

# Joseph–François de Vilanova

## NOTICES & MÉMOIRES 1824 - 1836

Articles and Memoirs about various curious and essential subjects relating to the commune of Corsavy in the canton of Arles, in the department of Pyrénées-Orientales.

### Translator's notes:

These memoirs first appeared in print (in French) in 'Corsavy : Paysages et Visages', 262 pages, published by 'Les Cahiers de l'Égare', 2007, ISBN 2-908387-92-1.

They had been transferred from the original manuscript to a typed version in French by André Patot of Corsavy by permission of the Vilanova family.

The author was fond of long sentences with many commas and subordinate clauses; so these have sometimes been split into separate sentences to make them more accessible, but otherwise it has been kept as true to the original as possible.

One difficulty of a translator's task is trying to give the right nuances and flavour, from the descriptions in French (and sometimes Catalan and Oc) of the 1820s. It is hoped that you find the result, a unique view of the Corsavy of two centuries ago, interesting and informative.

Several members of the Vilanova family were called Joseph or François, but it seems fairly certain that these notes were written by the François Vilanova who died in 1850 at the age of 57. If so then he was in his thirties when he wrote the descriptions below, about a generation after the French Revolution.

## THE NAME

The village of Corsavi may have received its name from the Romans who had the habit, like the French today, of adopting Greek technical words to express their ideas. In effect the name of Corsavilla under which the village was denoted in ancient writings indicates enough of the Greek word which signifies rock; it is joined to the Latin word Villa from which the final three letters have been removed. One can see still the houses placed around an enormous limestone rock which dominates the entire village and on which there exists still the ruins of an old castle called Roquefort which existed in a period of feudalism, power and violence.

## THE CASTLE

The castle of Roquefort which had taken its name from the fortified rock on which it was built has being ruined since ancient times. One can see nevertheless all the «barbacanes» [1] that's to say the narrow vertical openings for firing undercover on a rebellious crowd; the «glacis» [defensive ramps] full of debris are now cultivated lands.

Over time our villagers have found there some kitchen utensils eaten by rust. One can see there some pipe ducts in white marble which carried water from Ker Nègre and provided a water source which exists no more. The basin from it is at a private house (Pons), it is round and of granite.

## THE VILLAGE

One can still see round the village the mantle of walls which envelop it; there were 4 entry gates of which one still remains, the others have been destroyed some years ago, the traces of them are still visible. The enclosing walls were flanked with turrets, the bell-tower of the new church had been one of them, and was called «la tour de l'homenatge» [Tribute Tower], the ancient seal of Corsavi is shown in the side.

Today the village has been enlarged by a broad street to the north of the castle.

The population in 1821 was 752 inhabitants; the number of houses is 90 and with another 36 homes in the countryside. There are four good springs of which the water is light and excellent with a moderate temperature in winter and very fresh in summer, so much so that the people on the plain who come here are purged from the first day if they drink it but moderately.

## THE HORIZON

At first sight the commune doesn't appear to offer any unusual features. In winter everything is dry and monotonous, in summer it's a series of picturesque views, depending on the state of the atmosphere and the hour of the day. The carved mountain peaks which form the visual horizon, appearing to lose themselves in the skies, it looks as though it's the ultimate limit of the Earth. The onlookers experience a gentle embarrassment in the confusion and the abundance of the objects before the eye manages to discover them, as slowly one distinguishes these objects illuminated in various ways, and offering various aspects and reflections of shadow and light in an indescribable untidiness.

If from the plateau of Puig Estruch or from la Serre [2] one wishes to determine the horizon, one can see far away to the east a line of the sea where fishing boats sail from time to time. More to the right, the Albères show a more remote view, their colouring a greyish-blue, darker or lighter, when the weather is overcast depending on the season and the height of the sun.

In following round with your eye the mountains which separate Spain from our department, one can see those of Montalba and of Arles which have caused too many accidents to describe.

To the South our horizon is bounded by a hill called «l'Escatirou», [3] always green with an immense quantity of trees and by the Serre [4] of Montferrer.

[1] The English word 'barbican', a fortified gateway or tower, is derived from this word.

[2] Pla de la Serre is the ridge above the village where the campsite is now.

[3] L'Escatirou (or Bac de l'Escabirou), is the long ridge at the southern edge of Corsavy. It's unusual that Vilanova refers to the trees; at the time most of the hills were bare, the wood having been used by the charcoal makers, it needing 17 tons of wood to make 1 ton of iron. When Lady Henrietta Fortescue visited the area a few years earlier, in 1818, her sketches show some trees but not a lot.

[4] The Serre, or jagged crest, to the south-west, where Montferrer castle is located.

Then the eye rises towards the West, towards the big «Puig de la Souque» [1] covered with grass and containing some metal mines whose whereabouts are now unknown. From the top of this hill one can enjoy a lovely extensive view.

In continuing to turn one's gaze towards the peak of Canigou one sees the «Serrat de l'Estanyol», «Tretze Vents de baix», «Tretze Vents de dalt», and «Las Portelles de Canigó» where it ends in a large platform called «Plans de Canigou» strewn with an immense amount of fragments of granite rocks which have fallen from the crests of two large branches of these mountains which appear to meet at an angle at a place called «Las Portelles».

One of these branches, interesting to geologists, heads for «Tretze Vents» and the other goes on towards «Las Canals de Léca» and also closes our horizon on this side, following the mountain of Batère towards the hills of Montbolo.

Round our horizon, sometimes the picturesque arrangement of clouds produces some strange points of perspective, usually around autumn, with a horizontal belt or string appearing to separate the summits from the main mass of the mountains so that they seem to float in the air; this phenomenon disappears slowly as the sun gains height. These are quite strange for the people of the plain who come to Corsavi to see a spring day, the vapours in the air condensing under their feet and covering horizontally all the valleys and ravines of the countryside.

Sometimes electricity builds up there and the sound of lightning makes itself heard in the middle of the sea of cloud, which copies to the least puff the waves of the ocean, and which appear only to be held in by the haughty crests of the mountains.

The onlooker, in observing carefully such a phenomenon, might believe in the ancient changes of the Earth that the geologists attribute to water, that it is possible that the deposits of the various lands were, in forming, pushed, tossed, bent on the core of the primitive mountains, like the clouds which we have been discussing.

