



Open Access to a Memory of the World Document at the Municipal Archive of Girona

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The inclusion of the Llibre del Sindicat Remença of 1448 in the Memory of the World Register was the reason for creating a web resource to publicize the document, which was a precedent in the fight to abolish medieval serfdom.

The *Llibre del Sindicat Remença* of 1448, kept in the Municipal Archive of Girona (AMGi), is the first Catalan document to have been included by UNESCO (in June 2013) in the Memory of the World Register.

It is a precedent of the Arbitral Sentence of Guadalupe, by which serfdom was officially

abolished for the first time in 1486 (although there had been calls for it in other parts of Europe). Moreover, it expresses the wishes of the unfree peasants (*remences*) from a large territory, which makes it exceptional. This uniqueness was the reason for the document's candidature to be included in the Memory of the World Register.

The Unesco Memory of the World Register

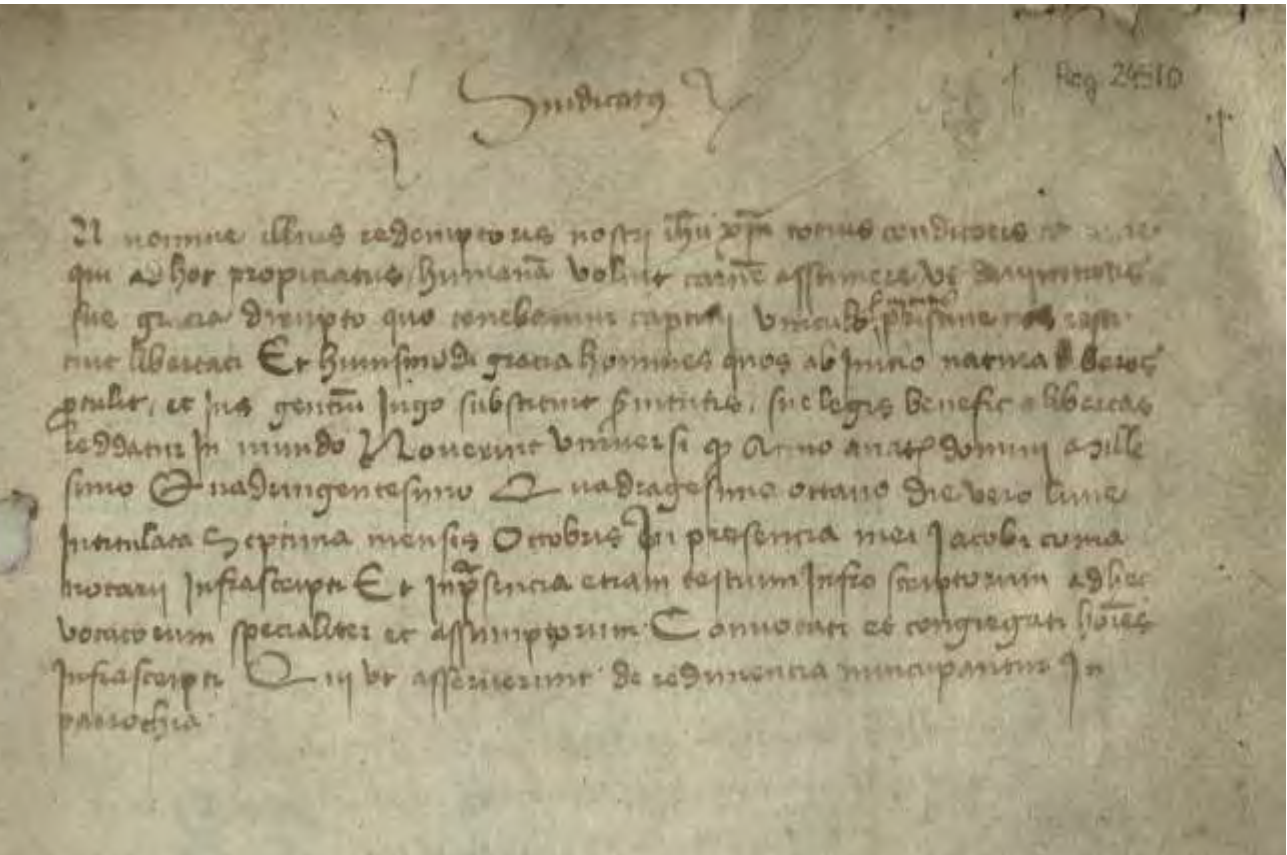
In June 2013, the International Committee of the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme, meeting in Gwangju (South Korea), agreed to include the *Llibre del Sindicat Remença*



