

GIRONA IN MODERN TIMES

The Girona of modern times was always one of the capitals of the Principality of Catalonia, despite the fact that during the course of this period it diminished in relative importance, at least in terms of population. From the second half of the 17th century onwards the city also became a strategic stronghold, mainly as a result of periodic wars with France. Thus, the bustling city of the 16th century, specializing in the production of woollen fabrics, had by the second half on the 18th century turned into a military capital.

1. GIRONA, CAPITAL OF DRAPERY AND CRAFTSMAN

In early modern times, textile manufacturing and leather and metal work were the city's main activities. In the second half of the 16th century, the three sectors together accounted for more than half of the employed population on the census. Meanwhile, the proportion of merchants, shopkeepers, master builders and carpenters ranged from 20% to 25% of the total. The Girona of the time was, however, a capital of drapery, that is, a city specializing in the manufacture of woollen fabrics of varying quality and consistency.

However, like other Catalan cities of the period, Girona "deindustrialized" rapidly from the early 17th century onwards. On part due to competition from the "Atlantic fabrics": the so-called new draperies of England and the Netherlands. But also because Catalan textile manufacturing became more rural and concentrated in areas regionally far from Girona. (towards Anoia, Osona, Olot and the surrounding area).

The urban employment structure is revealing: not only did the number of textile workers fall, but the jobs that disappeared were precisely those related to manufacturing, while shopkeepers, tailors and milliners grew in correlation. In the meantime, other trades also increased, such as those related to construction, while others, such as the food industry, diversified significantly (with the first appearance of "fideuers" – or noodle makers – towards the end of the 17th century).

2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Governance of the city was regulated for some time (under a Royal privilege granted in 1345) by means of a system of sortition and registration of honourable citizens divided into three "classes" (higher, middle and lower), and the weighted (that is, in favour of the higher class) annual appointment of a certain number of councillors (six at the beginning, and four following the municipal reform of 1576).

However, as a result of combined pressure from the urbanized nobility and their ilk, the local patricians or cives, the municipal government in 1601 ended up admitting noblemen or "military men" (as they were also known), always from the higher class, of course, who also had the guarantee from the on of one the two places on the council reserved for higher class citizens (while the middle and lower classes had to settle for one place each).

3. RELIGION

Religion was all but ubiquitous in modern Girona. The city was the diocesan capital, and the Church had also for some time been the largest owner of leased urban land. Its influence increased, however, following the so-called Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reformation during the second half of the 16th century, which, in Girona like everywhere else, sooner or later meant the arrival in the city of the most important religious orders, starting with the Jesuits (1581), Augustines (1584), Barefoot Carmelites (1591) and the Minims of Saint Francis of Paola (1611), receiving more or less support from a local aristocracy that did not neglect its obligations to the Church. However, religion was at the same time the context – or even the excuse, one might say – for urban, aristocratic or popular sociability and civic festivals, with their intentional mixing of classes, despite the inevitable hierarchy of rank. Devotional confraternities of laymen, under ecclesiastical guidance but formally independent, united knights, merchants and artisans under one religious devotion, encouraging charity among brothers; they always appeared at the front (or slightly behind, depending on the established rank) of all local processions, a sign of the importance of religions as a form of civic socialization, blessed by the municipal government as well as the Churches.

4. THE BAROQUE CATHEDRAL

The great transformations in religious architecture of the city arose from the initiative of bishops and priors. Bishops Pijoan and Fageda promoted the completion of the Gothic nave of the cathedral and the erection of its imposing Baroque façade. But the most remembered figure is that of the bishop Miquel Pontich, responsible for the completion of the magnificent staircase of the cathedral. For his part, Bishop Tomàs de Lorenzana culminated the baroque scenery of the city with the construction of the chapel of Sant Narcís and the erection of the hospice, both projects linked to the academic ideology of the architect Ventura Rodríguez. With these projects, the sacral space of Girona acquired the Baroque physiognomy that characterizes it even today.

Sant Narcís and the flies.

The famous miracle of Sant Narcís and the flies, supposedly occurred during the summer of 1285 in the siege of the city of Girona by the troops of French king Felipe the Bold, it lost the original meaning (the divine alliance of King Pedro against the pontifical interests and Francófonos) and adopted a new meaning that condemned the sacrilegious action of the invading troops that profaned the tomb of the saint. It is not surprising, therefore, that the miraculous power attributed to the saint will be recalled again years later in the siege of the French troops to the city during the summer of 1653. Without taking into account the effect of heat on bodies without a life of the fallen soldiers on the battlefield, a notarial record drafted by French soldiers in Sant Feliu de Guíxols insisted on the extraordinary nature of the behavior of the flies and, of course, the defeat. That act, spread by the Girona people in several Spanish cities through the printing press, served to put in value the martyr of Girona. That is why, since the end of the s. XVI and throughout the s. XVII succeeded the initiatives to promote their worship and advocacy throughout the peninsula. The canonization of the saint took place in 1638 and in 1680 it was possible to extend its cult to all the territories of the Hispanic monarchy.

5. GIRONA, MILITARY STRONGHOLD

The mid-17th century Reapers' War or War of Secession (1640-1659) and its outcome had immediate consequences for the city of Girona. The signing of the Treaty of the Pyrenees (1659) between the monarchies of France and Spain, and the subsequent transfer of Perpignan and the country of Roussillon to the French crown, moved the political and military border between those two monarchies closer to Girona. From that time onwards, systematic fortification work began on both Girona's city and its mountain (Montjuïc). First, with the immediate construction (1654-1655) of the Mercadal urban bastions: those of Santa Clara, Sant Francesc and Areny; and on the south side, Mercè. And then with the erection of Montjuïc Castle (completed after 1675) and its surrounding towers (Sant Joan, Sant Narcís, Sant Daniel and Sant Lluís) and Fort Condestable, which was equally or more decisive, strategically speaking.

The War of Succession

In the early 18th century, the War of the Spanish Succession between the Austrians and their allies (Britain, Holland, Portugal) and the French Bourbons (1705-1714) ended up as a flight to defend Catalan institutions and freedoms. During the second phase of the conflict, the city and its fortifications were unable to withstand the onslaught of the Bourbon armies (18.000 men) led by the Duke of Noailles, which besieged and conquered Girona in early 1711 following a month of resistance (by only 2.000 men). Montjuïc Castle had capitulated at the end of the previous year, and the French had also been able to install a battery of twenty cannons at Puig d'en Roca hill. The pro-Austrian counterseige or blockade of the following year, which began in April, came to nothing, defeated at the end of that year by the Duke of Berwick, who arrived in Girona with an army of 20.000 men.

6. A CITY WITH A "NUEVA PLANTA"

The *Nueva Planta* decree (1716) promulgated by Philip V put an end to the traditional model of urban government – the sortition of urban classes – and meant the delivery of governance – now, the city council – into the hands of a few councillors appointed for life or directly by the monarch or his representative, the Capital General, and selected from among the local oligarchy of proven loyalty to the Bourbons. Philip's victory also meant the introduction of a new taxation system levied on property and people: the hated and initially very onerous "catastre" or poll tax, which added to the traditional fiscal burden.

At the same time, the city filled up with soldiers. In 1723, according to some sources, there were no fewer than 3.000, and that among a local population of perhaps 5.000 at most. Military dwellings, then, posed the city's main problem for decades. Attempts were made to alleviate the situation by building more barracks (those of Santa Clara and Els Estudis in 1723), and later, Sant Agustí (1727) and Sant Pere (1729). Finally, the military authorities opted to grant money for domestic accommodation.