

Medieval Barcelona

Information Booklet



Advanced level

PRI

Camp d'Aprenentatge de Barcelona

Name:

[MEDIEVAL BARCELONA]

The area that accounts for Barcelona nowadays used to be inhabited by an Iberian sedentary tribe called the Laietani. The Laietani moved their villages to the hills, the most important of which was Montjuïc. The sailors that came to sell their products there named it **Barkeno**.

Thereupon the Romans arrived and the Iberian Barkeno transformed into the **Roman Barcino**.

In the 4th century AD, the walls encircling it were amplified and fortified, and we can still see their remnants today (the walls were not destroyed, but used to make other buildings). The walls had four gates that gave way to two streets, the *cardo maximus* and the *decumanus*, which intersected the current Plaza de Sant Jaume.

At the time, the surroundings of the walls were deserted and composed of fields and orchards supplying the city. A great part of today's La Rambla was covered by the lake Cagalell, which disappeared in the Late Middle Ages and consisted in non-drinking water and the effluents of the homonymous stream.

The Development of Medieval Barcelona

The original city center of Barcelona remained enclosed by Roman walls. This area continued to be occupied by monarchical, religious or civic buildings and institutions. On the outskirts of the old city new villages arose, comprised primarily of dwellings of the working class.

The Second Wall

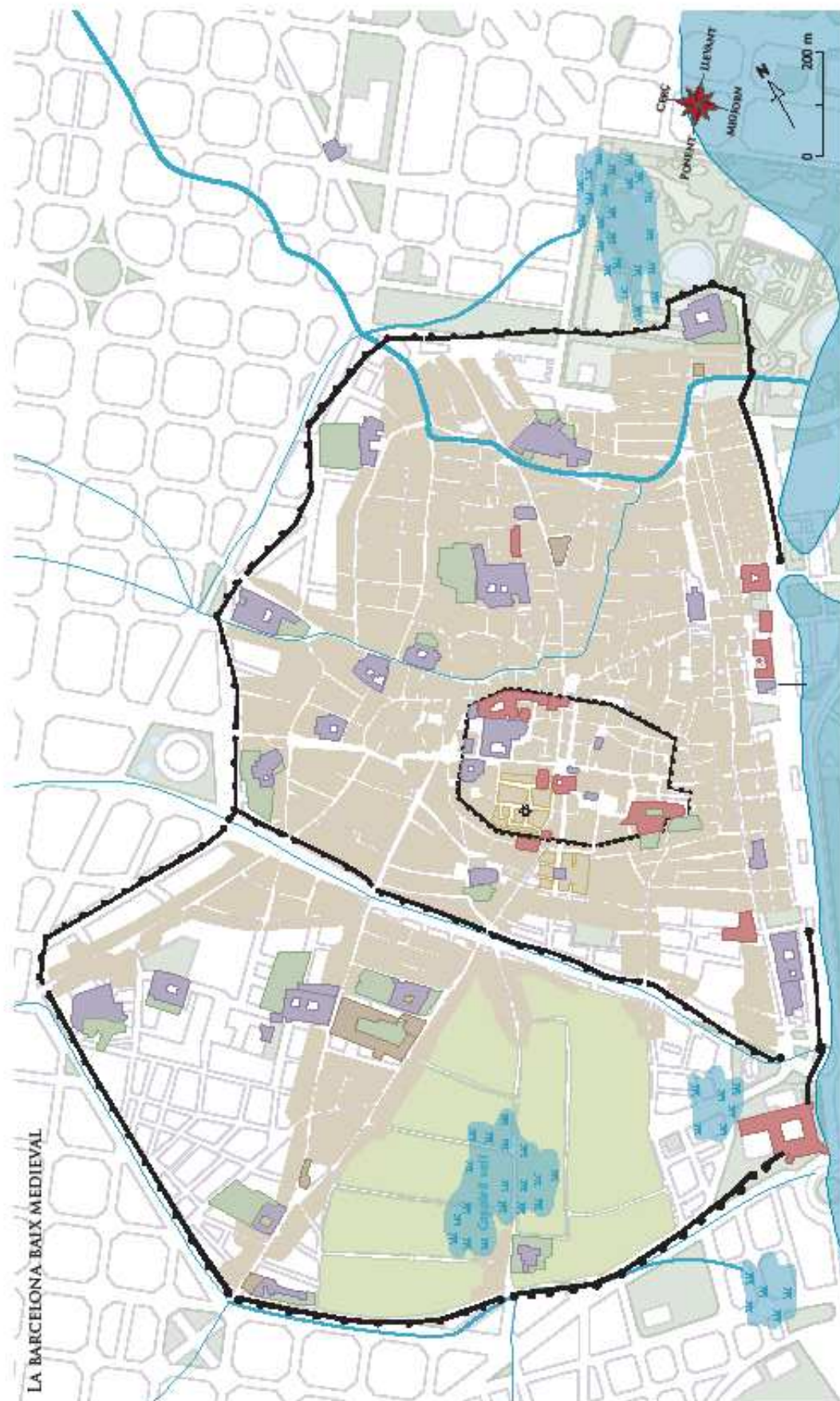
In the 13th century, the surroundings of the Roman walls turned into populous areas that needed protection. Consequently, **in the second half of the 13th century (1250-1350), a second fortress was built**, which was comprised of the walls that were to constitute **Jaume I**. These new precincts began at the river flowing from the mountain. From 1260 on, other gates were reported (Porta Ferrissa in 1260; Santa Anna and Jonqueres in 1275; Sant Daniel, Orbs, Trenta-Claus and Framenors in 1285; as well as Portal Nou in 1295). It is believed that the first tranche of enlargement of the walls was between the gates of Santa Anna and Jonqueres, followed by the sections between Rambla and Jonqueres up until Portal Nou. The rest of Portal Nou and Santa Clara remained without walls as it was already protected by the Rec Comtal, an ancient canal.

