

CESANA

AND SURROUNDINGS

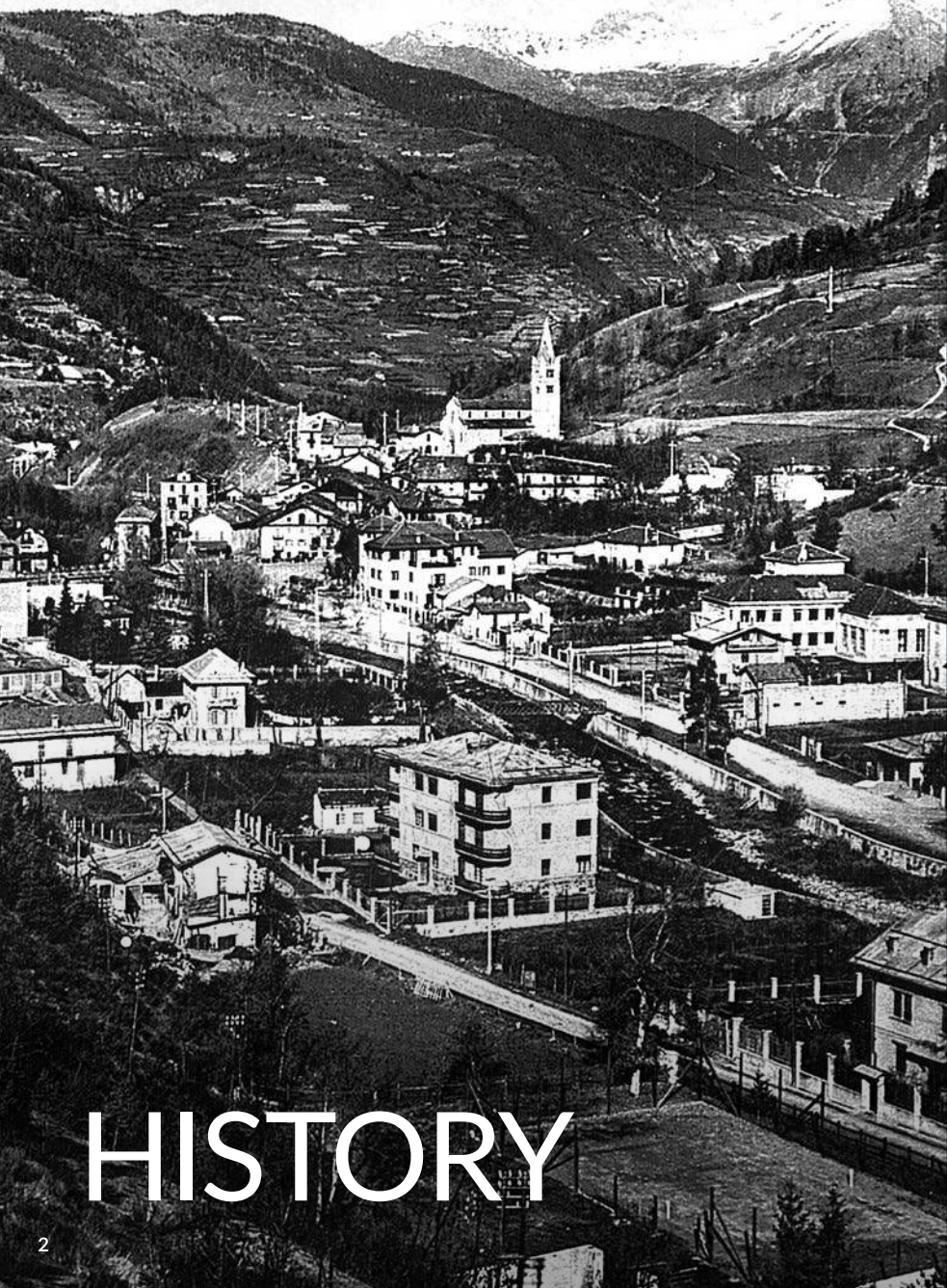


The municipality of **Cesana Torinese**, located at an altitude of 1,354 m above sea level is located at the foot of **Mount Chaberton** and it is an ideal place to stay for a vacation full of traditions and natural beauty.

History is ever present in its many **hamlets and villages**, together with **art and culture**, to rediscover ancient and noble crafts and reviving the “**mountain**” spirit of the Upper Susa Valley.

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HISTORY

The origins of Cesana Torinese, a picturesque hamlet in the heart of the Vialattea area, date back to the early **Middle Ages**.