Llibre del Sindicat Remença de 1448
Cover.
AMGi, Girona
City Council
Collection



Along with the explanatory panels, the exhibition displays a facsimile of the book, and by using a touch screen its digitization can be consulted. Moreover, it has a computer on which searches can be made in the indices of people and places,



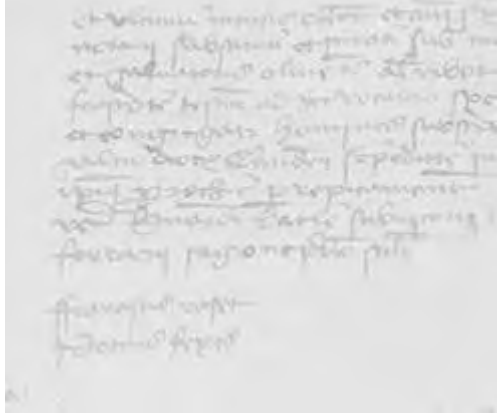
*Llibre del Sindicat
Renaça de 1448, f. 1.
AMGi, Girona City
Council Collection*

of 1448, kept in the Municipal Archive of Girona, in the Memory of the World Register.

The Memory of the World (MOW) Register is a programme created in 1992 by UNESCO aimed at the protection, preservation, access, and dissemination of documentary heritage. Its goal is to promote and preserve from collective amnesia the key documents for understanding the evolution of mankind.

The programme highlights the role of the world's documentary heritage in guaranteeing mankind's shared memory. The documents and the collections of documents included in

the register are assessed from multiple angles: an evaluation is made of their importance for the world (as testimonies to fundamental historical and social events), their authenticity, their technological innovation, their artistic quality or exceptional nature. The register therefore includes all kinds of documents on all kinds of supports: texts written on parchment, paper, stones, or leaves; photographic collections; films and sound documents, and so on. They come from every continent; they are registered in every language; they are documents that make up and bear witness to the historical evolution of societies throughout the world.



Throughout its 21 years of existence, this prestigious register has distinguished, for example, the manuscript of the declaration of the *Communist Manifesto*, the documents that made the adoption of the decimal metric system possible, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, the first *Declaration of the Rights of Man* and of the Citizen, Bunuel's film *Los olvidados*, the *Song of the Nibelungs*, the *Diary of Anne Frank*, Tolstoy's archives, and the *Gutenberg Bible*, printed in 1456, eight years after the meetings of our remences. In 2012 there were 245 documentary items included in the *Memory of the World*. With the new inclusions of June 2013, the register exceeded 300. Included along with our *Llibre del Sindicat Remença* of 1448 were, among others, the *Susrutamhita (Sahottartantra)* manuscript from Nepal, a compendium of traditional medicine from Southern Asia written on palm leaves, and Buddhist texts written on precious stones from Mongolia.

The Llibre del Sindicat Remença of 1448

In 2012 the Municipal Archive of Girona, with the help and collaboration of the Friends of UNESCO in Girona (Dolors Reig) and UNESCOCAT (Miquel Essomba and Onno Sero), began working on the application to have the *Llibre del Sindicat Remença* of 1448 included in the Memory of the World Register.

The *Llibre del Sindicat Remença* is the first Catalan document to have been included in the Memory of the World Register. This fact must be used to publicize this book and the rest of the documents referring to the struggle of the Catalan *remença* peasants (serfs) and for them to be studied in depth and compared with other contemporary movements of the same kind.

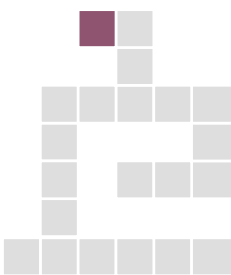
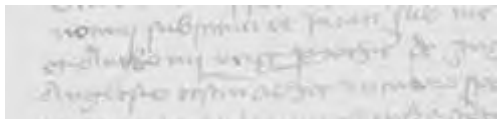
Who were the remences?