One notes also, at certain times of the year, when the Sun is on the horizon, a curious effect : this star in dawning appears double, and the waters of the sea reflect to us its dazzling rays. It is the same with the strange effect of a mirage of the moon when it cuts the horizon during a serene and tranquil night.

In summer, all our mountains are carpeted with thin grass, dotted with a wide variety of flowers which show some remarkable effects in certain circumstances; among many we can mention the following: who has not remarked on the grass of our mountains, the different colours which stand out from the greenish background? One sees during the morning in certain stretches flowers of all the colours, which disappear towards evening; there are among them some so delicate that the first rays of sunshine make them disappear as soon as they are illuminated, the fall of petals occurring sometimes by colour and by groups at times of the day more or less distant.

## THE SKY

The sky of Corsavi is one of the most beautiful in the vicinity of Canigou; in autumn and in May, it is often obscured by some fogs which form in the same places or by the clouds which the winds carry from the sea, but also it is almost always serene during the other seasons.

## TEMPERATURE

If we compare the climate of Arles with that of Corsavi we see that the temperature is more constant here than at Arles where the heat of summer and the cold of winter are excessive. At Corsavi by contrast the blazing heat of the sun is less strong there; it is tempered by the fresh air which comes continually from the East and from the West; our exposure to the South helps to assure that the cold of winter isn't excessive and continuous; it's easy to believe that our countryside, while very cold and wet towards Canigou, is temperate near the village, hot on one side and cold still in the bottom of the gorges where the sun hardly touches, as well as on the northern backs of our mountains.

[1] La Souque, or La Soca, the large dome-shaped hill to the west of the village.

## THE AIR

In coming from Arles, the traveller begins to experience the salutary effect of a change of air as soon as he enters the area of the commune; he experiences a feeling of comfort that one can't define, caused by fresher air, purer and more crisp than that on the plain. As one comes up, one breathes more easily, one is more gay, the appetite grows...

## THE WINDS

When the wind comes from the south-east, called the wind of Rosas, it brings us heavy rains in autumn and damp fogs in summer; in winter it brings snow and the worst possible weather.

The wind from the South, or the wind from Spain, sometimes brings us useful and abundant rains, but sometimes it is so burning that it dries out everything and imperils the harvest if it continues.

The wind from the North, called the Tramontane, is always cold, above all when Batère is covered in snow; it is sometimes so violent that it uproots the old trees but it lasts for only three or four days while on the plain it blows for three or four months without ceasing.

It has been noted at Corsavi that almost every year, in the month of April, and before the flowering of apple trees, the wind carries with it the flowers of most other species of tree.

## THE LAND

The land of Corsavi is situated on the eastern flank of Canigou; it provides as cultivatable land only a superficial layer of earthly debris of primitive rocks, but in compensation the soil forms a true blessing of earth for the wheat and rye.

The land that can be ploughed is divided into «estivades» or areas of wheat which in summer fatten the herds which graze on the mountain; and into lands of «marseries» which enclose the fields which are sown alternately with the seeds of «mors» and of wheat; and finally into «artigues» [1] or lands that our workers called «artigaires» work, with pickaxe and hoe, and who give to the owner of the land only a quarter or a fifth of the harvest, while the farmers give a third or two-fifths usually.

## EXTENT

The area of the commune extends 5 to 7 leagues [2] from east to west, that is to say from Arles to Prats de Mollo [3], and 3 to 4 leagues from north to south, from the communes of Valmanya, of St Marsal, and of La Bastide to that of Montferrer.

It had been divided in 1790 by the land registry into three sections, called : the first of the Fou [south], the second of the old church [centre], and the third of Vilalte [north].

It included 40 ayminates [4] (63 ares each) as estivades land, 220 ayminates as marseries land, 200 as bad land, 24 as good meadows and 27 as bad, 10 as wooded or copses of chestnut, 5 as copses of oak and 4 as plantations or other copses, 15 as vines with no yield, one ayminate and a half of gardens, and 1813 as waste or empty land or arable land left as grass for grazing.

(The estimation of annual revenue of the commune amounts to about 4452 f.) [5]

The unproductive land totals 1400 ayminates, running waters 400; buildings of every kind 7; the paths 6.

[1] Artigue is a Occitan word of uncertain origin that was used across Catalonia, Rousillon, Gascony and Basque country. It usually referred to cleared land or to fallow land.

[2] League. This ancient measurement of length was usually defined as the distance a person could walk in an hour. It varied widely from country to country but in France it was usually either 4km or 4.4 km. Vilanova has vastly over-estimated the size of Corsavy; the actual size (if treated as a rectangle) is about 8km [2 leagues] east to west, and about 6 km [1½ leagues] north-south, on a map. Perhaps he was thinking of how long it would take walk it, with all the length of the slopes, rather than as the crow flies. The accepted area today is 47.02 km<sup>2</sup> [4702 hectares].

[3] The commune of Le Tech (just to the west) didn't exist at the time. The enclave with the hamlet of Léca (assessed at the time to have an area of 150 hectares) did not become part of Corsavy until April 1833.

[4] Ayminate. This old French measure of area varied widely across Rousillon but the 'ayminate of Vallespir' used in Corsavy was 63.2 ares (where 1 are = 100 m<sup>2</sup>). So an ayminate was an area of about 6300 m<sup>2</sup> or 1½ acres.

[5] This is hard to accept as it equals only 6 francs per inhabitant! At the time an employed labourer might earn 1½ francs per day (for a 15 hour day). A pair of shoes cost 3 – 6 francs.

These make in total 4166 ayminates which the assessors of the year 1790 found for the area of the commune of Corsavi [1], and which they assessed as taxable product, as above.

In 1824 I estimate that the area of the ground of Corsavi is four thousand seven hundred and fifty (4750) ayminates; for the 6 leagues (of 2000 toises [2] each) that I estimated above from east to west, multiplied by the 3 leagues which form the distance from north to south, produce a surface area of 72 million square toises from which I deduct a tenth for the enclave of Léca, that reduces the figure by 7,200,000 square toises [3], which equals about 4,750 ayminates or about 3,000 hectares [4].

