
A Brief History of the University of Barcelona

Montserrat Fullola Pericot



UNIVERSITAT^{DE}
BARCELONA

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FOREWORD

The University of Barcelona has a rich and eventful history that dates back to 1450, the year it was founded. This continues to the present day; it is now one of the leading academic institutions in Europe, acknowledged for both its research and teaching work and its continuing capacity for social revitalization. Over the last 567 years there have been many vicissitudes, and this short book offers a highly readable summary of the different events that have shaped the University and the people who have in one way or another played a part in its history. And while the University of Barcelona is always looking firmly towards the future, to contemplate its history is to understand not only the difficulties and the adversities of each period, but also the determination and the commitment of countless people – some well known and others, anonymous – who have made the University what it is today.

A few years ago the Catalan edition of this brief history of our university appeared thanks to the efforts of two vice-rectorships, encouragement that we wish to acknowledge and repeat with the Spanish and English versions of this magnificent book. Its author, Montserrat Fullola Pericot, is well acquainted with two great works that tackle the past and present of our institution in greater scope and detail: *La Universitat de Barcelona. Libertas perfundet omnia luce* and *La Universitat de Barcelona. Història dels ensenyaments (1450-2010)*, both by Josep Maria Fullola Pericot, Francisco Gracia Alonso and Jordi Casassas Ymbert.

Besides these two reference works, several other very beautiful books provide accounts of the University's long history and cultural richness: *Els tresors de la Universitat de Barcelona. Fons biblio-*

gràfic del CRAI de la Biblioteca de Reserva, a collective work by more than 60 authors; *Barcelona sense Universitat i la restauració de la Universitat de Barcelona (1714-1837)*, by Ferran Soldevila, with forewords by Jordi Casassas and Enric Pujol; and *La Universitat a Cervera*, coordinated by Pilar Mateo.

Now that the 1991 edition of *La Universidad de Barcelona* by Josep Termes, Santiago Alcolea, Jordi Casassas and Ernest Lluch is out of print, there is an obvious need for new versions of the story in Spanish and in English, like the one we are presenting here. The story begins with the founding of the University in 1450, and touches on its closure and relocation to Cervera in 1714, its restoration in 1837, its role during the Second Republic (1931-1936), the impact of the Civil War, and the dark years of the Franco dictatorship. It goes on to the first free students' assembly in 1957 – a milestone that was to mark the beginning of the modern era – and the famous *Caputxinada* in 1966, and continues to the reinstatement of university autonomy in 1985, which began with Badia i Margarit as rector and was consolidated during the terms of office of Josep M. Bricall and Antoni Caparrós. This brings us to the years of our contemporary history, in which the university has expanded, modernized, and has reached out to all areas of our advanced, productive society, with a critical and constructive spirit.

The University of Barcelona has been a point of reference for many generations. I believe that it is important to remember this, at times like these when something of a re-evaluation is being made of the future and the role of the University. Beyond discussions of specific aspects, the University of Barcelona has played a fundamental part in the many processes of transformation and shaping of society. And it is important for it to continue to do so. Never forget that the university community is at its best when it is made up of people who love all aspects of knowledge and learning.

JOAN ELIAS I GARCIA

Rector of the University of Barcelona

PRESENTATION

As the signatories of this presentation of Montserrat Fullola Pericot's book, it is our wish to clearly stress the importance it has for the dissemination of our history as an institution. Summarizing more than 550 years of intellectual and academic history in a few pages, and placing it within everyone's reach, is no easy task, but the book that you are now holding in your hands accomplishes this very effectively.

Several studies have been devoted to the history of the University of Barcelona, the latest of which, coordinated by the authors of this presentation, is still very recent (2008-2010). However, this book should not be regarded as a mere synthesis of those that have preceded it; the author has clearly left her own personal mark on it, as she not only summarizes the events but also facilitates our understanding of many of the episodes that were explained at great length, sometimes in scholarly fashion, in previous compilations.

This is, therefore, a book that achieves the objective for which it was designed by the University of Barcelona's Linguistic Services. The intention was to give our Catalan university community, and the people closest to us abroad, a new resource with which to learn about the oldest and highest academic institution in the country. This, in our opinion, has been achieved.

We would like many people to have access to this book, from both outside and within our university, including young lecturers, administration and services personnel, and students in general,

who will now be able to satisfy their interest in learning about the origins of the institution in which they work or study. For historians like us this interest seems basic and elementary, but it is not always so obvious; we therefore think that placing knowledge of the past within everybody's reach is a very important achievement for those of us who work at the University of Barcelona. And, needless to say, for our society as well, which will undoubtedly be grateful to have a well-written summary of the history of what until half a century ago was the only academic institution in the country, and which still retains the privilege of being the oldest one, leading the way on our perennial journey into the future.