The village lies at the confluence of the Ripa (from the valley that bears the same name) and Piccola Dora (from the Montgenèvre Pass) streams. Located in the land of the Dauphinis of Vienna (where the **Republic of Escarton** was born in 1343, a political-economic partnership that profoundly marked the history and culture of this area), it was part of the Escarton of Oulx until 1713, when it passed under the rule of the Savoy House following the Utrecht Treaty. In 1708, during the **Spain Succession War**, the Piedmont troops were driven out of Clavières and the peaks of St. Sicario and barricaded themselves in Cesana, but the French army succeeded in conquering it by

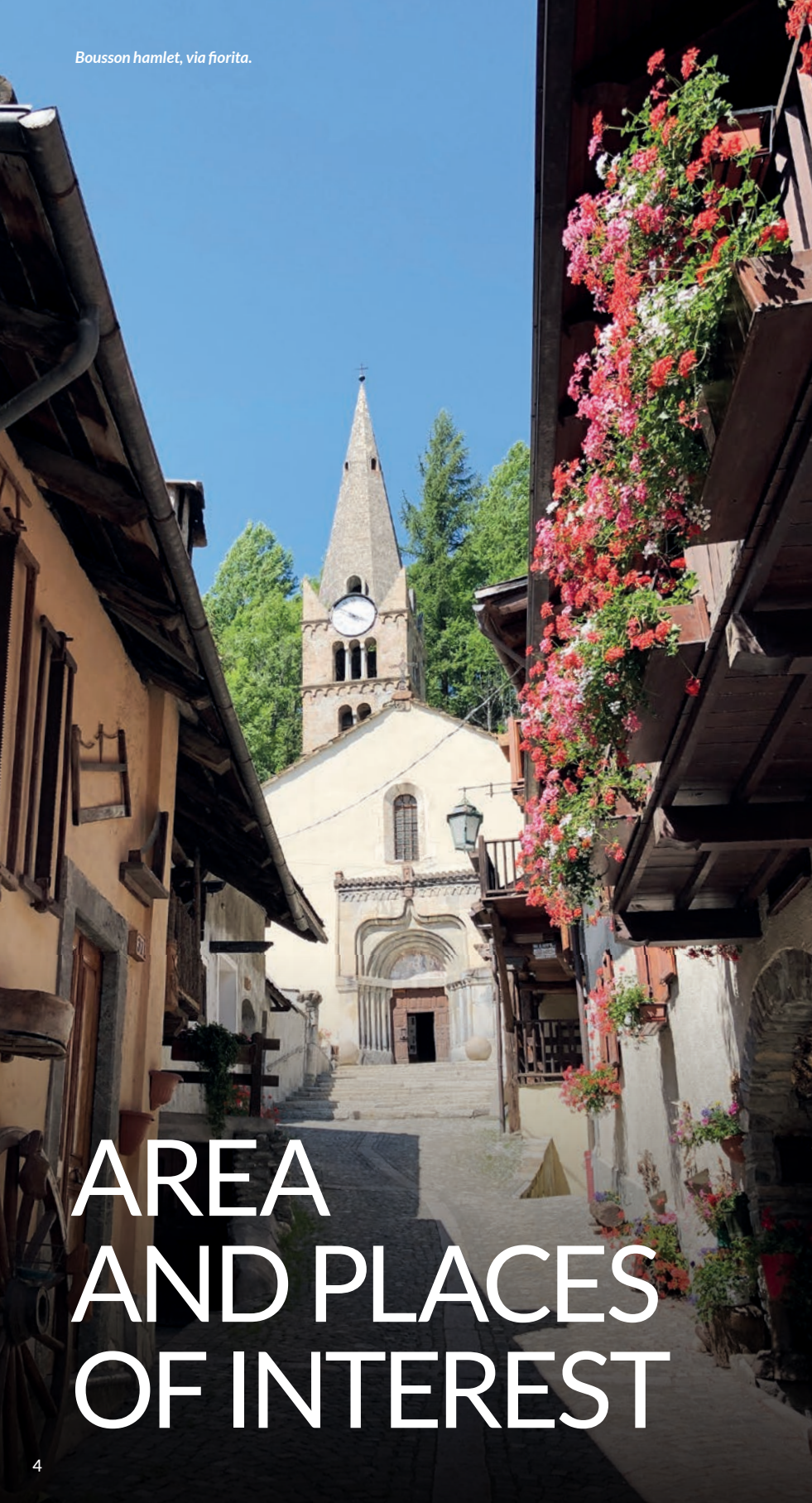
looting and burning. In the **18th century**, its strategic importance waned. In 1720, there were only 460 inhabitants. The construction of new roads boosted trade and at the beginning of the **20th century** there were 1,200 inhabitants, which dropped to around 600 in the 1920s due to migration. Since the 1970s Cesana has become a tourist and holiday resort and in 2006 one of the competition venues for the **Turin Winter Olympics**. The Super-G and Women's Downhill Alpine Skiing competitions were held in the hamlet of **San Sicario Alto** while the biathlon took place in the area of the former Italsider colony and bobsleigh, skeleton and luge were held in the **Pariol** area.