In the Middle Ages, a large number of Catalan peasants were *remences* (serfs): men and women who were forced to live and work on a farm. To free themselves they had to pay a redemption, or "*remença*", to their lord. Moreover, they were subject to other forms of servitude, known as *mals usos*.

The lord could keep part of their land if they died childless or without leaving a will (*eixorquia* and *intestia*); he could also lay claim to it if their farmhouse burnt down (*arsia*). He also had the right to receive part of the *remença*'s assets when he got married (*ferma d'espoli forçada*) and to punish him if his wife was found guilty of adultery (*cugúcia*).

After centuries of serfdom, at times not much different from slavery, in the mid-fifteenth century the peasants began to organize and demand its abolition before the king and queen of Catalonia. Despite their hesitancy – the monarchy was afraid of confronting the great feudal lords – Alfons IV and his wife and regent Maria took the first steps in favour of the *remences*. On 1 July 1448 Alfons IV issued a provision by which the peasants' demands were legalized: he authorized the holding and the money-raising efforts of the *Sindicat Remença* of 1448, which led to an interlocutory sentence being issued in 1455 in which forms of servitude were suspended. However, pressure from the feudal orders (nobility, Church and urban patriciate) prevented it from being introduced.

Finally, after two revolts of the *remences* (1462 and 1482) and the Catalan Civil War (1462-1472), on 21 April 1486, King Ferdinand II enacted the Arbitral Sentence of Guadalupe. This put an end to the *mals usos*, although it maintained the lords' rights over the farms. In



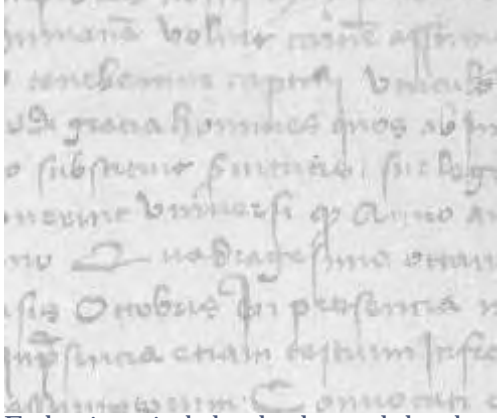


*Llibre del Sindicat
Remença de 1448,*
f. 78.
AMGi, Girona
City Council
Collection

return, the peasants had to pay the lords compensation and a fine for having rebelled. To make it possible for the peasants to raise the money for the compensation, the Gran Sindicat Remença of 1488-1508 was set up, studied by the historian Jaume Vicens Vives.

Demands such as those of the *remences* took place all over Europe throughout the fifteenth

century, but it was in Catalonia where serfdom was abolished officially for the first time in 1486 through the Arbitral Sentence of Guadalupe. In this respect then, the *Remences' War* was the first organized peasants' revolt that succeeded in Europe. The *Sindicat Remença* of 1448 is a precedent of it.



What does the *Llibre del Sindicat Remença* of 1448 contain?

The *Llibre del Sindicat Remença* of 1448 is a document handwritten in Latin between 1448 and 1449. It is written on paper, has parchment covers, measures 31.5 x 25 cm., and contains 237 folios. It is kept in the Municipal Archive of Girona, and is part of the Girona City Council Collection.

It includes the minutes of the 553 meetings held by the *remença* men and women, or serfs, from 912 parishes in the Catalan dioceses of Girona, Vic, Barcelona, Elna and Urgell, in order to appoint their syndics, or representatives. They had to negotiate the abolition of the *mals usos* before the king, Alfons IV the Magnanimous, and collect the money needed to pay the serfs' redemptions. The meetings were held from 13 October 1448 to 10 March 1449 and were attended by 10,425 people.

King Alfons IV had authorized these meetings on 1 July 1448, specifying however that no more than 50 men could meet at one time and that there should always be a royal official or delegate present and a notary to record the minutes in order to testify and grant legal validity to these meetings and the decisions made.

As all the meetings dealt with the same matter, on the first folios of the book there is the communal declaration to which the *remences* committed themselves. This introduction is one of the most interesting and innovative elements of the document: the reasons that moved the *remences* to meet and organize in order to achieve the abolition of serfdom are put forward in it. "*The mals usos are in all senses, absolutely abhorrent to the laws of nature, to the Scriptures and to the divine obligations*" [fol. 2r].

