

# PARVA GERUNDA

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## 1. PARVA GERUNDA: ROMAN GIRONA

*Gerunda* became a Roman-type city when Augustus granted it Latin Rights (*ius Latii*) in the years 15-14 BC. Its location on the Heraklean Way (Via Heraclea), absolutely controlled from the fortified urban centre, represented added value for a balanced and rich territory which was easily accessible and open to the sea. These circumstances help to explain its consolidation, the emerging role it held throughout the High Roman Empire and its subsequent further growth during the Later Roman Empire and Late Antiquity. It was in this latter period that the Heraklean Way (*then Via Augusta or Via Publica*) became the main link with Septimania, the trans-Pyrenean region that remained part of the Visigoth kingdom until its conquering and occupation by the Arabs.

The walls around Roman cities had both a defensive and symbolic function, as they demarcated the *pomerium*, the sacred perimeter of the urban centre. The walls of *Gerunda* were erected when the city was founded and are built from large irregular-shaped blocks of limestone (*opus siliceum*). At the end of the third century AD, the gateways were reinforced with the addition of flanking towers. These reforms can be seen clearly in the use of large square sandstone blocks (*opus quadratum*).

## 2. THE WAYS

From the fourth century BC onwards, Rome awarded great importance to the construction and maintenance of a network of roads linking the capital with all the provinces. This network was not only a military tool for territorial control, but also a key element in trade and effective vehicle for Romanization.

## 3. THE STREETS

The urban centre of *Gerunda* was orthogonal in shape, comprising a network of perpendicular, parallel streets distributed according to predetermined distances and defining the equal and uniform *insulae* (blocks of houses).

The complex topography of the site, with a slope of 60m over a distance of around 310 metres, explains the difficulties posed with regard to direct circulation from the *cardo maximus* (now Força Street) towards the east, which required the use of steps and steep ramps. Squares were key to the smooth running of the urban centre, and in addition to that of the Forum, the city had others such as Lledoners Square.

## 4. CIVITAS

The *civitas* was the political and administrative centre of a region, but also a commercial and industrial centre. There was therefore an abundance of all kinds of establishments to meet the essential needs of the people (bakeries, laundries, markets), as well as others more aimed at leisure and entertainment (spas, theatres, brothels).

## 5. DOMUS

Urban dwellings had various forms according to the social status of their occupants, ranging from modest apartments located in apartment blocks (*insulae*) to aristocratic *domus* that could occupy large areas. The larger *domus* were not simple residences, as many social and even political or economic activities took place there. To fulfil these functions, the family rooms were combined with other areas designated for receiving clients and visitors.

## 6. CONSTRUCTING MOSAICS

In order to make a mosaic, once the theme had been chosen the foundations had to be properly prepared to give the work consistency and strength. If a room is paved for the first time, a series of layers comprising different elements were laid in the following order: first, a layer of well-pressed earth; then a layer of rough stones or pebbles (*statumen*); then a layer of lime mortar with ceramic fragments (*rudus*), which acted as glue for the stones; and finally a layer of mortar 2 to 5 cm thick (*nucleus*), on which the tiles – previously cut and selected for the predesigned image – were quickly arranged. The result was a durable, solid pavement of considerable thickness, virtually indestructible due to all the layers being so strongly bonded together,

## 7. DESCRIPTION OF A MOSAIC FROM CAN PAU BIROL ROMAN CIRCUS

The circus mosaic is one of three mosaics found in the villa of Can Pau Birol. It is 708 cm long and 342 cm wide, and can be dated back to the late second half of the third or early fourth century. The elements of the mosaic reveal it as the *Circus Maximus* in Rome, which became the largest such construction in the ancient world. It was 650 m long and had a capacity for 250,000 spectators. As well as the shapes of the circus itself, the mosaic also depicts the race. In fact, this symbolic race is a *singularum certamina*: that is, only the one chariot participated per faction. Factions were the teams that raced in the Roman circus. They were distinguished by the colours of the tunics worn by the charioteers.

## 8. THE FORUM

The **Forum** was the civic square, the heart of the city. It was a large open area around which the urban fabric was arranged. The city's major temples were therefore built here, but also the most important civic buildings, such as the *basilica* (law courts), the *curia* (the government building), the *tabularium* (archive), and often the public baths. It therefore served to centralize the city's religious, political and economic life and retained, through the enormous concentration of inscriptions and statues, the authentic historical memory of the community. If the city did not have ad hoc buildings, the *Forum* also hosted the elections, the *ludi scaeni* (theatre plays), the *venationes* (animal hunting and slaying) and gladiatorial combats (*ludi gladiatori*). The peculiar topography of *Gerunda* meant the *Forum* had to be built on two levels: the upper terrace was used for the temple, while the lower area was presided over by the law courts. This layout has survived the passage of time, with the Cathedral now where the Roman temple once stood, and the Palace of Justice (Casa Pastors on the site of the old Roman basilica).

## 9. SUBURBIUM

This is the name given to the ager of the *ciuitas* closest to the urban centre within a theoretical circle of about six kilometres radius around the *pomerium*. Due to its privileged position, it was a place that enjoyed the advantages of both urban and rural life. This was usually the site of the necropolises, lined all along the roads, as well as small industries, cottages, quarries and farms of all kinds. The limited size of the city meant that the wealthiest Romans wanted to build their homes outside the *pomerium* amid the countryside and nature, but close enough to the city to reach it easily.

These suburban villas effectively fulfilled a dual function: on the one hand, they were authentic mansions of great luxury, and on the other, they were farms located in a privileged area.

## 10. CEMENTERIES

We know more about these than we might think. The most important were arranged along the main roads, and archaeological findings have confirmed the existence of some decorated mausoleums made from Domeny-Taijà stone. Up until the third century, it was common to leave very simple offerings to accompany the deceased, but from the fourth century onwards this custom became more exceptional.

## 11. SARCOPHAGI

From the second century AD onwards, inhumation became the most common system of burial. The wealthy used sarcophagi, often decorated with mythological scenes (such as the Rape of Proserpina) or from everyday life or with an effigy of the deceased. Christians opted for biblical scenes or symbolic elements such as the Chi Rho or the Good Shepherd.

## 12. VILLA NEGOTIUM

The villa was not only a place of rest, but also, and above all, a centre of business operations. Next to the main dwelling there were therefore a number of specialized buildings used for different business activities, such as wine and oil presses, cereal stores, stables for livestock and other facilities with more industrial and artisanal equipment, such as kilns or looms.

## 13. BEFORE THE THOUSAND YEAR

From the end of the third century until well into the fifteenth century, the perimeter walls of Girona underwent no major changes. By contrast, however, the political and social structures were modified according to the various empires the city was subject to and the mental and spiritual changes experienced by society, including the arrival and consolidation of Christianity. From the fourth to the seventh century, Girona formed part of the Visigoth kingdom; it fell under Andalusian Muslim control at the beginning of the eighth century and was liberated by the Franks in 785. During this entire period, the city maintained its status as a strategic point in geographical, political and economic terms. In the ninth century, Girona entered its most glorious period, the Middle Ages, which was such a fruitful period on all levels that it earned the nickname "the key city of the kingdom".