Vittorio Amedeo Square, historical archives of the Cesana Municipality.

INTERESTING FACTS

- 1 According to Casalis (from the Historical Geographic and Statistical Dictionary of States by His Majesty the King of Sardinia), the Cesana settlement dates back to ancient times. It is identified with the toponym "Scingomago" or "a place located at the crossing, or along a river".
- 2 Legend has it that Tolosano, feudal lord of Cesana, hated by the people for his tyranny, was thrown out of the mullioned window of the parish bell tower. With him also fell the dividing column, which was never replaced.



AREA AND PLACES OF INTEREST



Parish Church of St John the Baptist. Detail of the façade.

The historical centre of **Cesana Torinese** consists of the first core, built around the parish church, and a second core that winds along the pedestrian street overlooked by 19th-century buildings and shops.

The parish church of **St John the Baptist** dominates the village. The three apses, façade and bell tower are still those of the original place of worship dating back to the 11th century. Of interest are the 16th-century portal, the baptismal fountain made of green Bousson marble and the wooden coffered ceiling, carved in 1678 by a master carver from Brianza.

Also noteworthy is the **Chapel of St Anthony**, at the top of Via Roma, built in the early 20th century. The fountain underneath is fed by a spring located in the foundations. A replica can be found in the historical and central Piazza Vittorio Amedeo.

INTERESTING FACTS

On the parish façade, the bas-relief of the shell above the portal is noteworthy. It bears witness to the link the Cesana church had with the Compostela pilgrimage, which flourished as early as the 11th century: the shell, which dates back to 1518 as the engraved date indicates, was in fact the distinguishing mark of those who travelled to the tomb of St James in Santiago de Compostela.

HAMLETS

In **Bousson**, a hamlet split in two by the Ripa River, stands the **Church of Our Lady of the Snow** (16th century), with its late-Gothic portal in carved stone. The Dauphin coats of arms and fleurs-de-lis are on the lock. The polychrome wooden altar has a central icon depicting the Madonna and Child and the Bishops Saint Gregory and Saint Augustine. An inscription in the **Rectory House** refers to the Waldensian invasions of the 18th century.

Bell Tower of the Church of Our Lady of the Snows, Bousson.



Thures, located a few kilometres away from Cesana in the wild **Val Thuras**, is characterised by chalets with wooden and slate roofs, the **Church of Santa Maria Maddalena** with its bell tower dating back to the mid-18th century and the wonderful 17th-century fountain with its octagonal basin.

Sagnalonga, with its many chalets scattered among the vegetation at an altitude of 1995 metres above sea level in the area known as **Monti della Luna**. It is a charming hamlet that can only be reached in winter by ski lifts and in summer by foot trails and gravel roads.

Sagnalonga hamlet.



San Sicario hamlet.

San Sicario, between history and urban development.

In **San Sicario Borgo**, an ancient village whose oldest houses date back to the 17th century, the **Church of Sant'Atanasio** was rebuilt in the early 20th century over the ruins of the previous one of which the 17th-century altarpiece still exists. The community oven is still lit and used during the village festival.

A few kilometres further up, **San Sicario Alto** (1,700 m above sea level) is a modern, recently developed **ski resort**: the Super G and the Women's Downhill Alpine Skiing Championships held during the Turin 2006 Winter Olympics took place here.

INTERESTING FACTS

Since the 1950s, Frenchman Laurent Chappis, known as "**the architect of snow urbanism**" has influenced urban and tourism planning in the Alps, putting the aesthetics of the nature in the area before economic profitability.

In Italy, in 1971, he was entrusted with the projects of Pila (Valle d'Aosta) and San Sicario. Between 1963 and 1993, he participated in **several modernisation projects** for a multitude of ski resorts, including Sestriere.