The Third Wall

In medieval times, Barcelona was an important center of trade throughout the Mediterranean, which is why there was a significant increase in its population. All pointed towards the borders of the city being insufficient as new neighborhoods emerged beyond the Rambla.

In the late 13th century, the military and commercial expansion towards the Mediterranean became important enough so that the construction of Shipyards was initiated, grand sites in which boats were built. The acquired wealth once again entailed a population growth, necessitating the construction of another wall. Consequently, during the reign of Peter III of Arragon (14th century) yet another extension of the belt enclosure was considered. With the construction of the Raval, a new enclosure attached to the walls built through Jaume I, the city was extended up until Montjuïc. But the Raval failed to fill with people and remained empty for centuries. The terrible plagues of the pest, the economic crisis and the civil wars impeded the development of the city.

A map of Medieval Barcelona with its two extensions



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The Gates of the City

The four gates of the Roman wall became fortifications in medieval times and are generally referred to as "castells" (castles).

Castell Vell (The Old Castle)

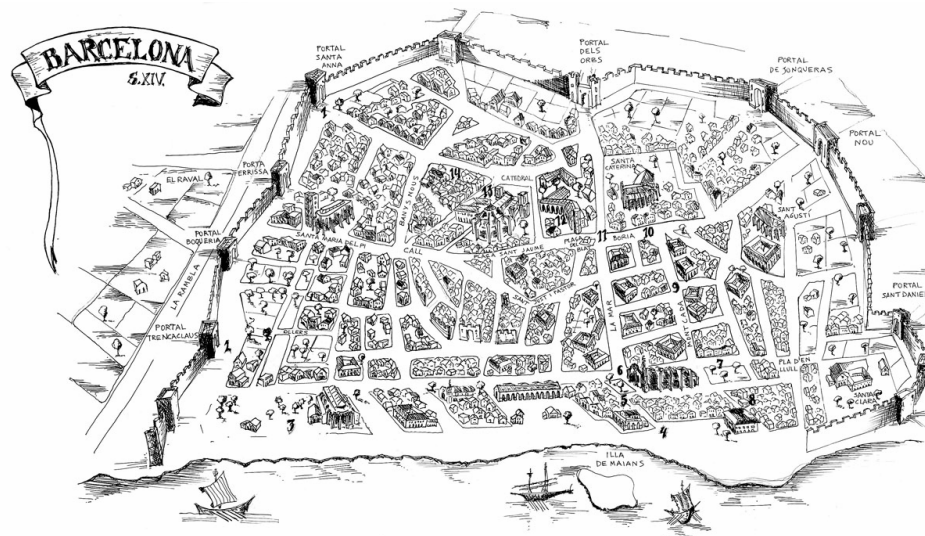
Castell Vell was built above the gate facing the east, the Late Roman wall, that became the main entrance to the city and from which paths branched out towards the sea and the Maresme, when there was a market. At the beginning of the 12th century, the castle was home to the court of justice and its judges, which carried out judicial functions as representatives of the King in Barcelona and Vallès. In the 14th century, Castell Vell became a prison. In 1911 it was demolished due to the construction of the Via Laietana.