There is therefore a difference in area of 584 ayminates between the dividing-up in 1790 and that which I estimate today and for which I have considered all the data possible:

| 1. Amount of land ploughed by oxen        | in ayminates |
|---|--------------|
| - for rye in the estivades                | 60           |
| - for rye and lentils lying fallow        | 90           |
| - for big millet and vegetables           | 20           |
| - for buckwheat                           | 25           |
| - for barley and winter barley            | 18           |
| - for oats                                | 15           |
| - for potatoes                            | 50           |
| 2. Cultivated by hand by the artigaires   |              |
| - for all kinds of wheat and vegetables   | 20           |
| 3. Others                                 |              |
| - land left fallow every year             | 200          |
| - waste land or arable land left as grass | 1500         |
| - copses of chestnut trees                | 26           |
| - copses of oak and other trees           | 20           |
| - good meadows                            | 10           |
| - mediocre meadows                        | 20           |
| - pastures                                | 1250         |
| - vines                                   | 10           |
| - gardens                                 | 4            |
| - built properties                        | 5            |
| - paths and roads                         | 7            |
| - river-beds and sterile mountain rock    | 1400         |

TOTAL number of ayminates contained in the commune of Corsavi 4750 [5]

[1] This is a mystery. The figures he quotes add up to 4172.5, not 4166 ayminates. This equals 2,637 hectares, which (even with the addition of 150 hectares for Léca) falls well short of the 4702 hectares of Corsavi today. Perhaps the answer lies in the phrase "which they assessed as taxable product"?

[2] Toise. This measure of length equalled 1.95 metres, so here Vilanova is saying that a league was 3.9 km.

[3] Here Vilanova misses his way entirely. After starting with exaggerated figures he writes about reducing the total by a tenth for the enclave of Léca, but then goes on and uses the value for that tenth as being the area of the whole of Corsavi, giving completely erroneous results.

[4] Even using his false figures he gets his sums wrong. The values using his false premise would be 4,340 ayminates (2750 hectares, 27.5 km<sup>2</sup>). The modern measure (French government, 2014) for the (map) area of Corsavi is 47.02 km<sup>2</sup>. Vilanova talks about ground area, which is larger. Assuming an average slope of 20° the ground area would be ~50km<sup>2</sup> [47/cos20°]

[5] This must have been fudged to get the previous (wrong) answer!

## RIVERS

The traveller will see with interest the Riuferrier river which is formed from a thousand springs and which descends rapidly from west to east towards Arles in a bed with steep banks which sometimes show enormous precipices. It will be noted also the similarity with that which Buffon [1] discusses and which rules between the winding curves parallel to the mountains which board the rivers, and the rocks in zigzags whose projecting angles correspond to the re-entrant angles of others.

The Riuferrier, which appears to have received its name by its running from the foot of the mountain rich in iron mines called Batère, separates, by its tortuous course, the commune of Corsavi into two large parts. It forms a long and pleasant basin covered in grass and woodland scattered with picturesque rocks. The movement of water of this little river is too rapid for it to ever freeze, no matter how cold the water. It nourishes excellent trout, of which the usual weight of the fattest is a half-kilogramme, although one has seen some of more than a kilogramme. Occasionally one finds eels there; they have an exquisite taste and should be more often in demand for the tables of the rich.

In the 15th century there were still several forges making iron on the banks of the Riuferrier; one can still see the remains of the forge of Léca which belongs to the lord of that hamlet, of the forge of la Tour d'en Glas, a site higher up, at the place called «lo pas de la fargasse».

I say nothing about the other smaller rivers which feed into the Riuferrier such as those of the «Freixe», of the «Cazot» called «la Riverette», of the «Cortal Triadou», of «la Pinousette», nor about the one of the mill of «la Tine» called the river of «l'Escatirou» which goes to add to the river Tech above Arles. Let's pass on to the floods of the Riuferrier.

## FLOODS

In 1814 and in 1820 there were huge floods in our department; anyone who witnessed them would remember them for ever. What havoc they caused! [2]

Since the floods, called in our area the flood of Saint Galdric, had arrived in 1763, our old folk hadn't seen anything as big, but on the 1st November 1814, All Saints Day, a south-easterly wind which had blown for two days met the water-laden air from the sea, and pushed them towards Canigou which resulted in cataclysm and continuous rain and formed torrents of water which flooded everywhere. The houses, the fields and meadows which border the Riuferrier, and other land were exposed to the fury of the mounting torrents to destroy the most precious soil of the commune. The flour mill at L'Andreu, with all its accessories, disappeared. Even now it is not known where it went, no debris was found except a single beam at Arles.

As for the town of Arles, it was in despair; the residents of the «Espagne» quarter, seeing the danger increasing, decamped with their goods and left their houses to the menacing ravages of the Riuferrier. Around 10 o'clock in the morning the great amounts of water which had fallen in areas above our mountains, and the crash of the rocks that it caused, terrifying by their roar and the revolting smell of burning that these rocks caused by their crashing and scraping together that they acquired in rolling in the surge, with which the floods carried havoc and desolation everywhere.

The floods of St Bruno, arriving on 6th October 1820 were even more disastrous than those of which we have already spoken, above all for the commune of Corsavi; tragedy for those who had property on the banks of the Riuferrier; these floods destroyed and carried off all that the floods of 1814 hadn't been able to.

Large trees uprooted and floating everywhere, the rock-falls and the crashing of all the objects carried away, multiplied by the winding curves of the Riuferrier which redoubled its fury and hastened the destruction of its banks. The stone bridge of L'Andreu, and the «palanca» higher up at Guell were pulled down, as well as the beautiful bridge at the forge which had been rebuilt two years earlier.

[1] Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707–1788), a French naturalist, mathematician and cosmologist, who wrote non-biblical accounts of the history of the Earth and argued that rocks and mountains had been formed by heat as well as erosion.

[2] The worst floods of recent times were those of the «aiguat» of 16 – 20 October 1940, which caused severe destruction across the area. Up to 1000 mm (39 inches) of rain fell in 24 hours (still a European record, and normally the amount for a full year); 1930 mm (76 inches) during the 5 days, and the level of the river Tech rose by up to 6 metres (20 feet).



## AGRICULTURE

The earth of Corsavi is in general poor, and poorly cultivated, only supporting for the most part rye and potatoes. A large part will grow nothing at all; the position of the terrain exposes it very often to the ravages and destruction by gullies; the farmers are obliged every year to construct small walls to retain the soil, without which the land wouldn't enjoy the advantages of its fertility for long. The ploughing is never deep in our mountains; it is done generally twice a year and rarely three times for seeding a field; one never sees a roller used, nor a harrow. The cultivated soil favours, it's said, the first vegetation which it shelters on all sides against the wind.