In the hamlet of **Champlas Séguin**, it is as if time has stood still. Established as an alpine pasture of Rollieres (Sauze di Cesana hamlet), the original core dates back to the 17th century. In the nearby area of **Mont Crouzeau** - but also in the neighbouring areas of Bousson, Roche Noire and Punta Rascià - it is possible to find **serpentinite**, a dark green rock furrowed with a dense network of white veins, which was once subject to intense mining. Still visible near Bousson is the **Green Marble Quarry**: three extraction sites with several openings supported by pillars, tools and machinery abandoned when the mine closed down (1970).

INTERESTING FACTS

*Along the road up to Claviere it is possible to find a green area with free access. It is dedicated to the geology of the Alpine region and, in particular, local geology. It is the **Garden of Rocks** - also equipped with benches, tables and a playground - where tourists and hikers can learn about the origins of our mountains.*

Champlas Seguin Hamlet.



Barracks opposite Fort Séguin.

Fort Séguin is located just above the hamlet of Champlas Séguin and was the largest building in the Piazza di Cesana after the Chaberton Battery, built at the end of the 19th century to counter a possible French attack from the Montgenèvre Pass.

Today, the position of the six coupled barbette cannons and those of the additional cannons remain visible, although submerged by vegetation, while only the perimeter walls of the barracks remain.

Solomiac is an ancient hamlet well worth a visit. Here the **Town Hall**, the **bakery**, the **school** and, a little further down, the **Chapel of Saints Sebastian and Rocco** can still be seen in the main square. Also noteworthy are a historical house, the so-called **Castle**, with unique and colourful frescoes on its façade, and an ancient **sundial** that used to mark the time before sunset behind Mount Chaberton.

In **Mollieres**, the **Chapel of Saint Anthony** the Abbot, the recently restored ancient oven and a stone fountain dating from 1347 are worth mentioning.

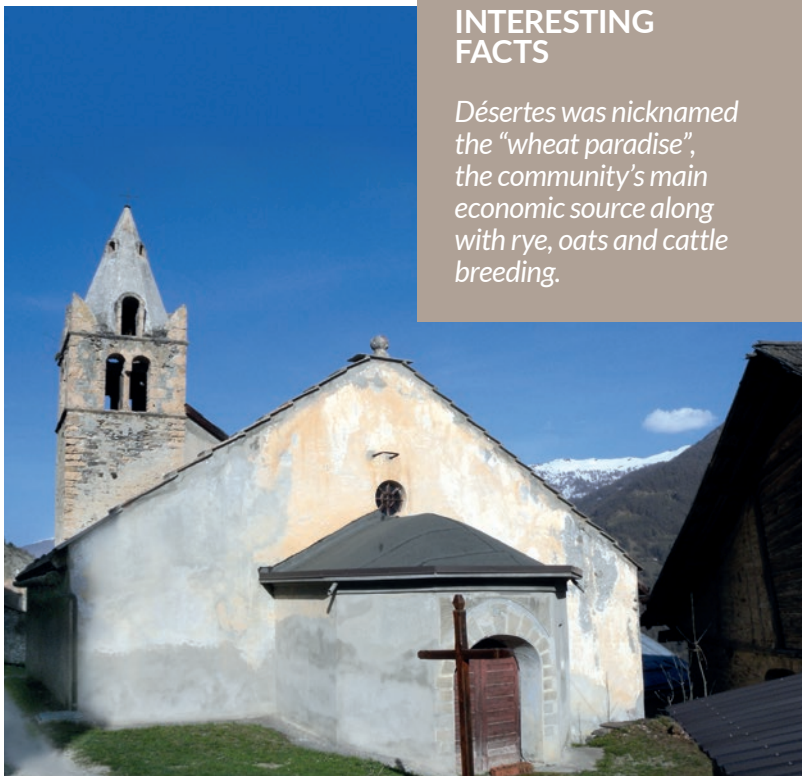
INTERESTING FACTS



*Cesana and the hamlets of Mollieres and Solomiac are located on the historical route of **Via Francigena**, hailing from Colle of Montgenèvre/Claviere and heading along the Susa Valley.*

Chapel of Saints Sebastian and Rocco, Solomiac.





INTERESTING FACTS

Désertes was nicknamed the “wheat paradise”, the community’s main economic source along with rye, oats and cattle breeding.

Désertes hamlet.

Désertes was an independent municipality dissolved in 1928 although it had about 200 inhabitants. In addition to the **parish** church with a bell tower dating back to the 15th century in Delphic architecture and its small cemetery, there are two **chapels**: one dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul with frescoes by Bologna-born artist Pinerolo and the other dedicated to Saint Anthony of Padua.