Castell Nou (The New Castle)

Castell Nou was first mentioned in 1021. The oath of allegiance was retained from Oliba Miró to Ramon Berenguer I and his first wife Elisabeth (1041-1050) for having obtained the New Castle of Barcelona from the Counts. It was constructed above the occidental gate of the Late Roman wall, which defended that side of the city. In the 13th century it enclosed the Jewish quarter.

Castell de Regomir (The Regomir Castle)

Castell de Regomir is located above the Southern gate of the Late Roman wall of the year 1015. It is traditionally assumed that the name commemorates the reign of Count Mir, brother of Borell II with whom he shared power. The castle was under the jurisdiction of the headquarters of Barcelona. Only ruins remain of the gate of the wall that served as basis of the castle. A populated area running from the outskirts of the wall up until the sea was documented already in 975.



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The Streets

The medieval streets were narrow and restricted even more through stones, tables and desks that obstructed the passage for pedestrians. The atmosphere was usually busy. Stones coming from Montjuïc were seen all around; the construction fever did not halt throughout the last medieval centuries. Religious and civil buildings built according to the new gothic style added elegance and sobriety to the city.



Many workmen brought their products to the street, where they or their wives and children tailored the objects and presented them to the public on counters and hangers, protected from rain and sunshine by canvasses. This often complicated transport through the streets.

On one hand, the authorities limited the areas through which bulky animals could pass. This implies that there were pedestrian streets in the 14th century already. On the other hand, the attempt to restrict the installation of counters outside the houses of craftsmen and shopkeepers was often not achieved. Particularly carpenters and coopers constructed the passage towards the well of the Lake, where the neighboring residents fetched water and where coal was sold. Carpenters and joiners filled the Plaza del Born. Some artisans made the symbols of their trade visible from afar. Taverns, hostels and other houses that sold wine showed a branch on top of their doors, from the 14th century on by the order of Trustees at least.

The markets spread out through the streets through makeshift stalls. Everything was sold in its own place and there were areas with corn, millet, cabbage, cherries, oil, wine and straw. On weekday mornings, the markets were filled with people, screaming, colors and smells. The markets were dismantled around noon and the only thing that remained of them was dirt on the ground, which the residents then reluctantly had to clean up.

Barcelona and its Inhabitants

The people considered as citizens of Barcelona came from backgrounds neither privileged nor marginalized and lived in the city in their own home, owned or rented. Domestic employees residing in their master's home were therefore not considered citizens and neither were the sons of citizens, even though when growing up they did live in their fathers' homes. Women could not be citizens by their own right, as many were just wives, daughters, mothers or widows of citizens even when they lived in their own homes and sold their own goods and labor.

Freedmen, slaves and foreigners were not considered citizens either, though the latter could become so by having a permanent residence in Barcelona for at least a year and half.

In the mid-14th century, Barcelona reached a population of 40.000 inhabitants and was followed in its significance by Perpinyà (13.000), and Lleida (12.000). Around 7000 people settled in Tortosa, Tarragona, Girona, Puigcerdà and Cervera. Overall, the urban population made up less than 20% of the total population in Catalonia, as most Catalans were farmers living in rural villages. The low medieval crisis, which began with the black pest of 1348, reduced the urban population significantly, though it was able to recover due to an active rural migration attracted by the high salaries. But the demographic, economic and social urban crisis was not resolved completely up until the second half of the 16th century.

Throughout the last medieval centuries, the process of urbanization of the nobility began. Many noble families moved into the cities, where they built their own palaces.

In the city, people differed according to wealth and profession. In the following, we present several people that were registered in the medieval records of Barcelona for different reasons.

ANDREU MALLA Miller who lived in Barcelona in the middle of the 14th century.

ARNAU MASSÓ Slave seller in Barcelona of the 14th century.

BERNAT CADIRETA Summoner of the city of Barcelona who lived between the 14th and 15th century.

