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SECRET

BARCELONA

JonGlez

LOCAL GUIDES BY LOCAL PEOPLE

STATUE OF THE BLACK MADONNA OF MONTSERRAT

Plaça de Catalunya
• Metro: Catalunya

1



As an Eastern proverb says, the protruding nail attracts the hammer. Passing unnoticed and blending in is sometimes the best way to survive.

The Virgin of Montserrat in Plaça de Catalunya is a good example. The story goes that she was saved from the wave of anticlerical fervour and iconoclasm unleashed by the anarchists in Barcelona at the beginning of the Civil War (1936–39), as they failed to even notice her. Otherwise the statue would probably have been melted down or smashed with a sledgehammer. She survived unscathed to comfort many Catholics who murmured a clandestine prayer each time they passed. Today she still stands beside the stone benches lining the square near the Aerobus stop.

The Montserrat sculpture by Eusebi Arnau (1864–1934), of which the Virgin forms part, was installed in 1928 during the work carried out in Plaça de Catalunya for the International Exposition of 1929. The sculpture commemorates Brother Joan Garí, who according to legend was tempted by the devil and committed a horrific murder in the 9th century. Repentant, he wandered in the mountains of Montserrat, becoming a hermit, eating herbs and drinking rainwater to obtain God's forgiveness, which was granted when the Virgin appeared to him in a mountain cave.

“ **A miniature Black Madonna saved from the anarchists** ”

MYSTICAL PLAQUE AT NO. 22

6

Carrer d'Estruc, 22
• Metro: Catalunya



Another protective talisman

Until the late 20th century, Carrer d'Estruc had a bookshop stocking anthropological curiosities that had always belonged to the Estruch family. It sold all kinds of strange artefacts that the owner had brought back from his extensive travels.

Eventually this unique bookshop closed and so the last vestige of this mystical Jewish family disappeared.

A souvenir still remains in the form of a plaque at No. 22, which indicates exactly where the famous “viper’s stone” was sold (see previous double-page spread).

The plaque is another mystical talisman that shows a snake at the centre, linked to the bite remedy (see opposite) and the Hebrew names used to invoke the powers of the Most High (*Tetragrammaton Jehova*) and the Angel of the Saviour (*Jelah Emmanuel*).

Note also that the numbers of buildings along the street appear on the plaque, bordered by Kabbalistic symbols that are actually magic seals, common in the practices of esoteric rabbis of the Middle Ages. They were inspired by the spellbooks of the medieval *Clavicula Salomonis* (Key of Solomon), composed of thirty-six charms formed from the sacred names of Judaism, the names of archangels and astrological signs. According to this tradition, the symbols represented here acted as a protective talisman for the neighbourhood.



SYMBOLISM OF THE SNAKE

Symbolically, the snake represents both death and evil that must be overcome by a virtuous life in the service of others, but also renaissance, as can be read in the Bible (Book of Numbers), where although land snakes sent by God were thought to have destroyed many in Israel, the chosen people found life again through the snake, following the instructions the Lord gave to Moses: *Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.* [Numbers 21: 6–9].

Thus the snake nailed to a Tau Cross became the symbol of the Kabbalah. Recovery from its bite meant the domination of the “venomous snake”, spiritual enlightenment through the awakening of the inner light, as Moses was bathed in light coming down from Mount Sinai after meeting with the Lord Jehovah. The Hebrews called those who were spiritually enlightened *nahas*, similar to the Hindu *nagas*. The two terms mean “serpent” and in this case the Serpent of Wisdom that heals, illuminates and grants immortality to whoever looks upon it.



EROTIC SCULPTURES AT PALAU DEL LLOCTINENT

Plaça Reial
• Metro: Catalunya



Self-indulgent angels

Charles V's palace was built under the supervision of Antoni Carbonell following a decree by the Monzón (Aragon) Parliament in 1547. From 1863 to 1993 it housed the Archives of the Crown of Aragon. Although Lluís Domènech was responsible for modernizing the facilities at Palau del Lloctinent in 1987, a major restoration was carried out between 2002 and 2006.

This building, originally the residence of the Spanish *lloctinent* (viceroys) of Catalonia, was completed in 1558. So that Charles V could avoid mixing with the common people, a passage led firstly to the royal gallery of the cathedral via a bridge over Carrer dels Comtes (from the street you can still see part of the bridge), and secondly to the Royal Chapel of Saint Agatha in Plaça Reial. Curiously, during the 1987 restoration work a gargoyle resembling the

"Dragon Khan" attraction of PortAventura amusement park was placed where it can be seen from the courtyard.

As he was not on good terms with Jaume Cassador, the Bishop of Barcelona, Charles V had erotic sculptures set around the palace to scandalize the canons as they approached what was then the main entrance to Barcelona Cathedral in Carrer dels Comtes – Sant Iu's door.