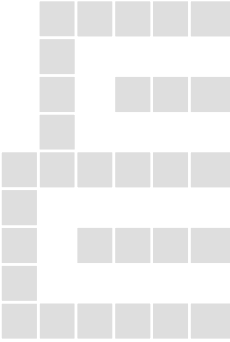
Each minute includes the date and the place where the meeting was held, the system used to summon the men of the *remença*, the royal official and the notary present at the meeting and the names of the men who gathered in each parish. The meeting place was usually the parish church, but also the town square, the cemetery, the lord's castle, the *sagrera* (area of sanctuary around the church), or private houses. Normally the men were summoned by the beating of drums, the pealing of bells, the blowing of horns, and by sounding the alarm ("viafora").

The notary Jaume Coma was given the job of compiling all the minutes that were sent to him by the other scribes scattered around the territory. These notaries were accompanied by royal delegates, messengers, bailiffs or constables, with the task of drawing up the lists of the *remença* census of 1448.

How important is the *Llibre del Sindicat Remença* of 1448?

As we have seen, the objectives of the 1448 syndicate were not achieved. Nevertheless, it served as a basis for the drafting of the *Gran Sindicat Remença* of 1488 (kept in the Archive of the Crown of Aragon and analysed by Jaume Vicens Vives), produced to obtain the financial compensation to be paid to the feudal lords upon the abolition of serfdom as decreed by the Arbitral Sentence of Guadalupe, and which this time did mean giving the serfs their freedom.

The *Sindicat Remença* of 1448 is thus the forerunner of the Arbitral Sentence of Guadalupe of 1486, by which peasant servitude was officially and legally abolished for the first time in Europe. As Professor Paul Freedman of Yale University points out, in other places such



as England peasant servitude gradually disappeared, but was never abolished by law.

According to Freedman, the *Sindicat Remença* of 1448 was in some ways a forerunner of today's trade unions, as associations of people from the same grouping or social status that organize to defend and stand up for their rights. It is for this reason that it may be considered an important milestone in the struggle for the achievement of human rights. Moreover, it expresses the wishes of the unfree peasants from a large territory, which makes it exceptional.

In this respect, it is one of the first examples of political recognition of an underprivileged group: it acknowledges for the first time the unfree peasants' negotiating power. The 1448 syndicate allows us to learn the names and places of origin of the ordinary people who were calling for the abolition of serfdom. It is they who some years later led the *remences* revolt, which, although it cost them dearly in terms of lives, was also a victory in the sense that it led to the abolition of serfdom.

Also innovative is the way in which the serfs formulated their demands, as they compared their view of serfdom with the view of academic jurists. The latter justified the origins of serfdom as being due to the Christians who had not collaborated with the Carolingian troops when they expelled the Muslims. On the other hand, the serfs attributed the origins of their servitude to an injustice: that of not allowing the Muslims converted to Christianity to be freed from slavery and, therefore, that of perpetuating slavery in Christians who – in their opinion – had the same right to be free.

Therefore, the *Sindicat Remença* of 1448 also represents a historic landmark in the demand for human rights: although at the time they only acknowledged the rights of all Christians, they were standing up for everybody's right to be free.

Strategies for the dissemination and reuse of documentary heritage

The *Llibre del Sindicat Remença* of 1448, as a document kept in the Municipal Archive of Girona, is part of the city's documentary heritage. Its inclusion in the Memory of the World Register multiplied its dimension and explicitly made it part of the world's heritage. With this categorisation, the objectives of any public archive to preserve, make known, and guarantee access to the documents kept in it became more obvious.