ESTEVETA DE MANLLEU Housewife

JAUME PERDIGÓ Member of the Council of Hundred and the Busca party, as well as shoemaker

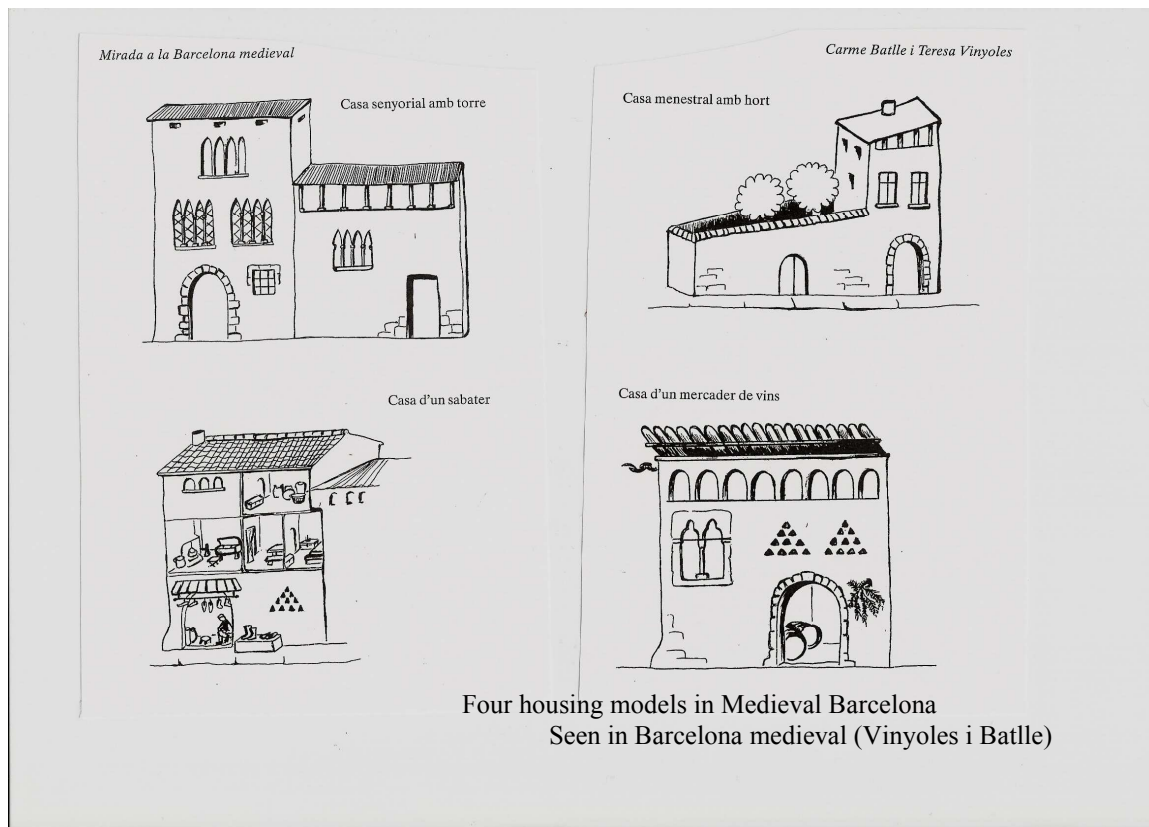
Information from: Històries de Catalunya llibre based on the TV3 series

Housing

In the urban medieval environment, there was a direct connection between the house and the street. The house represented the home, a private space where everyday life could occur, but simultaneously, it was a place of production and consummation. In the basement of the building, facing the street, artisan work and trade was produced. The houses tended to be small, cold and dark, and in some there was only one room for all the family. But the majority had two rooms. They were not very comfortable, since there was nearly no decoration, and only few benches or tables and chairs for guarding their few clothes.

The Family

The citizens of Barcelona in the Middle Ages lived in families, in which paternal authority was very important, as in other areas of the society, such as work, power, etc. There was a masculine predominance, because of which the wife, the children, as well as the domestic staff and learners, were dependent of the head of the household.



Children and adolescents socialized within the family space, as it was not common for them to go to school unless they came from privileged backgrounds, in which case some had a private tutor and others went to schools in the city. Note that in medieval Barcelona there were no educational institutions for girls.

Food

From the 14th century on, both Catalonia and the rest of Europe began to reorganize and enlarge. Consequently, the markets also developed. It was increasingly easy to find "exotic" products on big city markets, as well as everyday products such as salt, salted fish...

Trade relations became established between the most important Mediterranean cities and the orient. Beginning in the 13th century, the trade of spices and other luxury products began to increase. Venezia and Genova were important ports, while Barcelona began to expand towards the Mediterranean. Clear examples of such contacts could be found in the local cuisine.

In 1324, one of the first to write a cooking recipe was Saint Soví. Later on, in 1520, the first cookbook was written in Barcelona, the Book of Cooking by Rupert de Nola.

The Components of a Basic Diet

The basic diet of a Catalan family in the Lower Middle Ages depended, above all, on their societal standing.