JORDI CASASSAS

JOSEP M. FULLOLA

FRANCISCO GRACIA

Professors and historians of the UB

Barcelona, November 2014

THE ORIGINS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA

The University of Barcelona is one of the two oldest surviving institutions in Catalonia. The other is the *Generalitat*. Founded in 1450, the University has over 560 years of history and has been shaped by the same events that have marked the history of Catalonia as a whole.

The origins of an ancient institution

To understand the University's history we must return to its origins in the medieval world of guilds and consider both the economic transformations of urban society during that period and the philosophical and technical advances that were being made in the Middle Ages. These changes created a clear need for an institution that could provide a higher level of education.

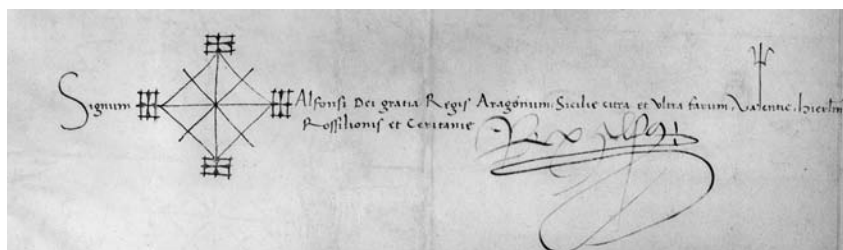
As was the case with most universities founded in the medieval period, the *Studium generale*, or University of Barcelona, marked the culmination of a process of educational, cultural and institutional development whose origins can be found in the cathedral schools of the High Medieval period. As early as the twelfth century, Barcelona already possessed several civil and ecclesiastical schools that covered its most basic educational requirements. Those students with the means to do so, however, left Barcelona for cities with prestigious *Studia generalia*, such as Bologna and Paris.

The first higher learning institutions in Catalonia were the *Studia generalia* of Lleida (1300), Perpignan (1349) and Girona (1446).

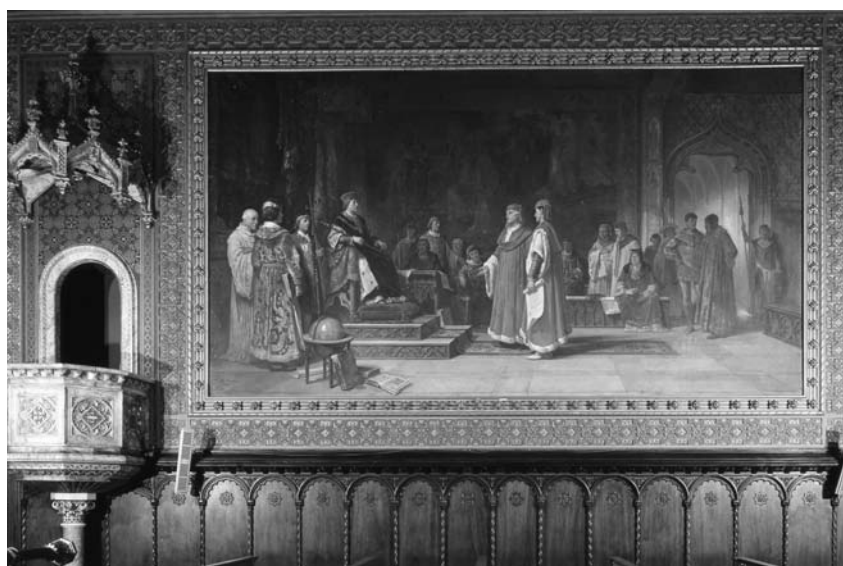
In 1402 King Martin the Humane established centres that would eventually become the *Studium generale* of Medicine and the Arts. However, 1450 is regarded as the University of Barcelona's year of foundation since it was then that King Alfonso the Magnanimous, with the authorisation of a papal bull, granted Barcelona the privilege of establishing the *Studium generale*. It was not until 1508 that the first ordinances (the rules that would govern the new institution) were passed and university studies in Barcelona became fully consolidated. In 1536 construction began on La Rambla of the first of the institution's buildings, and in 1559 the various faculties were brought together in one location. To this day, the upper stretch of La Rambla is still known as the *Rambla dels Estudis*.

Despite its prominence in the history of our institution, 1450 was also a year that saw the emergence of several factors that hindered the work of the *Studium generale* over the remainder of the fifteenth century. These included a social and economic crisis that afflicted the whole of Catalonia, repeated protests from academic authorities at the *Studium generale* in Lleida, who wished to retain their monopoly on university studies, and the problems arising from the civil war during the reign of John II (1458–1479) that led to the Rebellion of the Remences.

