this period. It depicts the twenty-four elders of the Apocalypse, the opening of the seven seals, the four horsemen, Cain and Abel and other figures from Christian iconography, and brings to mind the frescos of the cathedral of Novara, in Italy. It also boasts the two lateral panels from the altarpiece of the church of Sant Andreu de Sagàs, still with one of the bottom corners cut off to fit some other altar. One of the panels shows Adam and Eve under the Tree of Good and Evil with the serpent twined around the trunk, as well as the kiss of Judas, the seizure of Jesus Christ and the descent from the cross. The other panel shows the annunciation, the visitation, the nativity and Joseph's dream, and below, Herod and the epiphany. The two panels complement each other (the original sin leads to the birth of Christ and is redeemed by his death) and symbolize the harmony between the two testaments. Some of the museum's wooden virgins are also quite remarkable, especially one of unknown origin from the second half of the twelfth century —the moment of maximum interest for Romanesque

imagery. Both the carving and the polychrome work on this figure are of great quality.

Gothic art is well represented in the museum by the frescos from a sepulchre in the church of Sant Pau de Casserres, believed to be by a master of Lluçà in the second half of the thirteenth century: Christ announces the Judgement with the alpha and omega signs and the sun and moon at his side, according to the ancient tradition, while two pairs of angel trumpeters proclaim the resurrection of the dead. The altar frontal from Binéfar, dedicated to Sant Martí and dating from the second half of the fourteenth century, is a mixture of popular elements and the Gothic art that dominated the period. In this case, the preference for narrative scenes in which the anecdotic predominates over the symbolic excludes the piece from the Romanesque tradition. One of the key works in the collection is Jaume Ferrer's extraordinary *Sant Sopar*, or Last Supper, (tempera on wood, second quarter of the fifteenth century), so rich in detail that it includes cats and dogs sheltering under the table and an easily identifiable set of crockery, and in which each disciple maintains a different pose from the others. The Gothic collection is completed with the magnificent paintings by Pere Serra and Lluís Borrassà, stone sculptures, wooden carvings and religious objects such as fabrics, censers and candlesticks. ■