

ISHANESU SEXTUS GUSHA

Book Review

Joosten. Ellen, *Soul of Soller. A Journey Through Time*. Printed in China, 2021. pp 1-152; ISBN 978-90-903-4356-3. Website: www.soulofsoller.com. (Price € 45)

The title of the book; *Soul of Soller A Journey Through Time* is very appropriate and catching especially as one reads the book. What is a soul? In general terms, a soul is the part of the person that makes a person what he/she is, alive, aware and able. It is the essence of a being and the title explicitly speaks to the essence of Soller. Well done, Ellen for putting up such an appropriate and engaging title. The layout of the book by Anthony Kinne demonstrates immense creativity especially as one opens the contents table which is unique showing a winding journey through times. Was the designer thinking of the winding journey through times or was he thinking of the winding road to Soller from Palma? It only the designer who can answer this question. It is rare to read a book and find no typing or grammatical errors but I hardly find one in this book and credit goes to the entire editorial team especially the proof readers David Brown and Catrin Gynne Jones. The other thing that makes the book an easy read are the three hundred and six pictures and a single image of the map. Eric Herr-Laetitia Rolland should be thanked for the wonderful work in engraving photos. In reading the book, one does not just gain more knowledge about Soller and its surrounding places but one also receives the gift of twenty vintage cards depicting the life settings of ancient Soller. Fifteen side stories and four legends play an important role in shedding more light to the story of Soller as one is introduced to the original stories and conversations of the time.

The *Soul of Soller A Journey Through Time* is a book that one needs to read before travelling to Soller and re-read it again after experiencing Sollerian life. The book ignites imagination and as one enters Soller the world of imagination and reality converges to create perfect knowledge of the place. This is what I felt on my first visit to Soller after reading the first four chapters of the book. In the ten chapters of the book, Ellen takes through the journey of Soller from ancient times till the Covid 19 era. In chapter one she introduces us to what she calls the Golden Valley. What fascinates me in her introductory statement is that, “the Island of Mallorca was green and pleasant land before the evolution of tourism.” This gives us the negative picture of how tourism and development affect the environment and this explains why there is resistance to massive development in the Island of Menorca which still retains its natural beauty. In the chapter, Ellen takes through the journey of early settlers and the etymology of the Island’s name-Baleares. She also shares some insights on early development especially the irrigation system and planting of orange trees which are a trademark of Soller till today. In chapter two, Ellen discusses the issue of life in the valley especially on how religion and feudalism worked together under the leadership of James I of Aragon. The chapter dwells a lot on rural life and the early development of Olive mills, silk, textile and ice making. Chapter three takes us through the dark moments of Soller especially with the attack by the Pirates and later the construction of watchtowers to cement security. In this chapter one learns that there is no community that had enjoyed a smooth and straight life in terms of successes and development. Life is a winding journey with ups and downs and this is true of Soller as well. In Chapter four, Ellen takes us through the journey of life in Soller in response to crisis. She raises an important subject of migration as people seek greener pastures and how in turn they invest back home. Having about forty-three restaurants by 1887 was a

massive development that leads to improvement of infrastructure such as roads and paths. In the same chapter we also learn the role played by the clergy in maintaining family ties through matchmaking by organizing girls for the boys in diaspora for marriage. Such a prominent character was Father Josep Pastor Castanyer who was a local catholic priest in Soller. Chapter five takes us again to another dark period of Soller. This time around it was not by the pirates or other invading groups but by natural catastrophes in form of the Orange Blight which destroyed the orange orchards which were the backbone of Soller economy. The crisis also extended to the textile industry resulting in people migrating to other parts of the world to as far as Latin America. Such migrations necessitated the development of steamships linking Europe and America through the Atlantic Ocean. Another significant development during this time as the author points out was the funding and establishment of the Gas Company in 1892. In chapter six, Ellen takes us through the period ushering modernism. She discusses the influence of the French and the side story by Shirley Roberts about the Bell Esguard testifies to this influence. The chapter journeys us through the period of mechanization and the setting of the Bank de Soller. In Chapter Seven the author narrates another big development of Soller that changed the life of the valley entirely from being an Island with an Island to an Island accessible to the rest of the world. This was the construction of the railway through the Tramuntana mountains and later the introduction of the tram to the port. Crisis in the textile industry continued leading to its final collapse. However, opportunities arise in the midst of crisis and this time around the new opportunity was the discovery of the benefits of Vitamin C which brought back the orange business into limelight. The centrality of oranges in Soller remain visible with the orange festival which is held annually. In Chapter eight, the author takes us through the journey of emerging cultures especially in the entertainment sector. Leisure activities in form of movies, celebrations and cultural events take the centre stage in the life of Sollerics. They remained the permanent feature of Soller life till today. Chapter Nine introduces us to the new business venture in terms of the rise of tourism. Industries and factories that have defined the life of Soller for centuries have now collapsed and its now time to diversify into other avenues. The construction of the three-kilometer tunnel eliminating the fifty four hairpin bends makes the valley more and more accessible to the rest of the world. We see in chapter nine investment now being channeled towards hotels, restaurants, real estate, and infrastructure to support the tourism industry. In chapter ten, Ellen concludes by looking at the Soller of today. A completely new world of movies, outdoor activities, and leisure activities. It's no longer a village but a multicultural town with communities actively involved in the life of the city. The book ends in a period of darkness that covers the whole world in form of Covid 19. It is my hope that the author will write a new project on the post Covid 19 Soller.

It is a book that draws interest of people from all sorts of backgrounds; economists, agriculturalists, engineers, clergy, historians, archaeologists, political scientists, sociologists, artists, and development specialists. It's a book that sheds lighter about the Island and the entire region expanding from the story of a single village. The book connects the period in antiquity with the contemporary world in one hundred and fifty-two pages. The author takes us through the realities of the world of the past and the world of today. I would recommend you to read this book and immerse yourself in a story a valley that lived for centuries in isolation of the whole world. A valley with a rich culture and a unified community that explored survival tactics together in times of crisis. The book website helps you to locate bookshops where you can buy this jewel of Soller. As you prepare your reading list for the year, remember to include; *Soul of Soller A Journey Through Time*.