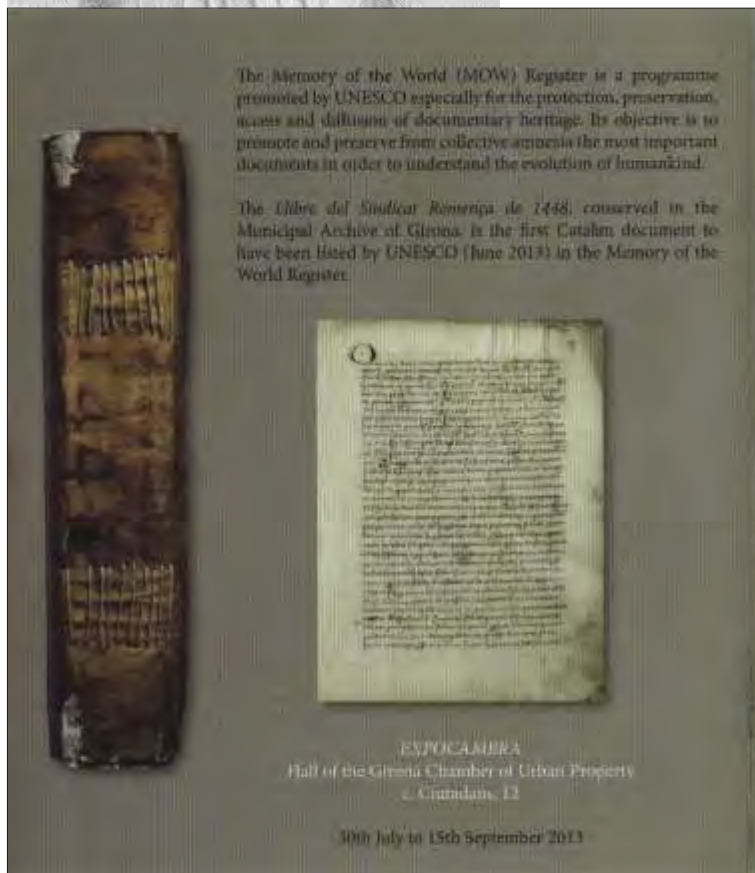
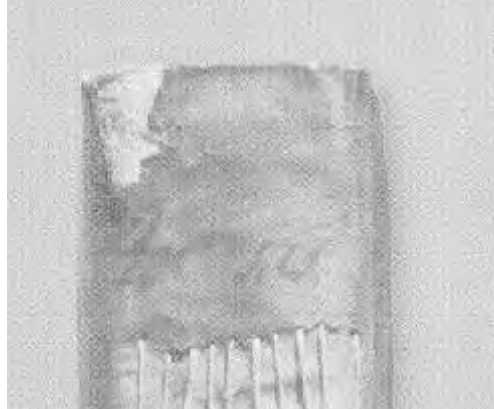
Inclusion in the register requires paying special attention to the document, its conservation, and its dissemination. As soon as the inclusion was notified, work began on an informative dossier on the *Llibre del Sindicat Remença* of 1448 to be distributed to the press and also made available to any interested citizens, in the city of the Girona but also on a national level: it was the first document produced in Catalonia to have been included in the Memory of the World Register.

At the same time a strategy of dissemination began to be designed that was focused, above all, on the creation of a web resource – linked to the Municipal Archive of Girona's website, to allow it to be consulted and reused – and on the production of an exhibition to inform the public of the existence and importance of this document.

Moreover, this inclusion in the UNESCO register should also be used to bring to the attention of scholars all over the world not just this book, which is the precedent, but the rest of the documentation referring to the struggle of the Catalan serfs. It may therefore be studied in depth and compared with other contemporary movements of this kind, and thus contribute, with more new data, to the study of medieval social movements and economic and political organizations.

In this respect, we felt it necessary to allow the document to be viewed and consulted online via the web. The book was fully digitized in colour by the Municipal Archive of Girona's Digitization Unit, at a resolution of 300 dpi, in uncompressed TIFF format. Consultation files were made from these in PDF, a format in which the text documents on the Municipal Archive of Girona's website are viewed. But the names of the people at the meetings recorded in the *Llibre del Sindicat Remença* of 1448 and the places where they were held have also been catalogued, transcribed, and indexed. We were thus able to present the digitization of the document and the transcription of its pages.