From the mid-sixteenth century onwards, the faculties of Arts, Law, Canon Law, Medicine and Theology were able to work more freely. The Faculty or School of Arts, which received all of its funding from the city council, held professorial chairs in Grammar, Logic, Natural Philosophy and Moral Philosophy, and the Faculty of Medicine held chairs in Surgery, Anatomy and Practice. The innovative organisation of the Faculty of Medicine allowed it to grow rapidly, increasing the number of medical chairs from three in 1559 to eight in 1586, placing it on a par with the University of Valencia and exceeding the number held at the prestigious University of Salamanca, which had only six. Barcelona was quick to adopt the latest trends in medical knowledge and



Seal and hand-written signature of King Alfonso V on the founding charter of the *Estudi General*.



Ricard Anckermann Riera (1842-1907). Showing the councillors of Barcelona as they petition Alfonso V for the Royal Decree on the creation of *estudis generals* or *universitaris* in the capital of the Principality of Catalonia. Assembly hall of the Historic Building.

practice, and the growing importance of studies in this discipline created a need for premises in which dissections could be conducted. In 1573 the Hospital General de la Santa Creu (known as the *Theatrum Anatomicum*) was founded, although it was not ful-

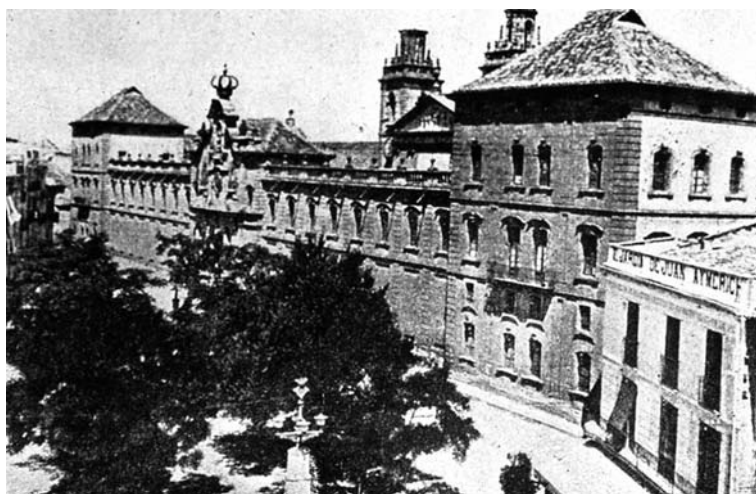
ly equipped until 1675. The Hospital de la Santa Creu, which had been created in 1401 by combining the six medieval hospitals in the city of Barcelona, was located in a magnificent Gothic building in the Raval district, which is now home to the National Library of Catalonia.

1714–1717: the University of Barcelona in exile

The year 1714 marks the beginning of another key period in the history of Catalonia and the University of Barcelona. In the War of the Spanish Succession, when the crown was disputed by the Austrian and Bourbon dynasties, Catalonia sided with the Habsburgs. During the siege of Barcelona by the Bourbon forces, the *Studium generale* participated actively in the defence of the city as part of the urban militia *La Coronela*. Many students who died in combat were buried in the Fossar de les Moreres.

Following its defeat the War of the Spanish Succession, Catalonia lost its independence and all of its institutions under the terms of the Nova Planta decrees passed by the Bourbon monarch, Philip V. In the same period, Barcelona lost its right to offer university studies following a decision to transfer the University to Cervera, in the present-day *comarca* of Segarra, which was intended, in part, to prevent the violent student disturbances that had affected the city. In 1714, therefore, Catalonia lost rights that would not be recovered until the last years of the Second Republic and were not fully consolidated until 1978, when democracy was restored after the death of General Franco. It was only then that the University could embark on the final part of its journey to becoming the higher education institution we know today.

The Bourbon victory in the War of the Spanish Succession began a period of hardship for Catalan universities, and reformists went so far as to advise Philip V to abolish every university in the Principality of Catalonia. Drawing on the heritage of the existing universities, the reformists intended to create a powerful,



The University of Cervera.

modern university system along the ideological lines of enlightened absolutism, which had become prevalent in that period. Serious efforts were being made to rationalise higher education systems throughout enlightened Europe, and central political authorities were beginning to take a direct interest in the work of higher-learning institutions. After 1714, therefore, and despite direct opposition from the Catalan authorities, the universities in Lleida, Barcelona, Girona, Tarragona, Vic, Solsona and Tortosa were unified to create a new university in Cervera. From 1717 onwards, the University of Cervera was the sole provider of higher education in Catalonia.

