



ROOM 6

The Cemetery and the gravestones

All the original stones showed in that hall come from the old, and only, cemetery the Jews had on one of the hills of the Montjuïc mountain, which is referred to in a document dating to the first years of the 13th century. At the moment of the expulsion in 1492, the goods and property of the Jewish communities, including the cemeteries, being as they belonged to the King, were entirely at his disposal to do with whatever he thought fit. In spite of this, in Girona, Joan de Sarriera, General Bailiff of Catalonia since 1468, appropriated the Jewish cemetery through a notarial document in the form of a donation made by the Jews in appreciation of the benefits they had received from him. The result of this deal is the group of inscribed tombstones coming from the *Torres* of Palau Sacosta, a huge, fortified mansion, property of the aforementioned Joan de Sarriera. The mansion was built around these dates and quite a few of the tombstones proceeding from the Girona Jewish cemetery were reused in the construction **1**. Later, other stones were reused in other places while some remained abandoned in the Montjuïc cemetery or nearby.

From the first years of the 17th century until the middle of the 19th century scanty news, some of which is found in the roots of popular legends such as the *enchanted box*, informs us of the discovery of graves and tombstones from the old cemetery. With all this, it is not until the 1860s when a true exploration and collection of all this dispersed material begins, thanks to the efforts

and will of scholars such as Enrique Claudio Girbal or Father Pita and of institutions such as the Commission of Historic and Artistic Monuments of the Province of Girona or The *Real Academia de la Historia*. This effort resulted in the creation of the Archaeological Museum of Girona, inaugurated on February 9, 1870 of which the tombstone collection formed an important part.

The Hebraic lapidary series, inherited from this first museum and now exhibited in those halls, constitutes one of the few important collections, which has been preserved. Its significance is derived not only from its quantity of tombstones but also from its variety, richness and quality of the inscriptions, which make up this group.

This collection of tombstones can be classified into two large groups. On the one hand, large stone blocks of which the inscription occu-



1 Picture of the Torres de Palau, detail of roof with Hebrew gravestones; *Patronat Call de Girona*

PUT IT BACK IN ITS PLACE, THANK YOU

pies only a part of the surface, and, on the other hand, a series of *stelae* of smaller format and with a more concise text. The large blocks date from the 12th century to the year 1371. These large tombstones were probably in use until 1391, the year of the violent riots, which collapsed a good part of the Jewish communities. From that moment on, the smaller, less costly, *stelae* were used.

The text of these inscriptions includes different elements of which the name is the only thing that can never be left out. The rest of the elements, praise of the deceased, the date, the age and the final blessings, can, but do not have to, appear in the epitaph according to the criteria of the one who drafted the text or the one who inscribed it. Among the eulogies directed to men, the terms *charming*- common among young men, *wise*, *honorable*, or *distinguished* prevail. Among those referring to women we find, *honorable*, *honest*, *just* and *pious*. Death, to them, meant, as shown in the inscriptions, leaving for the last resting place, a return to the celestial community in order to reunite with their people, their ancestors, in order to wait, all together, for the final destiny corresponding to each one. The final blessings insist in the necessity of eternal rest, in Paradise, under the protection of their

Rock (=God), of their Saviour **2**. It is this confidence in God that we find reflected in one of the inscriptions:

I always lead a quiet life and I achieved many things. That is why, now that I have reached the end of my days and I have been called to return to my origins, my light still surrounds me.



2 Image in mourning and eve; *Italian Haggadah*, 15th C; *British Library*, London.