The nobility and bourgeois usually had two meals a day, an abundant lunch and light dinner. Most of their meals consisted in a little bread, a big fish, pork and wild boar, poultry (capon, chicken, turkey, swans, pheasants and partridges) and candied fruit with honey and sugar for desert.

Common people only had one dish, accompanied by a lot of bread, wine and fruits, when there were some. For lunch, they ate vegetable dishes or legumes (usually lentils), pasta or cooked cereals with beef offal, beef or lamb, salt pork, cheese or eggs, and figs. For dinner they ate eggs, soup, a small fish or anything simple, raw or cooked with garlic pepper.

The Kitchen and Pantry in Gothic Barcelona

The majority of Barcelonan houses in the Lower Middle Ages had their kitchen on the first floor. They used to be rather empty, with no closets and little ceramics. There was always a fireplace and an iron stove, as well as several cooking utilities (pots, mortars and a pitcher) and places to wash the dishes and clothes (dish or laundry basins).

Most ceramic products designed for containing both solids and liquids, such as mugs and pitchers, were found at the pantry. There were also containers for the ingredients of spiced wine sweetened with honey or sugar, as well as for olives. Kitchen, pantry and cellar pieces were usually of poor quality.

J.A. Montañés, *L'ordre a la casa medieval*, 1994

Romanesque and Gothic Barcelona

The Gothic quarter of Barcelona enables us to explore the medieval past of the city at the beginning of its urbanism, comprised primarily of important Romanic and, above all, gothic buildings. Walking through these streets allows us to understand the various extensions of its mural enclosures and the importance that institutions such as the monarchy and the nobility held at the time. There are the Gothic Town Hall, the Palau de la Generalitat, the Royal Palace or the residencies of the nobility off the carrer de Montcada.

It is possible to recognize the role the Church played due to the presence of the Cathedral and other houses of worship, closely linked to institutions such as the Santa Maria del Mar as well. Buildings such as Drassanes and the Llotja demonstrate the important presence of a middle class that became strong within the world of trade. The hospital of the Holy Cross, for example, also shows the significance of welfare institutions at the time. The monasteries, located outside the city, such as Santa Maria de Pedralbes, are a testimony of the city's past. All this makes Barcelona one of the most artistic cities of Medieval Europe.

The Plaza del Rei

The palace of the counts of Barcelona, later also of the kings of Aragon, was called the Palau Reial Major (Royal Palace) and was built attached to the inner surface of the Eastern wall. It is believed that already the palace of the Visigoth kings was situated in that place. The first quote related to the building dates back to 990, where it was indirectly referenced in the writings of an orchard vendor, in a document that points to the castle as a county boundary. Despite of a general lack of information, we now know that Ramon Berenguer I pushed through some reforms here in 1044, and the character of the residence of the highest authority in the feudal state became the main source of disputes between Ramon Berenguer II and his brother Berenguer Ramon II, who were unable to share their power and decided to alternate residing in the palace for half a year each. In the 12th century, the counts were extended to the street, when the former Episcopal Palace was moved to the North-Western part of the wall. New reforms affected the building during the reign of Jaume I, who extended the palace towards the Plaza del Rei, as well as during the reign of his son Pere the Great, who opened the windows and built several rooms on top of the vault that connected the two towers of the wall, which had been part of the original core of the palace.

The Saló del Tinell

The Saló de Tinell is a work of the times of Peter of Aragon. It is a large room with several arches widely used in civil Catalan Gothic buildings, originally designed for meetings and parties to add glory to the royal protocol. At the end of the 14th century the orchard or garden of the palace was also noted. Neither the surrounding streets nor proper access to the palace were properly taken care of until the reign of King Martin in 1402, who opened a space that gave way to the stairs of the palace, i.e. the Plaza del Rei. The tower that rises above the Tinell is not exemplary of the era of that king, but was built later, in the 16th century.

In 1302, King Jaume II built **Chapel of Saint Agatha**, and rose its Gothic bell towers above one of the towers of the wall. In the past century it was about to be sold and disassembled stone by stone, but thanks to the stubbornness of certain Barcelonans the disgrace was averted. Saint Agatha was the patroness of women.

On the left side stands the **Palace of the Lieutenant**, whose construction (16th century) coincided with the destruction of the Jewish quarter. Hebrew inscriptions can be found on its walls due to this. For a long time, this place hosted the archives of the Crown of Aragon.