For about 50 years potatoes have been cultivated on a large scale and [yet] the poor never put it into their bread, although it's of a cheapness and an excellence recognised when one kneads it with two-thirds of buckwheat, which by itself gives a black gritty bread with a disagreeable taste. The potatoes combine still better with wheatflour; the bread which results is very good, hardening less quickly, keeps a long time, possesses a clear flavour and a desirable hazelnut taste.

The biggest trouble in the growing of potatoes is the too-great a desire to grow them abundantly, to the detriment of other harvests, so that they subsequently sell at a very low price. These days (1824) we are selling them at 85 centimes per metric quintal [1]. Already the landowners of the commune are beginning to realise that they no longer harvest as much wheat and vegetables as their fathers, who cultivated potatoes only for the bare essentials; the more one plants the potato the more the storms and the wind carry away the loosened soil and the less one harvests as a result.

The cultivation of hemp and flax takes place around May; although not a large expanse it is nevertheless common; all the inhabitants want to have a bed of them in their garden. A good landowner knows well that the still-green stem of flax will kill almost instantly any pig which eats it.

One sees artificial meadows not at all or hardly at all in Corsavi; there is only the red clover of Rousillon around the farm houses for the maintenance of the flocks of sheep in winter and for food of the oxen in spring. There is also some alfalfa which is not at all a big product because of its haymaking which our farmers, without intelligence, find difficult.

It must also be admitted that their efforts with other plants are often thwarted by the wintry weather, the storms and the hail which falls every year, sooner or later.

I have seen several times on the eve of the harvest, the fields golden with ears of wheat, only to change in an instant to a wasteland before the eye of the farmer saddened by its loss.

It seems at first sight that the cultivation of the soil of Corsavi is easy because it is ploughed at any time and the wheat is sown there during a large part of the year, that is to say from September until May. However it seems to me to be to the contrary, that the different positions of the terrain, the changes of the soil, cold, wet or temperate, the slopes of loose soil which need a particular art in order to prevent their being pulled into the rivers with their fertiliser and crops, form so many insurmountable difficulties that it requires some skills and knowledge that not all farmers can acquire.

The sowing will not be extended until May if they have in advance enough manure for the land intended to be harvested; on the contrary the careless farmers always leave some, to lose a large part, whether by the winds or by the rainwater which carries them into the gullies.

They aren't sufficiently zealous about this important subject, one of so many. Couldn't they increase the amount of their manure if it was done as in another lands, if they gathered the dry leaves of the woods that the winds pile up in sheltered places, and the branches of young wood which cover a large expanse of the commune, an inexhaustible source of fertiliser for the intelligent farmer; the burying of some aqueous and green vegetation also offers a great resource for the swift culture of our soil; but the attachment to the ancient practice of using animal manure excluding all other fertiliser will long be an obstacle to the use of those which I have been discussing.

The gardens of the village display a picturesque and always green amphitheatre, but the walls that hold the terraces or strips of land are knocked down from time to time by the storms or by too much continuous rain; the working farmer rebuilds them incessantly in order to enjoy good cultivation.

[1] Metric quintal, a unit of weight similar to the British hundredweight. In France it used to be defined as 100 livres (pounds), about 49 kg, and was later redefined as 100 kg, called a metric quintal, which Vilanova is using here.

Compared to his price of 85c per metric quintal, the UK potato price in 2014 is £10 - £20 per metric quintal; a factor of 120-240x? The Bank of England Inflation calculator gives a factor of 100x for the same period.

## HOUSES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

There are 36 farmhouses, of which 23 are for the farmers of quite big smallholdings where they keep their herds and flocks, and 13 for the «artigaires» who work their small patch by hand with pickaxe and hoe.

The chart [below] shows the number of animals to be found in each of the 23 smallholdings in the commune, as well as the quantity of rye needed to sow the land which is cultivated every year.

7 June 1836 State of the smallholdings of Corsavi with some items necessary for their operation

| Males      | Females   | NAME                            | Sheep & ewes | Lambs       | Oxen      | Cows      | Young who are learning to work | Fattening pigs | Sows      | Young to sell | Seed        |
|------------|-----------|---------------------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|--------------------------------|----------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|
| 5          | 3         | Lo Coumou                       | 40           | 20          |           | 2         | 2                              | 2              |           |               | 8           |
| 2          | 4         | Mas de l'Andreu                 | 100          | 45          |           | 3         | 3                              | 4              | 1         | 4             | 30          |
| 1          | 2         | Case Vicens de l'Andreu         | 30           | 15          |           | 2         | 2                              | 2              | 1         | 6             | 7           |
| 3          | 3         | Bigorrats de baix               | 80           | 30          |           | 4         | 4                              | 3              | 1         | 5             | 35          |
| 7          | 5         | Bigorrats de dalt               | 220          | 70          | 2         | 2         | 3                              | 6              | 1         | 2             | 60          |
| 5          | 4         | Lo Freixe                       | 220          | 70          | 2         | 3         | 5                              | 4              | 1         | 4             | 60          |
| 9          | 2         | Gaüsach                         | 400          | 100         | 4         | 5         | 8                              | 8              | 2         | 8             | 100         |
| 4          | 5         | Mas nou de Gaüsach              | 160          | 40          |           | 2         | 3                              | 4              | 1         | 4             | 30          |
| 6          | 2         | Vilalte                         | 180          | 50          | 2         | 2         | 3                              | 4              | 1         | 4             | 50          |
| 5          | 4         | Casa Valmanya                   | 400          | 100         | 4         | 5         | 7                              | 8              | 2         | 8             | 110         |
| 8          | 8         | Casa Pinous                     | 300          | 90          | 2         | 4         | 6                              | 4              | 1         | 4             | 90          |
| 7          | 4         | Mas de l'hom                    | 300          | 90          | 4         | 4         | 6                              | 8              | 2         | 8             | 100         |
| 8          | 2         | Mas de l'hom petit (la casette) | 80           | 30          |           | 2         | 3                              | 4              | 1         | 4             | 50          |
| 11         | 8         | Lo Casot                        | 350          | 100         | 4         | 4         | 6                              | 6              | 1         | 2             | 90          |
| 5          | 5         | La Taillède                     | 300          | 90          | 4         | 4         | 6                              | 8              | 2         | 8             | 100         |
| 4          | 2         | Puig sech (Cortal de l'Aloy)    | 120          | 50          | 2         | 3         | 4                              | 4              | 1         | 4             | 50          |
| 3          | 5         | Las Balmes                      | 100          | 40          |           | 3         | 4                              | 4              | 1         | 4             | 30          |
| 3          | 3         | Castell Vell (Casa Gallard)     | 60           | 20          |           | 3         | 3                              | 2              | 1         | 6             | 20          |
| 4          | 7         | Casa Vilafort                   | 40           | 20          |           | 3         | 4                              | 3              | 1         | 5             | 30          |
| 5          | 4         | Lo Tuyre                        | 80           | 30          |           | 2         | 3                              | 3              | 1         | 5             | 20          |
| 7          | 4         | Lo Puig                         | 200          | 60          | 4         | 4         | 6                              | 3              | 1         | 5             | 80          |
| 4          | 5         | Madeloc de baix                 | 140          | 50          | 2         | 3         | 3                              | 4              | 1         | 4             | 60          |
| 5          | 5         | Case Delaris                    | 300          | 90          | 4         | 4         | 6                              | 8              | 2         | 8             | 100         |
| <b>121</b> | <b>97</b> | <b>TOTALS</b>                   | <b>4200</b>  | <b>1300</b> | <b>40</b> | <b>73</b> | <b>100</b>                     | <b>106</b>     | <b>27</b> | <b>107</b>    | <b>1310</b> |
| 19         | 21        | artigaires                      |              |             |           |           |                                |                |           |               |             |