In **Fenils**, a village on the slopes of Mount Chaberton characterised by its ancient gorges, stands the Gothic-style **Church of San Giuliano**. Built around 1490 and expanded between the years 1753 and 1758, it has a three-nave structure and a coffered ceiling with precious reliefs. The premises of the old **bakery house** the **Ethnographic Museum**, which has in display tools and machinery from the folk tradition and peasant work, household furnishings and photographs from the past.



Chaberton Fort, summit of Mount Chaberton (3,130 m).

THE CHABERTON FORT

The **Chaberton Battery**, built by the Royal Army, is the highest fortification in Europe.

Works began in 1898 with the tracing of the road connecting Fenils to the summit of **Mount Chaberton** (3,130 m) and, under the leadership of Engineer Major Luigi Pollari Maglietta, and they were completed in 1913. The location was chosen because of its strategic position, inaccessibility and the impossibility of hitting it with the weapons of the time.

After the declaration of war on France on 10 June 1940, the fort became active for the first time to bomb military targets beyond the Alps, but with the armistice of 25 June it was decommissioned once again.

With the Paris Treaties of 1947, the whole of Mount Chaberton passed into French territory. The abandoned fort was ripped of all metal structures in 1957. In 1987, the road from Fenils was also closed to traffic. Today, on the summit, a popular destination for hikers and mountain climbers, are still clearly visible the eight towers on which the cannons rested.

INTERESTING FACTS

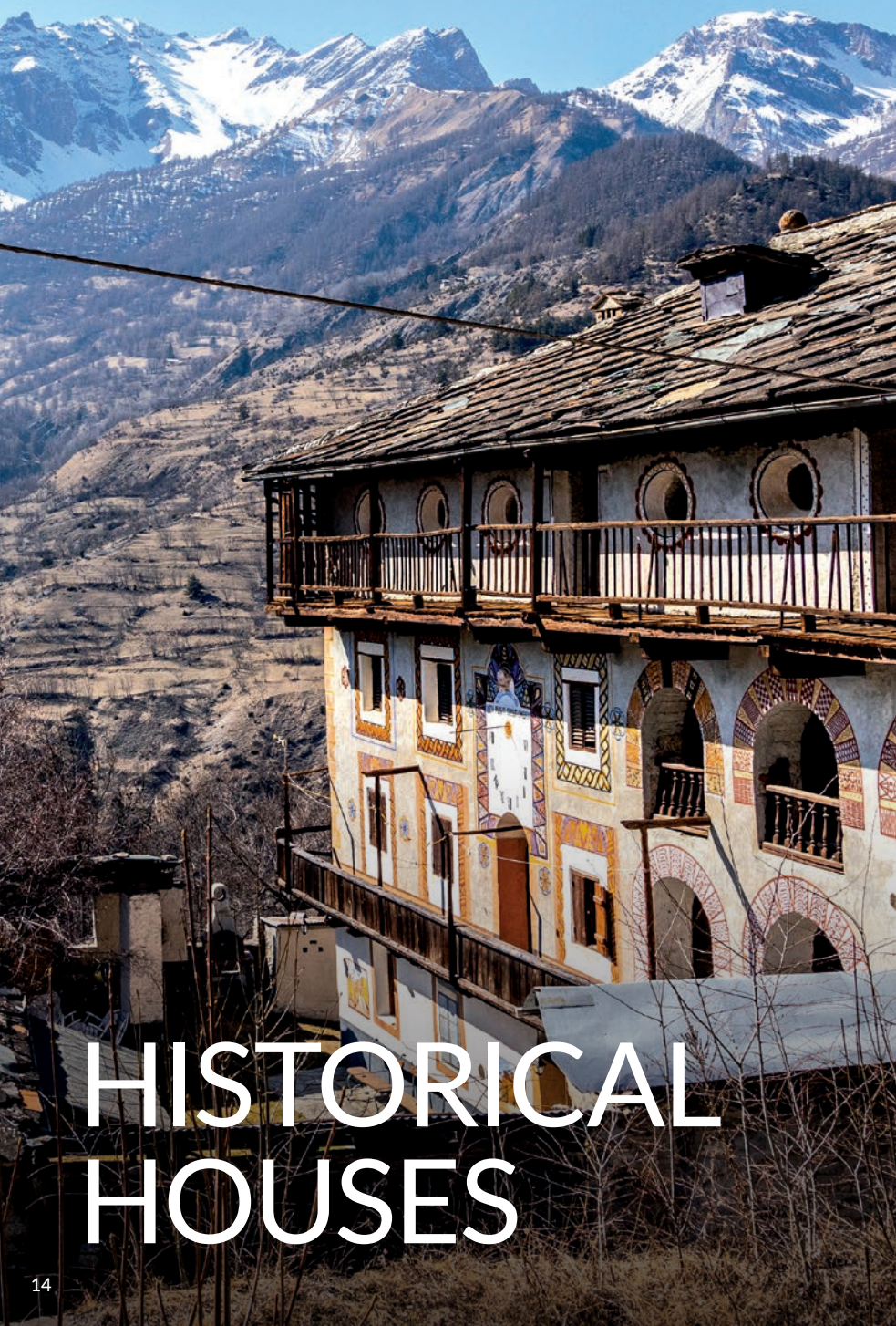
- ① Although completed shortly before the start of the First World War, the Fort remained unused for almost twenty-five years. Its cannons were then deployed on the Eastern Front and relocated during the Fascist period, when its management was entrusted to the artillerymen of the 515th Frontier Guard Battery.
- ② The summit of the Chaberton was flattened and lowered by about 6 m. On the Italian side, a rocky step of about 12 m was created, at the base of which the masonry works were built lengthways. Two long corridors gave access to dormitories, storerooms, infirmary, command and kitchens. Eight towers on the roof held as many cannons. Approximately 7 m high and 6 m apart, their tops were reached by an internal metal spiral staircase.