The Cathedral

The current cathedral was the result of a substitution process of the Romanic S. IV for a Gothic one. Ramon Berenguer I built a Romanic cathedral which was consecrated in 1058. It disappeared around 1298, in the era of Jaume II, as informs an inscription on the doors of Saint Iu giving way to the contemporary cathedral. Only the Chapel Santa Lucia remains from that time. The current chapel was constructed between the late 13th century and the mid-15th century in Gothic architecture, but it was not finished then. The neo-Gothic façade dates back to the 19th century. It is worth mentioning the cloister, with the door to Santa Eulalia, as well as the gates of Saint Iu, Saint Lucia and of the Piety.

Palau de la Generalitat

In medieval times this was the institution that represented the courts. One part of the building is Gothic and the other one is from the Renaissance, due to several construction phases between the 15th and the 17th century. The front of c/Bisbe, created in the first third of the 15th century, is Gothic. The gate was constructed by Marc Safont in 1416 and decorated until 1418 by Pere Joan. There are interesting gargoyles in human shapes that highlight the large equestrian center medallion of Saint Jordi.

In 1420 work was done in the garden of the house which was converted into a patio. On the first floor, a porch with arches was made, which was finished in 1425 with the construction of a staircase. The last great work of the 15th century is the Chapel of Saint Jordi. The façade is an example of a successful Catalan Gothic style. On the other side of the street, there are Gothic residences of the canons that were constructed in the 14th century. In 1927, a large Neo-gothic bridge was added, which connected the Palau with one part of the houses in order to make it the residence of the President of the Generalitat.

The Ajuntament (Council)

In the 11th century, the local government of Barcelona had two county officials: a judge, who had governmental and judicial functions, as well as a mayor, with more administrative and economic responsibilities. In the beginning, the various municipal activities were exercised at the Palau Reial, seat of the Catalan kings, but afterwards they had their headquarters in various parts of the city. Ultimately, in 1373, their own space was created with the construction of the Saló de Cent (Hall of Hundred), which was the most important space of the new building, whose Gothic façade was finished in 1402, so Barcelona finally had a House of the City.

In the early 13th century, there was a scheme of municipal rule that was called Consulate, which was formerly known as "Council of Hundred". It was composed of honorary citizens (upper class), merchants, artists and ministers, but five directors truly were in charge, which were all honorary citizens. One century later, a fourth group representing artisans was added.

The Ajuntament of Barcelona is located at the Plaza of Saint Jaume, in the building that hosts the municipal governor of the city since 1372. It shows elements of various époques. The front of the Ajuntament is Gothic. The Hall of Hundred is still kept in its original space.

The Church of Saint Justus and Pastor

A Parish dedicated to the young martyrs Justus and Pastors and considered the oldest parish of the city, built in the 14th century. From 1345-71 it was remodeled in Gothic Catalan style.

The chapel held the arms of the city it held for the rights it had concerning the chapel and its altar, made by Count Borell II in 965. There are also weapons of the Requesens family which were the protectors of the Chapel and promoters of its famous altar piece of the Holy Cross.

Three privileges of the Sant Feliu altar are recollected in the chronics of Saint Pere of Puelles, the source of nearly all literary legends of the Church: the Jewish battle, the Jewish oath and the sacred will.

The Market

The market was created at the exterior part of the wall, facing the major port. It was an open space, which was wide and, above all, widely used. It gave towards the northeast. From here, crossing the Merdancar river, roads originated that went towards the Saint Maria del Mar (Silverware street) and towards the Rec (Boria street). In contrast with the old roads that coincided with the "cardo maximus" and the "decumanus" of the city, the market became the nucleus that united everyone who walked in that direction. The names of the roads, streets and places now all relate to the names of the products that were sold there at the time (wool, oil, millet etc).

The market was first mentioned in 989. Initially, fresh fruits were sold there, as well as artisan products, livestock, pepper and even slaves.

In the early 14th century, the market space became smaller, as markets emerged in other parts of the city as well. Primarily cereals were sold there then and consequently the market was called the Plaza del Blat (the "Wheat Square").

Plaza del Blat

The "Wheat Square" was the center of the city, the place from which the city was divided into squares, as there was a large cylindrical stone on the upper part that guided the administrative division of the city into four different parts. This stone was the axis of those divisions.

A little further towards the east, close to the Plaza de l'Óli (the "Oil Square"), was the Plaza de Llana (the "Wool Square") named after the place where wool spinners were sold, that were spinning in the corners there. In one corner, wool was spun and in the other it was resold. A street was also named after this Plaza, the carrer de la Llana ("Wool Street").