One of them shows a *putto* (nude and chubby child) inserting a bellows into the anus of another, who seems to be taking pleasure in it. On this same façade, another *putto* is fellating the enormous phallus of a monster.



CARVED FACES IN EL BORN

3

Junction of Calle de las Panses and Calle de las Moscas
 Carrer de l'Arc de Sant Vicenç – Carrer dels Agullers – Carrer dels Mirallers
 • Metro: Barceloneta



Signs of 15th-century brothels

In El Born district various faces of women or satyrs can be seen carved in the walls. These carassas (a Catalan word for gargoyles, although these are more like mascarons or grotesque masks) indicated to travellers or soldiers passing through town the whereabouts of the nearest brothel. The best-known carassa is a satyr below the third balcony of a building in Calle de las Panses,

at the corner of Calle de las Moscas, a narrow alley that cuts through to the only nearby brothel. The three others are in the streets of l'Arc de Sant Vicenç, Agullers and Mirallers.



Being a port city, Barcelona was visited by hundreds of sailors and foreigners who set off in search of these pleasure houses as soon as they came ashore. The stone faces were the perfect marker, good for foreigners sniffing around as well as the illiterate.

In 1400, a number of brothels were already tolerated and protected by the government, and in 1452 King Alfonso V granted special permission to Simón Sala to open a chain of brothels in Barcelona.

The women worked every day of the year except for the Feast of Corpus Christi and Holy Week. At such times they shut themselves up in their workplaces and covered their bodies so as not to expose the faithful to temptation. They could also retire to a convent behind Santa Creu hospital, which was incidentally where they lived out their days when they grew too old to work – they had to be over 20 before starting.

The numbers of the buildings in which the city's first prostitutes worked were painted red, the colour of passion. Plant motifs were later added to the façades, making them rather too flamboyant, so Philip V decided that only the carved faces should remain as symbols of sated lust.

The brothels were only allowed to have very narrow stairways that would take up less space. These buildings were pejoratively known as casa de barrets, literally “house of hats”, in Catalan.



FC BARCELONA SHIELD

Basílica de Santa María del Mar
Plaça de Santa Maria del Mar, s/n
• Metro: Jaume I

?



Barça in church

On the left of the high altar in the basilica of Santa María del Mar, in one of the windows that in theory date from the medieval Gothic period, a 50 cm by 40 cm Barcelona Football Club shield is displayed.

The shield is the work of artist Pere Canóvas Aparicio, who explains: “This dates from the time when windows damaged or destroyed by the Civil War were restored or replaced. Several windows were ordered from the company where I work as an artist. Some of them are new creations featuring my drawings, others have been restored. For this we were sponsored by a number of organizations. In the late 1960s, it was the turn of this window. Through the textile industry, we contacted Agustí Montal Jr, president of FC Barcelona at the time, who authorized the club to donate 100,000 pesetas, equivalent to about 12,000 euros today. To thank the club, its shield was incorporated in the window. The other windows also feature the insignia of their patrons.”



WHY DOES BARÇA CELEBRATE ITS VICTORIES AROUND FONT DE CANALETES?

The Canaletes fountain (133 Rambla de Canaletes) gained its reputation several centuries ago, at a time when chlorine was not added to drinking water so it just tasted of pure water. The fountain's water ran from a spring through the channels (*canaletes*) of an aqueduct and was of excellent quality. It is said that when the locals wanted visitors to settle in Barcelona they would inevitably take them to taste this water, which made them fall in love with the city and bound them to it forever.

The upper stretch of La Rambla has always been one of the best places in Barcelona to quench your thirst. As large crowds tended to gather there, the end of the 19th century saw small shops opening up where drinks and sodas were sold. In 1908, Esteve Sala, an enterprising businessman and keen supporter of FC Barcelona, set up a new drinks stall next to the fountain that soon became a fixture for other supporters.

In the 1930s, the fans renewed their interest in this corner of the city – when the team was playing away, journalists from the sporting paper *La Rambla* (founded in 1930 by Josep Sunyol, another Barça supporter) wrote the result of the match on a blackboard hung in the window of the editorial offices overlooking Rambla de Canaletes, just above the Nuria bar. Crowds of fans were anxiously waiting in the street below, and if luck was on their side they took the opportunity to celebrate the victory in style.

The newspaper folded after the Civil War and the drinks stall disappeared in the early fifties, but the habit of celebrating sporting victories at Canaletes has endured.