The 13 other houses of the artigaires are as follows: Case Japou, Mas de la Couca called Guell de baix, Casa Pet de Bourrou, Casa Dayne, Moli Vell, Casa Vaca, Moli den Maler, Guell de dalt, Case la Samsone called Can Doble, lo Cortal de l'Arol, las garrigues, roc Riera called Cazotte del moli den Vidal, and La Solanette.

In all these small houses they don't keep any herds or flocks. They use 80 double-décalitres [1] of seed to fill their land with rye.

As to other houses in the countryside, one can see the forge of Corsavi, the moli den Borat, the moli de la Fargue, the moli Delaris, the moli Vidal. We note that in the establishment of the forge there is usually a family of artigaires, two at Casa Vaca, one at Vilalte, one at the Delaris mill and another at the Mas de l'Andreu.

## HARVESTS

As well as the manual cultivators called the «artigaires» which we have already discussed, there are in the area some «Parcés». These are workers who cultivate and sow the areas that the proprietor or farmer cannot or has not the time to work. They plough to cover the seed in return for a litre of wine or a half-litre for each «artigue» or stretch of land, which gains the artigaïre two-thirds of the crop excepting those of potatoes of which he gains half.

If the «Parcé» manures the land he takes in addition one-third of the harvest and all the beans that he can plant between the maize plants. As regards the farmers they have for their part only half the cattle and three-fifths of all the harvests which are in general very late at Corsavi; the harvests only begin on the return of the reapers who go down on the plain every year in June.

The sowing season for the winter rye lasts from 1st October until the month of January; it is reaped from the following 15th July to the month of September.

The preparatory crops for the rye are the potatoes which are sown from 1st April to 15 June and which are collected in October or before the frosts, as well as the maize that is sown in strips at the end of May on the clover stubble ploughed twice.

The buckwheat suits the rye land very well; it is sown from 15 June to 15 July; the harvest begins on the 9th October.

The hinge barley and the winter barley commonly called «cabailé» are sown around 15 April; the latter is harvested at the end of July and the other at the end of August.

Oats are sown in March and harvested around 15th August.

## PRODUCE

The three parts of our productivity are the pastures, the woods and the cereal crops.

The average product in nature of an ayminate [2] of meadow is perhaps 16 quintals [3] of hay.

For wood we will write it in a separate note.

As to the cereals one finds approximately that they give on average 36 double-décalitres in rye per ayminate of land where there have been 6 or sometimes 7 seeded; 50 double-décalitres of maize where one décalitre has been cultivated; 35 double-décalitres of buckwheat where one has seeded 5 décalitres; 36 double-décalitres of barley for 6 used in seeding; 35 of oats for 7 double-décalitres seeded; 450 of potatoes for 30 double-décalitres of 16 kilogrammes each.

[1] 1 double-décalitre, a measure of volume, = 20 litres (about 4½ gallons or half a bushel).

[2] 1 ayminate. a measure of area, = 6300 m<sup>2</sup> or 1½ acres.

[3] 1 quintal, a measure of weight, = 100 kilograms (220 pounds).

## AVERAGE CONSUMPTION

The total consumption in the commune is equal to the average consumption multiplied by the number of individuals who consume. We consider in the table below only some of the principal items calculated for the population of Corsavi.

| in 1836            | rye (hl)* | maize (hl) | buckwheat (hl) | barley (hl) | oats (hl) | potatoes (hl) | pulses (hl) | wine (hl) |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|----------------|-------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|-----------|
| annual consumption | 2536      | 1200       | 200            | 105         | 50        | 2000          | 100         | 1000      |
| average harvest    | 1268      | 300        | 200            | 105         | 57        | 4100          | 50          | 65        |
| exports            |           |            |                |             | 7         | 2100          |             |           |
| imports            | 1268      | 900        |                |             |           |               | 50          | 935       |

\* all values in hecto-litres (hl, 100 litres)

The balance of the results is fairly satisfactory relative to the number of consumers in the commune, showing the large quantity of rye or of mixed cereals that our people are forced to buy elsewhere, particularly in the town of Arles.

This large import together with that of the wine causes the poverty of our workers and enriches our farmers not at all, though they attend to their cultivating with as much activity and economy as best they can with soil like that of Corsavi.

In addition to these absolutely essential items we must add the cash it is necessary to spend to buy so many other necessary things; above all the money that is needed to buy the maize that is given as food to the mules (they consume two hectolitres per day).