Cesana is a...a winter hub for skiing thanks to its ski lifts in the village while in summer it **offers outdoor activities of all kinds:** from hiking and mountain biking to off-road activities for motorbikes and cars.

Snowshoe trails, snow activities, horse back riding, golf, padel or yoga lessons are some of the activities that can be enjoyed in Cesana!





HISTORICAL HOUSES

ALLIAUD HOUSE

In Via Alliaud, downtown Cesana, stands the **Auberge de l'église**, also known as Alliaud House. It is the old hotel where **Vittorio Alfieri** supposedly stayed and composed some of his masterpieces.

COSSUL HOUSE

Belonging since the 17th century to the family of the same name, which had a leading role in the communities of Solomiac and Fenils, it is also known as the **Castle of Solomiac**. It is a typical example of a 17th-century house-fortress. It is an imposing building of no less than four floors and basement, accessed through several trapdoors, with distinctive and colourful frescoes on the façade and a sundial that marked the time before sunset behind Mount Chaberton.

HOUSE OF TOMBSTONES

In the upper section of **Bousson**, it is possible to come across a particularly mysterious building: the House of Tombstones (dating back to the second half of the 17th century), whose primary function at the time is still unclear. Perhaps it was a small monastic house or heretic refuge. The only surviving original wall is decorated with a series of marble tombstones, probably not funerary, featuring geometric and baroque motifs, bearing inscriptions in archaic French and praising a mystical life, sayings and quotes from saints. Now it hosts the Museum of Material and Intangible Culture, Tradition and Popular Culture. It is open in summer and in winter with temporary exhibitions.

Cesana T.se, Alliaud House.



Bousson hamlet, House of Tombstones.

Sundial dated 1713 - San Giuliano Fenils bell tower.

SUNDIALS

It may come as a surprise but looking at the façades of buildings in the area it is possible to find **a number of sundials** - mostly dating back to the 18th or 19th century - **bearing witness to a historical period when the agricultural work and the passing of time were governed by sunlight**, which cast the shadow of the gnome between zodiac signs and sacred images.

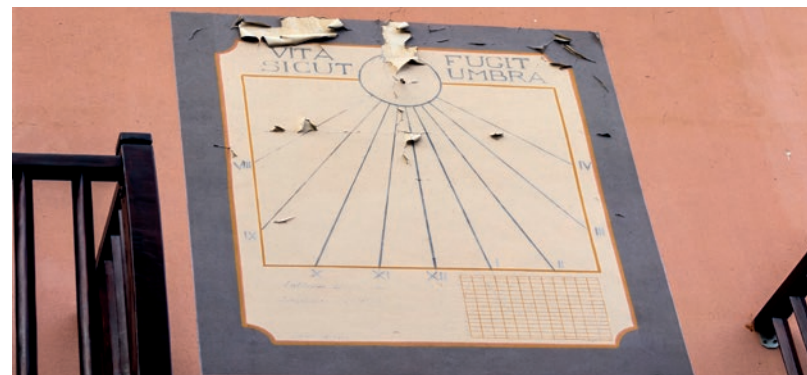
Among the courtyards and balconies of **Cesana** there are still traces of a few quadrants: the one in **Via Sant'Antonio** is clearly visible.