FRIENDS OF THE RAILWAY ASSOCIATION

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Estació de França (south entrance)
Carrer d'Ocata

- Metro: Barceloneta
- Tel: 93 310 5297
- Open Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 18.00–21.00,
Saturday, 17.00–21.30
- www.aafcb.org



Miniature trains

Founded in 1944, Barcelona's Friends of the Railway Association (Asociación de Amigos del Ferrocarril de Barcelona) is a dream come true for rail lovers. Located in the south wing of the França station, it occupies three vast rooms.

One holds the library and has specialized magazines, films, and over 4,000 volumes available to members. Collector's items are found in every available space: signals, telegraph machines, old posters, and hundreds of model trains, replicating both famous and little-known engines.

The second hall is open to members who want to run their model trains and feel like real train drivers. The tracks twist and intersect in such a way that the enthusiastic operators must be on their guard and employ some basic skills to avoid an accident in miniature. Finally, there is a conference hall where lectures and courses are held, and rail films and documentaries projected. The most striking aspect of this room is the seating, both for conference participants and the general public, which comes from authentic rolling stock.

The association, in collaboration with the Renfe/ADIF rail company and the Catalan Government Railways, organizes special outings to discover vintage and modern trains. The AAFCB also has its own collection of vintage trains, such as the Garrat 106 steam locomotive dating from 1926, the Berga 31 steam train from 1902 fitted with wooden carriages, and the Patxanga 304 electric train from 1926. During May, June, July, and August, trips on these trains are organized to nearby villages, where a stop is usually made for lunch, the idea being to recreate the ambience of an earlier age.

The association can be visited without pre-booking if you are just passing through. If you wish to join and participate in their conferences, excursions, or become a model train driver, the inscription fee is €30 and the annual fee €98.

There is a similar organization in Paris, with premises located beneath the Gare de l'Est [see *Secret Paris*, in the same collection as this guide].

ANATOMY LECTURE HALL

Real Academia de Medicina
Carrer del Carme, 47

- Metro: Liceu
- Tel: 93 317 1686
- Open Wednesday, 10.00–13.00

“**Barcelona's
secret masterpiece
of neoclassical
architecture**”

Designed by the surgeon Pere Virgili and built in 1760 by Ventura Rodríguez, the P. Gimbernat anatomy lecture hall of Barcelona's Royal Academy of Medicine and Surgery is a little-known masterpiece of neoclassical architecture.

This dark and gloomy place has an atmosphere that can be overwhelming, inviting silence and inspiring respect. The circular hall, while not very large, has a very high ceiling. In the centre stands a marble table equipped with a hole to drain away the blood of the bodies being dissected. Its proximity to the Santa Creu hospital of course made it easier to perform demonstrations on human corpses.

Notable among the operations carried out at the time (1770) was the spectacular separation of Siamese twin boys.

The benches where the students sat surrounded the dissection table. In the front rows were a dozen wooden armchairs reserved for the authorities.

A chandelier hangs from the ceiling and between the high windows are busts of a number of immortal figures from Barcelona's medical world, such as Ramón y Cajal, Servet, and Mata.

The building was initially home to the College of Surgery, then until 1904 served as the Faculty of Medicine. It subsequently became a training school and, since 1920, has belonged to the Royal Academy of Medicine. In 1951 it was listed as a historic and artistic monument of national interest.

Once a year, Catalan writers meet in the lecture hall to “dissect” the Catalan language, discuss the changing vocabulary, the future of the language, and additions to the dictionary.

Visiting is very restricted, with public access on Wednesday mornings only. It is no use trying to get in at other times.

There is a similar hall in London – see *Secret London: An Unusual Guide*, in this collection of guidebooks.

THE TEMPTATION OF MAN SCULPTURE

Portico of the Nativity façade, Sagrada Família

2



“A diabolical
weapon

Catalan society of the late 19th century was deeply divided: much of the population lived in miserable conditions while the rest accumulated vast fortunes. Some anarcho-communist workers chose a “propaganda by deeds” strategy to denounce the dominant political, economic and social system through a terrorist campaign. Orsini bombs, a type of hand grenade designed to explode on impact, were used in various attacks.

On 24 September 1893, for example, Arsenio Martínez-Campos, Captain-General of Catalonia, was wounded by one of these bombs thrown by Paulino Pallás during a military parade at the intersection of Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes and Carrer de Muntaner. Pallás was tried and sentenced to death. When facing the firing squad, he claimed that his comrades would avenge him.

And so it was that on 7 November 1893, Santiago Salvador chose the symbolic site of the Liceu theatre to hurl two Orsini bombs from the gallery into the stalls during a performance of Rossini’s *William Tell*. Mercifully the second bomb failed to detonate, falling into the lap of a woman who had already been killed. But the outcome was still terrible: twenty-two dead and thirty-five injured. Salvador took advantage of the confusion to escape, but was arrested in Zaragoza a few weeks later, in January 1894. He was taken back to Barcelona, tried, sentenced to death, and jailed in the Pati dels Corders at the Queen Amelia prison (in what is now Plaça de Josep Maria Folch i Torres, near Ronda de Sant Pau), singing the hymn to freedom, *Hijos del pueblo* (Sons of the People).