During the one hundred and twenty years in which Barcelona had no university, other institutions such as the Jesuit *Collegi de Cordelles* and the Dominican convent of Santa Caterina took on the responsibility of imparting high culture. The creation of the College of Surgery, the establishment of studies in Navigation, Geography, Fine Art, Cartography, Mathematics and Astronomy under the sponsorship of the Board of Trade, and the creation

in 1806 of the Royal College of Pharmacy (which functioned along similar lines to a university faculty) made decisive contributions to restoring higher education to the city. In Cervera, meanwhile, ideological struggles between conservative and reformist academics ultimately led to support for the Ancien Régime, laying the foundations of a dialectical confrontation between Barcelona and Cervera in the period 1815-1837.

The return to Barcelona and the Historic Building

The return of the University from Cervera to Barcelona was a slow process, tied as it was to the success of liberal reform, which was finally achieved in 1833 with the death of Ferdinand VII. In 1837, a royal order granted permission for the transfer, although urban riots and the turmoil caused by the First Carlist War delayed its completion until 1842. The University found it difficult to settle in the city on its return, not only because of on-going political tensions but also due to the difficulties of finding a suitable location. Progress was also stalled by the slow and difficult effective establishment of university studies within a coherent system of higher education in the Spanish liberal state.

Despite the situation in Barcelona, in 1842 the Faculty of Canon Law merged with the Faculty of Law to create the Faculty of Jurisprudence. In the following year, under an innovative plan drawn up by Pere Mata, Medicine, Surgery and Pharmacy merged to form the Faculty of Medical Sciences, and in 1843 a plan was announced to reform the Faculty of Philosophy with the introduction of four-year general preparatory studies in Sciences and Arts, which were to be taken prior to any other degree. At this time, however, the positions of rector and of representative for the University Board of Delegates were still appointed from Madrid.

The University of Barcelona continued to extend its range of courses and to increase student numbers. In 1850 the degree in

Industrial Engineering was launched, with tuition initially shared between Barcelona, Madrid, Seville and Bergara. From 1860 until 1868, Barcelona and Madrid shared the privilege of offering this subject at the higher degree level, and from 1868 until the end of the nineteenth century Barcelona was the only city in Spain where the degree could be taken. In 1851 the *Escola de Mestres d'Obres* (the school of master builders) was created with a view to increasing the level of professionalisation of this important trade, the skills of which had generally been passed from father to son. In 1874 the corresponding studies were integrated into the academic structure of the new School of Architecture, reflecting the importance of these disciplines in the rapid industrialisation and urban development of Barcelona in the mid-nineteenth century.

The period of greater freedom known as the Democratic Sexennium led to changes across the whole of the Spanish university system. Student numbers at the University of Barcelona rose to the highest levels recorded in the nineteenth century, increasing from 1,100 in 1863 to 2,600 in 1869.

It can be argued that this period marked the real consolidation of university education in Spain, as studies were established and teaching positions became more clearly regulated. Reflections on the nature of the university institution made by rectors in their start-of-year addresses illustrated the aspirations and challenges of a new model: new disciplines, the university's role in scientific progress and the creation of a modern society, and the role that modern society should play in the broader consolidation of democratic freedom. Barcelona needed a new university as far removed as possible from the institution that had been transferred to Cervera in 1717.

This period was notable for the consideration given to important issues such as academic and scientific freedom, the independence of teaching practice, the University's relationship with the authorities and public opinion, and its role in inspiring young people and concern regarding the education of women and the

working classes. A comprehensive new process was under way that addressed not only ideological and economic change but also the matter of the University's location. Until the new building was constructed outside the city walls (1860–1882), faculties were housed in the disentailel Convent del Carme, where classes were taught in extremely poor conditions. The collapse of a roof, which severely injured three people and killed one, had far-reaching repercussions and led to calls for the construction of more suitable and spacious premises. In 1874, the University's new building, which we now call the Historic Building, was opened on the Plaça de la Universitat.

The project for the construction of the building was awarded to the architect and University of Barcelona professor, Elies Rogent. However, we must also mention here the plan by Barcelona town planner Ildefons Cerdà who, in 1861, when the definitive location of the new building was to be selected, was completing the layout of Barcelona's Eixample district for a commission awarded in 1859. Cerdà intended to construct a large square that would open onto the junction of Gran Via and Passeig de Sant Joan, where he wanted the University to be located. However, the view was taken that Cerdà's plans would move the University too far away from the traditional home of higher education in Barcelona, and Rogent himself preferred a more central location. The matter was finally settled at a meeting with the rector on 1 August 1861: Gran Via would continue to be the central axis, but the site would be moved to the west of Ciutat Vella, where the building would occupy an area belonging to the State at the junction of what are now the Ronda de la Universitat and the Ronda de Sant Antoni, opposite the entrance to Carrer dels Tallers.

Rogent finalised his plans in 1862 and began the construction of his neo-romantic palatial design, drawing clear inspiration from the German romantic classicism that influenced his work. However, the construction process was extremely complex, and the half-complete building was twice occupied by the military, who