In **Fenils**, a sundial dating before the year 1713 and located on the **bell tower** of the Church of St Julian marks noon by projecting the time on an upturned fleur-de-lis of French crown. Another one dating 1830 is in the courtyard of the first house downhill from the church. There, two winged lions hold a scroll with

the inscription '**Vita ut divertere, et scies quota**' (Life will leave you and you will know at what time).

Also the hamlets of **Balbieres** and **Désertes** have sundials (1750), as does **Solomiac**, on the opposite side of the mountain. On the frescoed façade of the **Cossul House**, a large sundial from 1870 is painted with the motto '**Vita fugit sicut umbra**' (Life flees like a shadow), reminding people of the brevity of earthly life.

Sundial Via Sant'Antonio.



Sundial Fenils hamlet.

INTERESTING FACTS

To read the time through the sundials, today one must keep in mind when daylight saving time is in force, since all the "ancient clocks" show standard time.



Sundial bell tower of St Magdalena in Thures.

In **Bousson** there is a restored sundial on the façade of the apartment building **"La Meridiana"** from which the building takes its name. Walking along the Thuras Valley, one can admire other sundials on the **bell tower** of St Mary Magdalene, in **Thures**, decorated with

the image of a cherub, and on the **Moni House** in the hamlet of Lause. The latter dates back to the year 1712 and it was restored in 1993. The inscription reads: **"Fontis ut unda fluit circiter umbra fugit"** (As the source flows in waves, so the shadow flees).

Sundial House of Tombstones.



Just outside Cesana, history and tradition continue:

at **Champlas du Col**, on the road to Sestriere, a sundial from 1870 is surmounted by the effigy of a rooster, baskets of flowers, birds, and Christian symbols;

at **Sauze di Cesana**, one must raise one's eyes to the **bell tower** of the **Church of San Restituto**: there is a sundial from 1804 (repainted during restoration works) that reads **'Si le soleil ne m'eclaire, je ne peut vous satisfaire'** (If the sun does not shine on me, I cannot help you).

INTERESTING FACTS

The Church of San Restituto (12th century) was for a long time a parish church located outside the village, perhaps because gathered the faithful from three neighbouring areas: Sauze di Cesana, Rollieres and Champlas du Col.



Bell Tower of the Church of San Restituto, Sauze di Cesana.



Detail of the Art Nouveau fountain in Piazza Sant'Antonio, Cesana Torinese.



FOUNTAINS

Water is one of the most important local resources and in the past fountains were indispensable for household use and wash-houses, to water animals heading for the pastures or quench the thirst of those travelling along the Via di Francia.

Originally, the fountains were carved out of large larch logs. Only from the 16th century onwards did a more prosperous situation contribute to the use of stone. Today, the entire Alta Val di Susa is characterised by unique stone basins with decorations, symbols and carved dates that tell centuries of history.

At **Fenils**, in the square in front of the bakery now converted into an ethnographic museum, there is an octagonal basin curiously devoid of friezes and chronological references. The one in the main

square in **Thures**, on the other hand, bears the date 1623 and, exceptionally, the signature of the stonemason: master Antoine Vignola, to whom the rectangular one in Champlas du Col, near the road to Sestiere, is also attributable, dated 1624.

In **Bousson**, at the top of the steps of the Church of Our Lady of the Snow, a curious round basin fountain has been created and filled with water flowing down a tall stone column and gushing from a bronze decoration, adorned with bunches of grapes and surmounted by a bird in flight.

Fountain hamlet Thures.



Cesana octagonal fountain, Piazza Europa.

The shapes of the rare 18th-century fountains are unique. In Fenils, the one downstream from the church was made by re-using the basin of an oil mill bearing the date of the year 1772, as was the one of 1797 in Sauze di Cesana; the ones in Bousson and in Cesana, in Via Alliaud, instead, are square.

In **Cesana**, the large octagonal fountain - originally in Piazza Europa, then moved to Piazza Vittorio Amedeo so as not to

obstruct the transit of cars - was relocated next to the parish church with the replacement of some slabs: the effigy of a shield of lilies remains as proof of its ancient origin.

The small Art Nouveau-style fountain depicting a young girl in **local attire** built for the first tourists in Piazza Sant'Antonio is located where there is also an octagonal fountain with an adjoining stone wash-house and dates back to the early 20th century.