One can see that without the prosperity of the iron mines we couldn't subsist on this land, where most of the ground is only cultivated one year in ten, fifteen years, sometimes even more; the rest of the time it forms only a blanket of weeds.

## INHABITANTS

The character and manners of the inhabitants of Corsavi are different from those of neighbouring villages. The farmers are religious and gullible, superstitious even; they do their farm-work according to certain phases of the moon. [1]

Every year they pay a tribute to «l'assouladadou» who heals them (they say) of certain illnesses, such as rabies, while on the other hand the priest of the village performs exorcisms and blesses their poor harvests and all kinds of animals, especially the sick.

In order to compensate the priest for his powers, the poor people present him with a suckling pig, a lamb or other good things.

The miners of Batère [2] are more superstitious than religious and are even impious. They are gentle at home and in the village; haughty and proud when they are at the mines where they stay night and day, except on Sunday and the other festival days, even outdated ones.

These workers, with hard work, earn a lot and are always tipsy on rest days. As they are paid weekly, they use up on Sunday what they earn with difficulty in the toughest and most deadly of jobs, for by the end of the week they may be crushed under the weight of enormous rocks which may fall from the roof or from the walls of the galleries in the mines, especially if the earth is waterlogged.

[1] Some villagers still plant, and gather, their crops according to the phases of the moon.

[2] Iron ore was mined at Batère since Roman times: the mines closed finally in 1987.

Neither their extreme poverty nor all the benefits that they could offer to any other commune, are able to make them envy a happier fate. The young married men often don't even want to live at home with their wives, they fear so much their transfer to the dangers of the war. Those who are designated to go to the army hide themselves in the forests or in the mines or else they go in search of impunity or tranquillity in Spain.

Education seems banned in our commune. The girls and the boys, while they are young, do nothing. They will sometimes go with a basket to pick up the droppings of beasts on the paths, or pull up the stubble in the fields when in season or gather dead leaves with a small rake for the litter of pigs. When the boys are strong enough to drive donkeys, they are sent every day to the mines until their father retains them to work in the mines. A few continue in transportation and become good muleteers.

Girls, in growing up, help their mothers in all that they do, digging-up with them the earth of the artiques or elsewhere, carrying back all kinds of things, such as the hay from the meadows. Firewood is the daily basis in winter for cooking potatoes. Our women are the most hard-working in the department with regard to agriculture; they do not rely on their husbands who work in the forests or the mines, so there are only women and children in the village.

Moreover, our people, though rustic and poorly-housed, all have a hospitable and genial temperament. From their farms they offer to all who pass by on their way to the mines something to refresh and restore, if it's needed. The stranger is often forced to accept, especially if he hears the Catalan dialect. These unofficial miners are very guarded in their trickery, and they deceive with their shrewdness and cunning. Although easily offended they work closely for the overall well-being of their own people.

## FOOD

The bread which the residents eat is usually made from rye, buckwheat or maize, occasionally from meslin flour. [1] However all those who can do it, never fail to make bread from wheat for the feast on the patron saint's day. [2]

Their vegetables are peas, green beans, lentils, beans, pumpkins, onions, leeks, cabbage, turnips and of course potatoes. Our farmers eat every day throughout the year from this precious tuber, without which they could not survive in this country.

Trimmed barley is also a big help for them; during hot weather the food is refreshing and excellent when cooked with pork fat.

The people get one or two pigs annually to fatten them and then add salt at the end of the Carnival to supply their homes, for we almost never eat meat from a butcher.

The usual practice is to make two meals a day, in the morning and in the evening.

At these meals we always eat soup which is taken in deep dishes in the shape of a cap, which the Spaniards bring us from their country. We also eat a lot of «ouillade», a soup of different vegetables that is seasoned with a good piece of pork and a little ointment crushed on some support with the tip of a knife. We are careful not to add this condiment into the pot until the broth is boiling. We usually eat soup without bread, or alternatively with meat.

[1] Meslin is a mixture of grains. For human consumption, it is traditionally a mixture of wheat and rye. For animal feed, it is produced by mixing many grains such as wheat, barley, oats with other species such as pea.

[2] St Martin's Day, 11th November, the «festa major».

## FESTIVALS and PRACTICES

Celebrations always begin with acts of religion, which I will not describe here, and end with dancing and other practices as follows:

On **New Year's Day**, the children of the village, armed with instruments to make a racket, go at night to all the doors of houses screaming « ni nou ! ni nou! », which translates as “New Year, New Year”. These cries, along with a sound which stuns the ears, forces people to give them something, like apples, nuts and other fruits to finish the fuss; otherwise it lasts until Twelfth Night, every night, for those who have given nothing.

For **Candlemas** [1] they have a ‘beast-man’; a peasant, usually covered by ivy or a skin that looks like a bear, is led by the whole village to the sound of a tambourine, tied to a rope to make him dance, in the manner of a bear driver;

When this tedious fun has ended, the man-bear takes a long pole and chases people to hit them, pretending to eat them, while being pursued by others who shoot at him with rifles loaded with powder. When he is tired, he retires to a straw hut, usually to the corner of the hut, and then we set fire to it until he pops out. This crude amusement may seem poor fun. A proverb says that Spring will only return after Candlemas if the bear leaves its cave.

When the Christian festivals replaced those of the villagers, the festival of the preparation of the virgin called Candlemas, which is celebrated on February 2nd, was substituted for that of Ceres. [1]

On **Carnival Sunday** we've always done « le bagueé », that is to say we mimic the old village bailiffs in imitating some of their customs. A smart young man wears a wig, old false teeth, and a coat, and an old hat. He goes, when we leave the High Mass, to arrive in the square on horseback, preceded by musicians and followed by a merry band of young men, one of whom is dressed as a woman to mimic the wife of the bailiff.

On reaching the square, ringed (« bagueé ») by the crowd, he dismounts, sits at a table where there is a great book that he leafs through with a goat horn and simulates the registering of payment of debts by the vassals. They arrive voluntarily, or by force, led by those who hired the musicians called « caps de joulas ». They pursue in pairs those who do not want to give, and lead them, tied with a long strip or belt to the table where « le bagueé » urges them to pay their débet.

Meanwhile we dance the « bail del bagueé » that goes on beyond one o'clock in the afternoon. The ceremony over, we retire to eat. After the meal we do « le bail dels cornouts » or “the lease of cuckolds”; we see there only married people. Those who hired the musicians encourage the shy ones for this dance and go to get the men, entreating them to go to the « bail ».

