

We wish to dedicate this work to the memory of Roser Vallmajó i Trayter, President of Funcació60, author of the idea and this cultural-business project. She died in Girona at 51 years of age on 28 February, 2007.

Here your visit to
Magical Girona begins



42 MAGICAL STORIES

"LEGENDS OF GIRONA"

Einstein said that if you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales. Read your children stories every day, legends, tales and more fairy tales...



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The rights and intellectual property of the marble reliefs as well as the texts of the forty-two legends of Girona appearing in this book belong to Fundació60, which is making them available to the citizens of Girona and its visitors.

This book was published on 23rd April, 2007, on Saint Jordi's Day, in Catalan, Spanish, English, French and German.

An extended edition is planned for 2008, with more of Girona's legends, more marble reliefs, more sculptures, more charm, more magic and more legendary mystery. It is to be edited in Italian, Russian, Dutch, Arabic, Chinese and Japanese, eleven languages in all.

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Preface to the edition

THEME HOTEL OR EXTRA VALUE

In our modern culture of so much mobility –and particularly in so-called cultural tourism– the place you stay in has more and more values attached to it all the time.

Naturally, the world of legends forms part of our collective set of ideas.

So the idea of blending legends and sojourns is along these lines; adding more values, those we are all so often looking for.

Our country is without doubt one of traditions and roots, a country of customs and continuity, of popular trades and identities and of crafts and history.

But it is also a country that goes back a long time, to when our legendary tradition finds its roots in its own ancestral mythology.

Catalan customs, and by extension Catalan legends, are heir to these traditions and are especially fertile. Our written history is widely documented with important names behind it (Joan Amades, Aureli i Maria Aurèlia Capmany) and it has had periods of investigative and informative drive that is connected to the recuperation of identity.

The wealth of our legends can be seen in our regions and also, especially, in the city of Girona, essentially concentrated, –obviously– on the heart of the historical city. Among the many collected together in this current collection, we find religious and irreverent ones, those of cults, historical ones and those with popular roots...

All in all, it is quite a varied, attractive and suggestive selection for a hopeful hotel adventurer.

The building chosen to accommodate the hotel is doubtlessly of great significance in that world between fantasy and tradition, sited as it is on one of the vertebral axes of legendary Girona and very near to where the figure of St. Narcís is recorded.

Two of the legends here described seem to have, in one of their hypotheses, their origin on this actual site, or in these whereabouts.

The building, in its most recent form, was a rented property containing various homes and was extensively modified inside, but it still

had some interesting features that were recoverable.

Another remarkable thing about the building is the persistence of the rather striking elements on the facade, especially on that which overlooks the carrer Portal de la Barca, which is part of later renovation work that introduced large windows and balconies of a certain quality with the aim of ennobling the property.

The current process of work is revealing the presence of still more features, which may bring light to its past and to the written history of the quarter.

The thematic thinking based on the world of legends, as well as the formal definitions in the interior, introduce a very meaningful storyline.

The work's basic proposal is to incorporate this distinctive trait so that it is beyond that of a mere reference and becomes a distinctive part of the restoration of the building itself.

This then is a new line of thinking: an attempt to root the originality of this hotel in popular wisdom.

The information available on the Old Quarter of the city is widely documented and one can follow the story from the first wall of the late Roman period. This drew an irregular, vaguely triangular, perimeter and was not modified until the late 9th Century, with the construction of the Castle of Gironella and an extension towards the Galligans River.

Then, in the 11th Century, a great deal of construction activity took place, both in the interior of the city and around the edges (the Cathedral, Saint Pere, Saint Nicolau, Saint Daniel, Saint Martí, Saint Eulàlia, Saint Susanna...), and likewise building in the Saint Feliu area started.

It was, however, not until the 14th and 15th centuries that the great growth of the city consolidated the building down towards the flatter area. A product of this time, around the middle of the century, was the beginning of the construction of the existing wall and the

new walls which were to encircle a much larger area. Also during that period, the new wall of the Mercadal was being planned, even though it did not actually materialise until the end of the 15th Century.

And, inside this precinct, we now have this whole multitude of monuments, buildings and history in stone, which attract so many visitors today and which the city is struggling to convert into a living city and not into a tourist theme park.