Art Nouveau fountain in Piazza Sant'Antonio, Cesana Torinese.



INTERESTING FACTS

Traditional attire.

Men's daily garments consisted of knee-length trousers, hemp shirt, waistcoat, jacket and socks made of natural wool; on holiday days, a satin jacket was worn instead of a woollen one. Women dressed a dress made of rough black fabric, consisting of a long skirt with several flounces, a bodice with long sleeves tightly fitted at the forearms, a shawl (made of cotton or wool depending on the season), an apron; on holidays and festivities the dress was of cloth, apron and shawl made of silk in bright colours and with floral motifs, and embroidered and featured long fringes.

A headdress was also worn, which was usually of two types: the 'courneutte', which was easier to wear, white or coloured on working days and in plush cotton in winter; or the 'coueifo' for grand occasions, made of embroidered tulle, valenciennne lace and organza. To embellish clothing, a Savoy cross was tied around the neck with a gold buckle or velvet ribbons: it was often a baptism, engagement or wedding.



Traditional attire.

Friends in traditional dress .



TYPICAL PRODUCTS AND DISHES

The Susa Valley boasts **some excellent products** that find their maximum expression in traditional recipes and on local catering menus. These include **mountain potatoes**, a key ingredient in, for example, ghenefle and cajettes.



Ghenefle and cajettes offered in the village restaurants.

GÒFRI

Gòfri or goffres are round wafers with simple ingredients: flour, water and yeast. The dough is cooked over high heat on guofria, cast-iron griddles with the typical honeycomb shape, greased with lard to prevent the dough from sticking. They are eaten hot au naturel or stuffed with cold cuts and cheese, or with honey, jam and chocolate cream.

GHENEFLE & CAJETTES

These are two traditional Occitan dishes: for the first, the potato is mixed with the other ingredients (nutmeg, eggs, flour and parmesan cheese) after being boiled. For the second, the potato is used raw and grated together with an egg, onions, leeks, sage, flour and toma cheese to taste.

INTERESTING FACTS

Once upon a time, every family had its own griddle to heat on the wood stove, as goffres were a poor substitute for bread. Today they are often found at village festivals in the Susa Valley.

INTERESTING FACTS

There are many variations in recipes, especially for cajettes. Each hamlet or even each family has a different version, depending also on the ingredients available at the time. The name and pronunciation also differ according to the language spoken in the hamlets.

Mountain potato.



Preparation of Turta D'la Caruta Ruja.

GLARA

Glòre gratà is part of Occitan cuisine and, although more typical of Val Chisone, in some places in Cesana and the surrounding area it is served as a main course, an appetiser or an aperitif. In the *glòre a taliun* variant, which means “cut” in the patois language, the potatoes are sliced instead of being grated.

TOMA, THE ALPINE CHEESE

Toma is a cheese made from the milk of alpine cows. It has a compact, rough rind, a dark yellow colour, a crumbly texture and, if aged for a long time, a blue colour. Its particular characteristic lies in the cheesemaking process. The milk is left to acidify for 48 hours, then the cream is removed, which in turn is curdled and pressed.

INTERESTING FACTS

It used to be prepared at home by families and baked when the community oven was turned on in villages and hamlets.

INTERESTING FACTS

Natural acidification occurs more easily in summer, due to high temperatures, so originally toma cheese was only produced in alpine pastures.

GENEPÌ

There are mountain traditions that are never abandoned, such as the production of high-altitude herbal spirits, often with therapeutic properties. The recipe for Genepi has very ancient origins: created as a digestive spirit, its ingredient is mugwort, which grows wild between 2,000 and 2,500 m above sea level, among rocks or gravel, in rugged and often inaccessible areas. It can be obtained by infusion (the herbs are soaked for about 45 days in a hydroalcoholic solution) or by suspension (plants are placed on special grids above the infusion). Since 1928 mugwort has been a protected species, therefore its collection is subject to severe limitations.

TURTA D'LA CARUTA RUJA

It is a simple recipe that used to brighten up meals in the old days. When bread was baked, a piece of dough was rolled out flat like a cake and filled with simple ingredients, e.g. beetroot (*caruta ruja*), then covered with a second sheet of dough and baked in the village ovens. The sweet version of this ‘bread cake’ was filled with apples and spices.

Artemisia Genipi.







TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

Cesana Torinese

Piazza Vittorio Amedeo, 3
(+39) 0122.89202
info.cesana@turismotorino.org
@ufficioturisticocesana

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