The women don't need any coaxing; they even encourage this farce, while some of the most merry place horns on their dancers. At the end of the « bail » one needs to pay something to the men, and they are given, as well as the women, a glass of wine. They each go to their place where they wait for the musicians, who play a waltz during the round of those who pay, and then finish the dance. Then comes the « bail dels fadrins » or “young people” whose ceremonies are almost exactly the same. The end of the day is spent in « carnavalades ».

The next day, Monday, those who hired the musicians go in carnival dress to all the farms where they are given what is needed to eat or drink to excess before Ash Wednesday. This eating and drinking to excess is known in the region as the « ribotte » or the « marloussada », for on this day the « caps de joulars » go into the houses to look for eggs and bread, and invite people to join them for lunch, dinner and supper in a private home. Formerly the food was very expensive; today we no longer see, as then, the richest people of the village who would give at the end of each meal, six, eight or ten francs each, or even more.

[1] Candlemas is a festival on 2nd February, celebrating the middle of winter. The « fête de l'ours » or bear festival is no longer carried out in Corsavy, but it still occurs each year in Arles-sur-Tech (2nd February)

[2] Ceres was the Roman goddess of agriculture and grain. The word cereal is derived from her name.

In the afternoon, about three o'clock, the main agents of the « ribotte » dress up. One of the girls cries to lament the [figure of] Carnival that they are going to bury; others decorate a stretcher to carry him, another acts as the priest who is helped by many others for the ceremonies, while others follow by singing a few church tunes.

They carry a rope with several tin bottles filled with wine to quench their thirst or rather to liven up the procession that goes round the village to go up to « la Serre » [1], where they burn the image or figure of the Carnival, after having drunk well, danced well, to excess. Then they return seriously and silently to the village for dinner and to eat and drink to excess again, and we pay for the wine for those who, during the return, uttered some word or made us laugh at the expense of someone else.

During **Holy Week** the young people go in groups at night to the farms, and on Holy Saturday to the door of every house in the village to sing verses of a song called « los goigs dels ous » [2].

These nocturnal songs are usually accompanied by the instruments we use for our Catalan dances.

On **Easter Day**, the singers with the musicians ask at the homes of the village people what they have to make an omelette, that they eat that afternoon on the grass at « la Serre », while others eat with their family. After this little picnic meal we dance on the lawn. A stranger who came here for the first time would enjoy the contrasts of the various ornaments of the dancers with the dark green of the grass and remember those sorts of pagan gifts that the Celts, our ancestors, made with Easter eggs.

For **Ascension Day** we go in procession before High Mass, outside the village to the cross called « de las platanos ». In earlier times, after the priest had made the usual prayers we handed a bun to all the assistants who came in crowds from neighbouring places. Now we give them at the door of the church every year; after the service the priest blesses them and takes two or three. The distributors or « caristaders » hand them out to young and old. Also all the inhabitants, even the smallest children of the farms are taken on that day to the church to have a « brene » or black bun which is usually indigestible. The crowds throng to have one, the women scream, the children cry and present a picture that a skilled painter would find quite difficult to depict. This ancient practice seems likely to last much longer.

For the feast of **St Jean** [3] we do the same as other places in the Département; before the day we go to seek « la bonne aventure », that is to say, some herbs and flowers that we place in a cross above the doors of the houses. The muleteers, on that day only, drive their mules in the meadows or on roadsides to eat the grass all covered in the dew that maintains, they say, their health. The shepherds graze their flocks before sunrise. The night before St Jean we light everywhere the so-called St Jean bonfires.

The day after this festival, the muleteers celebrate their patron St Eloi. The mules which go to the mines are driven into the square, where they have races. Each is led by his people around the village preceded by musicians, and asking individuals for the bread which was blessed at the church and then given to everyone. When the mules arrive at the door of the church, the priest with his vestments says a few prayers and gives them the blessing; then they retire and spend the day...

Finally, on **St. Martin's Day** [4], the patron saint feast day, people are well behaved. The festival is celebrated with all the pomp of which we are capable.

The dances last two or three days; the « bail » ceremony for the mayor is rarely done, the one called « dels confits » and the one called « del ramailles » always.

For some years now we don't dance any more the « bail del tortell », nor that of the « couca » (cake) nor any others of local tradition. The first was danced only by the wives of the church wardens and the other by those who care for the Chapel of the Rosary.

[1] Pla de la Serre is the ridge above the village where the campsite is now.

[2] Los goigs dels ous : literally "The joys of eggs". The verses were usually written in Catalan (or sometimes in Occitan).

[3] St John the Baptist feast day: 24 June, almost the midsummer solstice (previously a pagan festival)

[4] St Martin's day, 11th November (now Armistice Day). St Martin is the patron saint of Corsavy.



## COSTUMES

In all these holidays, adornment for men is of blue cloth; their women colour their wool in June and spin it around. This is a coarse cloth with a crossed texture keeping all the strands and sometimes slightly pressed; those of the women are in black, white, or red. Neither one nor the other is subject to the whims of fashion.

## HUNTING

Hunting with a rifle is the only rural pastime practised by the inhabitants of Corsavi; though some children enjoy trapping with string. Before giving the number of places where one can find every kind of game in the commune, I will describe the various objects necessary for this pastime, which exercise can be only agreeable to the spirit and favorable to health.

A gun is said to be mounted advantageously if the direction of the barrel approaches the eye without disturbing the head. The range of a shotgun depends upon the caliber of the barrel length, the line of sight, the nature and strength of the metal, on temperature and humidity, on the measurement of the powder and the lead in the charge.

A gun should be 28 to 32 « pouces » [1] to shoot partridges. The powder should be made in the summer; its strength is dependent on the proportion of the component materials. The powder must withstand rubbing and be slate-coloured. The augmentation of the force by caustic lime, by potash, by superoxygenated chloride, by antimony, by alcohol or ether, is not at all important; a small glass ball of nitric acid in the centre of the powder is preferred.