Therefore, the new town of the market was the center of urban activities until the end of the 15th century, when action was moved to the Plaza Sant Jaume.

The Ribera: neighborhood of the guilds

During the 13th century, the city grew immensely outside its own walls. In the Ribera neighborhood, known as "Vilanova del Mar" at the time, ships were constructed and a variety of products imported and exported. Workshops of the arts and crafts of the period were reflected in the names of the streets. It was characteristic of the medieval era that people working in a certain trade resided in the street named after that trade. They were assembled in guilds, which in war times each had their own space in the wall reserved for their defense.

When somebody joined the guild as an apprentice, he first achieved the rank of a Fadri and then took an exam in order to become a master of the art. The majority achieved this at the age of 25.

The construction of the Saint Maria del Mar was made possible through voluntary work on behalf of the porter guild, which were dedicated to the uploading of ships and which would transport the stones necessary for the construction of the church up until the Montjuic mountain.

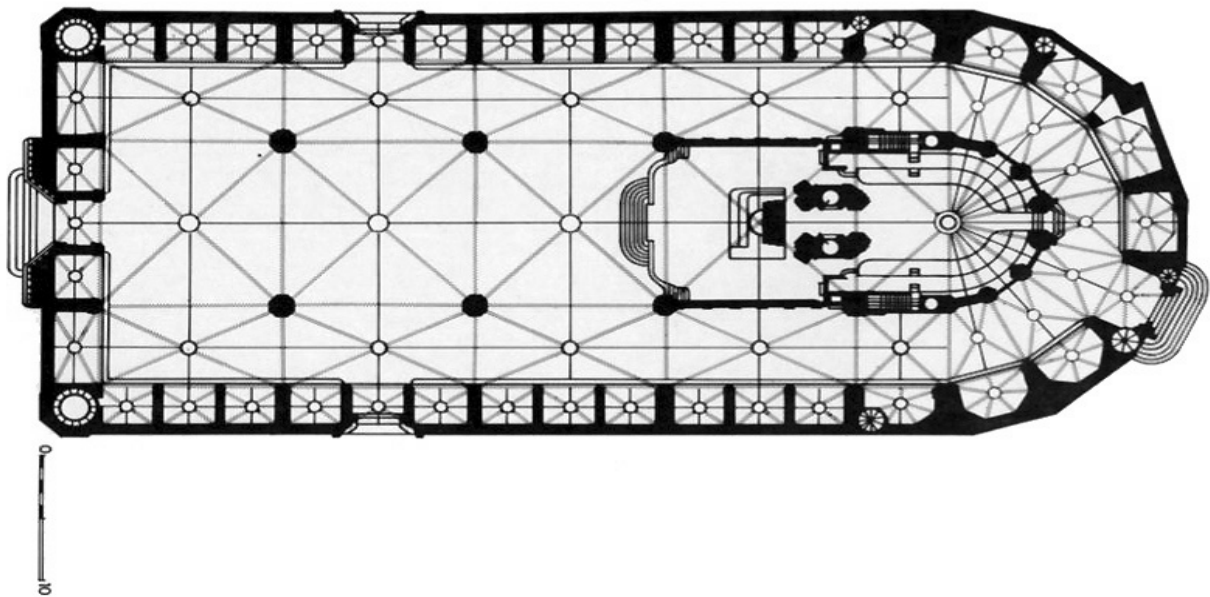
In the 15th century, they joined the Council of the Hundred.

In the Montcada street, the palaces of rich merchants and nobles were constructed.

Santa Maria del Mar

The Santa Maria del Mar was constructed between [1329](#) and [1383](#) by [Berenguer de Montgut](#) and [Ramon Despuig](#).

Its construction began on March 25, [1329](#), as can be conferred from what is said on the headstones of the portal. A remarkable fact, which was upheld until today, is that the church belonged solely to its parishioners, the only ones responsible for the materials of the temple. It seems that the entire population of the Ribera participated in the construction of the church. The merchants contributed in economic terms, the porters loaded and dismounted the stones, the fishermen and simple people used their own hands, shoulders and boats to transport the stones to Montjuic. The walls, the lateral chapels and the façade were finished in around 1350. In [1379](#), close to finishing the fourth part of the scaffold, the bastion caught fire and important stones were damaged. Ultimately, on November 3, [1383](#), the keystone was put in place and the first mass was held on August 15, 1384.



Passeig del Born

A rectangular plaza that was of particular importance for Barcelonan life between the 13th and 17th century.

