

# MEDIEVAL GIRONA

SALA 1

EN

## 1. A STRATEGIC ENCLAVE

The city's inclusion within the Frankish Empire in 785 created a direct link between the city and the European centres of power. This determining factor in Girona's history, shared with the rest of Old Catalonia, represented the confirmation of its status as a key part of the kingdom, a strategic site set within a border that looked south until the end of the 12th century. Later, however, danger came from the north, such as in 1285, or from elsewhere, such as in 1462, against the backdrop of a civil war.

## 2. THE SHAPE OF THE CITY.

The middle centuries of the Middle Ages saw the resurgence of the city. The influx of the rural population to Girona, attracted by the city's trades and commerce, meant that the city had to spread far beyond the boundaries set by the ancient walls. The city grew along the main access routes into the city, around the market and within the protection of churches and monasteries, until completely new hamlets and neighbourhoods were built. As a result, between the 12th and 14th centuries, the urban area covered by Girona grew to four times its original size.

## 3. THE MECHANISMS OF URBAN EXPANSION

The king and ecclesiastical institutions, headed by the bishop, controlled the process of expansion by granting plots of lands for construction to certain agents through regulated contracts (emphyteutic leases). The new owners therefore became real estate promoters, a role which was dominated by the prosperous bourgeoisie. They developed tracts of land, divided them up and then sold plots and courtyards to third parties with leasehold contracts. Each buyer built on their plot and became the usufructuary in charge of all of the physical aspects of the property, much like today.

## 4. THE DOMESTIC HABITAT

In medieval cities, and in particular around the Mediterranean, there was little space set aside for privacy. The workers plied their trade in the streets and the doors and windows of the houses were left open throughout the day. Every aspect of life could be seen and heard. Private and domestic lives were conducted with very little intimacy. The majority of activities related to the maintenance of life were performed in the houses: acquiring food, clothing, bedding and articles for comfort for the members of the family. In fact, the home is where people were born and died.

## 5. LIFE IN THE HOME

One of the main concerns of women in medieval Girona was the home. Girona women dedicated a large part of their days to chores in the home and to the family: they would go fetch water, keep the fire lit in their homes, make bread, mend clothing, etc. The most privileged would delegate these chores to their servants, or, on occasions, to their slaves. Family relationships were also built in this living space, although sometimes outsiders would come along. In the rooms and bedrooms, the women would take care of teaching the children and looking after the sick and the elderly; the children would learn and have fun, and the men and women amuse themselves by reading, playing, sewing or simply looking out through the window.

## 6. AID AND CHARITY.

The lower classes of medieval society consisted of the poor or *nihil habentes*, those without means to earn their living, put bread on the table or a roof over their heads. This group included people without money or employment, the sick, the elderly, widows and orphans. Despite being marginalized, society saw it as their responsibility to provide for these groups and give aid to help them survive. Aid to the poor was an opportunity to exercise Christian charity while, at the same time, ensuring social peace.

## 7. PEOPLE'S NAMES

As people only had a single name, there was a great variety of names. From the 11th century onwards, this wealth of names began to decrease as double names became more common, with combinations of names with the father's name, names with their place of residence and names with trades. Gradually, these complements to the name became fixed as surnames. In the case of women, the surname was taken from their father or husband. The use of nickname and aliases was also common. This panel contains a game of "soup of letters" where you can find the more common names in Medieval Girona.

## 8. CONFLICTS

Medieval society was far from being egalitarian, and both in Girona as well as its surrounding areas there were always all kinds of protest. Certain groups who tried to separate themselves from a situation of extreme dependence would usually put the structures that governed Girona society in doubt. Revolutions led by an unhappy population, who in general were exhausted by the severe subsistence crisis, broke out in the city area. In the rural area, the most noteworthy revolution was provoked by the *remences* ("serfs"), which had a huge repercussion on the city of Girona.