All the hunters of this area note that hunting the hare should take place only in Spring and Autumn because in the Spring the hares move from the plain to Canigou, and descend in Autumn on to the plain. For this hunting we use hounds that hunt nose to the ground and when they encounter the animal's trail, they make two or three loud cries from time to time, while approaching the hare. One of the hunters leading the dogs lets them loose while others will position themselves to some certain known passages of which the following are the main ones: Coll [2] de la Vignasse, Coll de Lancia, Pla [3] de Sant Marti, Coll de Riu, quer de camins, collada de la farga, camp llune, Pla jougadou, deux rocs de Cardabère, roc de Sant Guillem, Pla de Rodes, Pla de las eugas, serrat de Guillanasse, las Sereus, 2 collets de la Cirere, Coll Boufadou, 2 collets de Pey, collada del bolet, Coll de la Descarga, Castellats, Coll de Auger, Pla de la justici, roc de las aniolles, Tour de Batère, creu del ferrou. [4]

The places to find isards [5] are: collada de las Canals, las Sereus, serrat de la Guillanasse, pla de las eugas, collada del serrat del pla de las eugas, collada de Canigou, collada de Tretze vents, Coll de roc negre, la llouselle.

We also hunt rabbits when it has rained and the sky is covered with some clouds which allow rays of sunlight through. That's when we will position ourselves in places where the rabbits are, and they come out from under ground to graze, to warm themselves in sunlight, and one can easily kill them. The names of the places where there are rabbits are as follows: Balmes, quer de camins, terre roge, Guilleteres, pla de las moles, Boixeres, Madeloc, font del metge, sous lo pla jougadou, pla de la justici, roques Negras de Can Robert, serra de Can Valmanya, serra de Vilalte, serra dels Bigorrats, bac del Drago.

As for hunting the partridges and the quails, they are done with the hounds. There are often big groups of this game in places where you least expect it.

[1] A pouce is a measurement of length like the British inch, defined originally as one-twelfth of the length of the king's foot. In Vilanova's time a pouce was usually about 2.7 cm. The British inch is 2.54 cm.

[2] Coll, or col is a mountain pass.

[3] Pla usually denoted a flat area or a meadow.

[4] Most but not all of these places are marked on modern maps or on the cadastral maps, see: [http://www.cadastre.gouv.fr/scpc/afficherCarteTa.do?f=Q0060000\\_T01](http://www.cadastre.gouv.fr/scpc/afficherCarteTa.do?f=Q0060000_T01)

[5] Isard (or izard) is the Pyrenean chamois or goat antelope.



Far from being frightened by sudden changes in the climate, the hunter gives himself up to the delightful impressions of this pastime and gets tired without realising it. Since he needs to be refreshed from time to time, here are the names of the principal springs rise up in our mountains, as the hunter, and any foreigner whether muleteer or traveller or naturalist needs the agreeable refreshing water for his fatigue.

The springs are innumerable. The main ones are: la font de taillade, del prat del Rey, de coma llagosa, del prat de Lamarque, del bac de l'Andreu, del bac del Drago, del palet de Rolland, de l'ascoudaillou, de Rolland, des camps den Blasi, de la Ba niouse, de la Coma, de las Creus fresca, de la llose, del funxo del ginebra, de romanis, de l'aspinas, de paux fourquets, de la close, del graubiu, de l'anie, d'aiguës blancas, del lotuires, de l'ascoudaillou, de l'aboaradeu gros et petit, de barnado, de canals, des bagués ou pagesa, de grilladou, del bouladre, del micalet ou roques Negras, de las Indis, del balaga, Blanca, de las balmettes, de riba male, de la barraque del Faig, de rabasse, de Tretze vents, de l'estagnol, del pla de rodes, del bac de font freda, del bac de la Pinousette, freda de Cardabère, carénera de dalt, cardebera de baix, de la casa del bac, del carbo, del lloup, de la gardiole, del bac de la farga, del roc de gaillagos, del sarrouillé, del carnegra, de costal, de l'aram, les sept funs, del clot de las boixeres, del mené, del Salt de l'aiguè, de la trinquineille.

I haven't named all the little crystal springs that never dry up; they are innumerable, their waters are like ice in summer and steaming in winter. Water could be distributed, to water the herds and the passers-by, who should drink with caution because of their treacherous coldness in summer.

It must be said that even in the vicinity of all rural houses there are still one or two fountains that I have not described above, all delicious thanks to the agreeable freshness of their waters.

## SITES and VIEWS

Among the sites and viewpoints that are worth noting let's mention Canigou [1], the Tower of Batère [2] and the Fou [3]. When you climb Canigou, you must choose a beautiful day, for sometimes thick clouds form suddenly, the sky and earth seem to merge; we see cold masses of vapour criss-crossed by lightning, rolling and swirling around us, forcing our group to descend as fast as possible. Sometimes these vapours dissipate at the appearance of burning rays of sunlight, and then everyone calls to continue the march towards the summit of Canigou.

Arriving at the top of one of the three peaks that serve as a kind of barometer to the entire department we see the points of the rocks that act as natural lightning conductors, which preserve the surroundings from the ravages of lightning.

We can enjoy there one of the finest sights in nature, more than 2,800 metres [4] above sea level. One can believe one is seeing, like the gods of Olympus, the world at our feet. From the eminence of this mountain, the eye glides over a vast horizon, crowned far away by an amphitheatre of mountains whose slopes are covered with fine grass that fattens the flocks during the summer. On their proud summits are barren rocks whose remarkable effect and placement delights any geologist who visits them. These are blocks of primitive rock (granite sienite) [5], in the shape of wedges, tables and prisms, overturned on top of each other in the most beautiful disorder.

The cry of the solitary isard sometimes catches the attention of travellers as well as the melancholy caw of the crows on the rocks.

Joseph-François de Vilanova  
written during 1824 - 1836

[1] Canigou or Canigó is the 'sacred mountain' of the northern Catalans.

[2] La Tour de Batère is the romanesque signal tower high above the village, at Batère.

[3] Fou : the river Fou flows through the commune, starting on La Souque (la Soca) the dome-shaped hill to the west, and ending in the Gorges de la Fou, a mile-long narrow canyon cut into the rock.

[4] The height is measured today at 2784 metres (9,134 feet).

[5] Sienite or syenite is an igneous rock, like granite but with less quartz. However modern geologists describe Canigou as consisting of a biotite granite, containing biotite or iron mica  $K(Fe,Mg)_3AlSi_3O_{10}(OH,F)_2$ . The geology of the area is complex.