Urban festivals were celebrated here, such as fairs, tournaments, processions and the carnival.

The property located at nº 17 was built in the 14th century and was restored respecting the original architecture of the époque.

Palaces on the Montcada street

These are palaces constructed between the 13th and 18th century. Initially, these palaces were dominated by the military nobility of the house of Aragon. Later on they were occupied by rich merchants of nearby businesses. In the 15th and 16th century, the Council of Hundred used them to host their illustrious guests.

The palaces constructed in the medieval era are:

•**Nº 15** Berenguer d'Aguilar, 12th and 15th century. In the 15th century it was restored by the Aguilar-Junyent family, whose weapons are reflected in the windows and patio.

•**Nº 23** 15th century, is the oldest building on the street.

•**Nº 12** of Marquise de Llió, contains remainders of the 14th century, and was reconstructed in the 18th, transformed in the 19th and 20th century. It currently holds the collection of the Textile Museum.

•**Nº 14** 14th or 15th century, contains elements of a tower, with a gate and window. In the 19th century, it was replaced by a neoclassic gate.

Picasso museum: nº 15 'casa Berenguer d'Aguilar' (1963), nº 17 casa del Baró de Casteller' (1970), nº 19 'Palau Meca' (1999).



Chapel of Marcus

Despite having a flat roof and being united with a Baroque house, the chapel still retains a Romanesque character. It was built by Bernat Marcus, amidst orchards. A Roman road was running in front of it. Dating back to the 12th century, the facades, hanging arches and its high steeple were conserved. Dedicated to the Mare de Déu de la Guia it became the headquarters of the Confraternity Post, an important union of the time.

La Bória

Neighborhood in which dying and bleaching industries were established (Rec Comtal), linked to the present district of San Pedro.

In this quarter, there are many streets related to the textile industry: assaonadors, blanqueria, flassaders, plaça de la llana, etc.

The Carders street was an ancient road, important as an outlet for the land, where establishments dedicated to communications were located.

Going towards the Marcus street at Carders road, at gate nº 12 we find the INN OF GOOD LUCK, which dates back to the 17th century.

In the Carders street we can still see a medieval shop, which sells bells. In its windows, there are oil luminaries, chandeliers, candlesticks etc. This street connects the "Wool Square" with the "Marcus Square".

Textile manufacturing was the largest sector of Barcelona's medieval crafts, with a great female character, such as yarn, silk, weavers, shoes and hats seamstresses. At the "Wool Square", there was a market with spun wool every Saturday morning. The shape of the plaza is irregular and three streets converge below its arches: the candle arch, the Semoler and the Boquer street. Today we can observe that nearly all streets hold the names of various trades.

To finish our visit of this neighborhood, we walk towards a short ancient street named Boria. It goes from the Plaza de la Llana towards the Plaza de l'Àngel, an old Roman road that entered the city through the main gate.

Flor del Liri (Lily Flower) Street

In this street, the first breastfeeding agency was established, a branch of the Lily Flower Inn, which hosted women offering the service coming from outside. Breastfeeding as a way of earning a living was already documented in Roman Barcelona and was practiced up until very recent times.

Breastfeeding women held an important place in medieval Barcelona: they nurtured the children of women of a certain societal standing that were not in the habit of feeding them themselves.

Breastfeeding was the most lucrative female profession within the domestic realm.

Their work was highly regulated and confirmed in contract by a notary.

Therefore, quitting a contract before it ran out was penalized with a substantial fine or prison term.

The crisis

But Barcelona also experienced some difficult times: the pest, or Black Death, arrived at the port of Barcelona in 1348 and a number of subsequent epidemics also took a grand number of its inhabitants. Social tensions appeared all over: in the countryside there were revolts of the peasants against their feudal lords, and within the city a succession of clashes occurred between the rich families monopolizing the city's government (centered around the "party" of Biga) and other sectors of the city such as artisans, merchants etc (also part of their own organization, the Busca).

From the late 15th century on, the crisis became apparent in the entire Mediterranean. The discovery of America displaced the center of commerce towards the Atlantic. Barcelona lost a good part of its maritime activities.

The Raval was not spared either. Even though it theoretically would have continued to grow at the rate of the city, the political, economic and demographic crises resulted in the Raval being basically uninhabited during the subsequent centuries.

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Camp d'Aprenentatge de Barcelona
Pg. Mare de Déu del Coll 41-51
08023 Barcelona

cda-barcelona@xtec.cat
www.xtec.cat/cda-barcelona