Following the Liceu outrage, part of Barcelona high society saw anarchists – and more generally the working class – as an example of the human soul at its blackest. Two years later Antoni Gaudí, a devout Christian, created a sculpture in a portico of the Nativity façade of the Sagrada Família, *La Tentación del hombre* (The Temptation of Man), showing an anarchist receiving an Orsini bomb from a demon’s claws. As the proverb goes: “Weapons are the domain of the devil.” Gaudí is emphasizing that Orsini bombs are part of that domain.

REFUGE 307

Nou de la Rambla, 169

- Metro: Paral·lel
- Open Tuesday to Friday, 10.00–14.00 • Visits by appointment
- Tel: 93 256 2100
- Admission: €3

4



A historic air-raid shelter

Visiting one of the few remaining air-raid shelters that protected the people of Barcelona during the Civil War can be a terrifying experience. Refuge 307 is a trip back in time, to a conflict that still endures in living memory. The residents of the Poble Sec neighbourhood took refuge there from the relentless aerial bombardment waged by Mussolini's air forces.

The site was discovered by chance during Holy Week 1995, following the demolition of a glassworks that revealed one of the three entrances to the shelter.

Built in 1937, it was one of the best equipped at the time, with electricity provided by a portable generator, an infirmary, sanitary facilities, and water fountains fed by the Montjuïc springs. In theory it could protect 2,000 people from the bombing, but as construction was never finished the actual number is not known.

Over a period of two years, 1,400 shelters were built in Barcelona, 288 of which were in what is now the Sants-Montjuïc district.

Today, little remains but a few scattered ruins. The renovation of the sewer system and the construction of underground car parks saw the end of most of these shelters. Refuge 307 is one of the rare examples to have survived urban development.

It was also the only shelter not to be closed down by Franco's troops. After the war it was used for growing mushrooms, as storage space for a glassworks, and as a shelter for the homeless. It was closed from the 1960s until its rediscovery in 1995.

Today you can visit the shelter accompanied by a guide who explains the main events of the Civil War and the efforts the citizens made to create havens where they would be safe from the terror of the bombs.

NEARBY

A STRANGE FAÇADE

Carrer de Margarit, 30

A stroll through Poble Sec offers some rewarding surprises, such as the allegory of the industrial world on the façade of No. 30 Carrer de Margarit – a medallion depicting a woman leaning on a cog wheel.

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DIPÒSIT DE LES AIGÜES

18

Pompeu Fabra University
Carrer de Ramón Trías Fargas, 39

- Tel: 93 542 1709
- Open Monday to Friday, 8am-1pm, Saturday, 8am-2pm
- Metro: Ciutadella Vila Olímpica

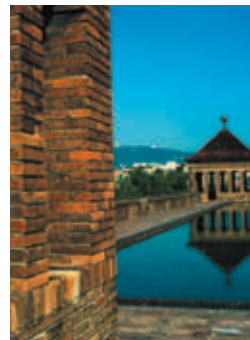


*One
of the best-kept
architectural
secrets
in Barcelona*

The Dipòsit de les Aigües (Water Deposit) is one of the best-kept architectural secrets of the city. The building, inspired by the Mirabilis Roman baths, was constructed in 1880 by the architect Josep Fontserè. It was designed as a reservoir for water, hence the vaulted ceilings and brick walls resting on forty-eight pillars.

But over the years it has been used as a retirement home, a fire service warehouse, a film studio, an improvised hospital during the war, and finally, a university library.

In the 1970s, Pompeu Fabra University bought the building, thinking that it was an ideal opportunity to expand its facilities. Architects Lluís Clotet and Ignacio Paricio were commissioned to transform the space and adapt it to the needs of a library.



Apart from the effect of the million books stored here and the powerful architecture, the library has another distinctive feature. Silence is of course the norm, but if you listen carefully, the roaring of lions and tigers can be heard through the huge windows. This is no illusion, the library is next door to Barcelona Zoo.

NEARBY

TÀPIES' CONTEMPLATION ROOM

19

In Pompeu Fabra University, a few metres from the library, is a very strange “contemplation room.” In this lay chapel, there are no saints or gods to be worshipped, but simply two canvases: *Díptic de la campana* and *Serp i plat*, both works by Antoni Tàpies.

This room, designed by the Catalan sculptor and painter, contains some twenty chairs fixed to the wall.

The original idea was to create a space where visitors could come to terms with themselves, call upon a personal deity, or just admire two brilliant works by Tàpies in absolute silence. If you would like to visit this meditative space, just ask permission at reception.