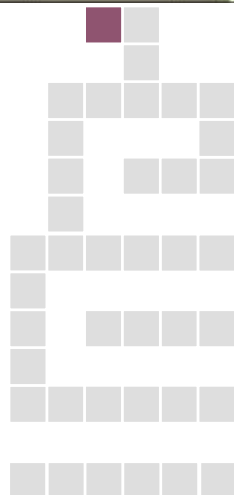
Consultation of the book on the web makes it possible to view the digitized pages and at the same time search for the transcriptions. As a basic platform we have used Pandora, a free text search engine and database. The search can be made via free text on the transcriptions that have been previously indexed, based on the data of the documents and on the indices of personal and place names. The result of the consultation also makes it possible to view the digitized page along with its transcription. The digitized pages are presented via an interface that simulates the two pages of the original book and makes it possible to turn the pages

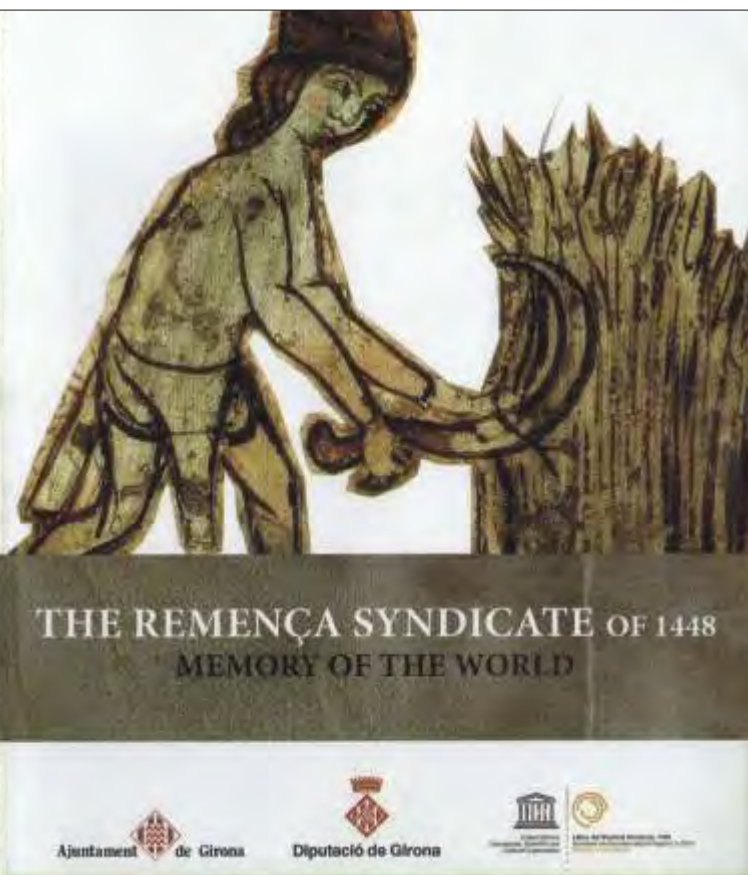


comfortably and zoom in. The transcriptions can be consulted and downloaded as PDFs.

The book can be consulted via the Municipal Archive of Girona's website document search page, but also through a specific resource about the document. In this resource, linked to the same web, more detailed information is also offered on the *remença* peasants, the content and the importance of the book and the Memory of the World Register.

Besides facilitating the online consultation of the document, an exhibition on the *Llibre del Sindicat Remença* of 1448 was put on in the city





Access to the web resource

http://www.girona.cat/sgdap/cat/recurs_remenes.php

of Girona from July to September 2013. After that, the exhibition visited different towns in the Girona region and it is now installed in the city of Elne (France), the episcopal see of the diocese that was part of the Catalan-Aragonese Crown in the Middle Ages.

Along with the explanatory panels, the exhibition displays a facsimile of the book, and by using a touch screen its digitization can be consulted. Moreover, it has a computer on which searches can be made in the indices of people and places. From these the digitized pages and the transcriptions of the meetings can be accessed. This is, perhaps, one of the

El Sindicat Remença de 1448
Exhibition panels, Girona, 2013
Design: Josep M. Oliveras;
Texts: Joan Boadas, Anna Gironella.

aspects that the exhibition visitors find most attractive: the possibility of getting to know the people of a town in the fifteenth century or of looking for their ancestors among the different Catalan dioceses.

The *remença* question affected several dioceses in Catalonia, and Catalans now see it as a historical moment of utmost importance. Tributes have been paid repeatedly to the protagonists of the *remença* revolt and numerous streets and squares have been named after them; however, the thousands of men and women who gave their initial support have up to now been anonymous.