In fact, there is no doubt that the historical centre of the City of Girona, an authentic focus of life and dynamism until the end of the 60's, as Joaquim Nadal has described very well several times, has, since then, had to go through a radical process of transformation and revitalisation. This was after a loss of vitality and was due to the resulting uncontrolled and even anarchic growth which the ambitious general plan of 1970, known at the time as the "Gran Gerona" (Great Gerona), engendered.

The key instrument of the special plan has enabled us to tackle the essential rebirth of the old city which has brought us now to a situation where its monumental importance and the necessity of making it more cultural –even making it more touristy- have to be compatible with it being a lively quarter, and more essentially, one that is inhabited.

This was democratic Girona's choice and, despite the many difficulties, we can now see the light at the end of the long tunnel. And, in a way, the same kind of choice has been made in selecting the site for this hotel premises.

The location of the hotel, in the area of Pou Rodó, in the atmosphere of old tradition in the old quarter of Girona, an area which has become not only the reference for urban action, but also an authentic new focal point for restoring life to the historic centre, gives it a certain value as a gateway, an point of access and welcome. And what could be better than to use the best of the illusions and fantasies that emanate from the world of legends as hostesses in this welcome?

It is a starting point for a journey into a whole world of sensations.

Cities are much more than stones, spaces or areas. Cities are a deposit for traces of the lives of its inhabitants; they are impregnated with their life experiences, with the history of all their thousands of hopes and efforts, and they are even a hoard of imagined happenings and traditions which time can transmit to us in many ways; but it does so too in the form of legends, which have existed from the beginning of time and in all cultures.

Our regions, Girona and –especially- its historical centre, are deposits of an exceptional treasure in this field. Preparing ourselves to perceive, to follow and to experience this magic world of fabulation, rooted in popular ideology, seems to me to open an extremely attractive world of possibilities.

A restful stay in a hotel can be a certain parenthesis in our daily life, like a small gift to oneself during our otherwise agitated life, like one of those instants of happiness which we need to give to ourselves; and all these propositions are not far from this idea which is closer to the spiritual than the material.

The historical city can be read many ways, it offers many routes around it and has many angles from which it can be approached.

One can structure a visit or an itinerary around its monumental wealth, visiting its many icons of interest and quality; or one can follow its historical thread, from the Roman precinct to the walls of the Mercadal; or one can choose tours centred on spaces with the typical things; or one can enjoy the commerce, gastronomy, and culture, the new urban and architectural features...

Also, legends can, partly, be a way of approaching and getting to know these corners; a different and meaningful way.

Josep Riera Micaló

President of the Girona area
of the College of Architects of Catalonia



GIRONA: A SMALL, QUIET, MODERN AND ACCESSIBLE CITY

Girona is a beautiful scenic place where history flourishes in every corner; it is close to its inhabitants and to all those who neither renounce the past nor those opportunities that are offered by our own times.

A small, quiet, modern and accessible city, where a simple stroll can satisfy all interests, with its exceptional architectural heritage, more than two thousand years of history and a large number of different legends: an intangible and versatile resource telling history from a fantastic, imaginative and playful perspective. It is a legacy which, through the passing of time, has become consolidated as a tourist resource of the Old Quarter and so, by extension, of the whole city.

We invite you to enjoy Girona through its legends. Girona has many of them: The Witch of the Cathedral, the Lioness' Bottom, The Flies of Saint Narcis or the Cocollona. These are some of the most popular; they are the cultural heritage that is representative of the identity and history of our city.

We congratulate Hotel Llegendes of Girona for adding this idea with its innovative and distinctive edge to our city's tourist offer; an idea which they have been wise enough to come up with by looking into our popular traditions and chronicles.

Anna Pagans Gruartmoner

Mayoress of Girona

THE HISTORY OF THE CITY OF GIRONA IS REFLECTED IN ITS LEGENDS

A Legend is a narrative, both oral and written in tradition, which is more or less historical in form. It has a well defined space and characters and is combined with imaginary and fantastic elements. Legends are tales that have the appearance of reality, but which mix historical and real events with other, fantastic or false, but seemingly possible, events.

Every human group has created its body of legends to tell and to write down the facts which are considered to be most important; and it has done this, not objectively, but from its own point of view. The group defines itself as the good, the true, the brave, which has often been attacked by others, who are the barbarians, and it has emerged heroically and victorious. In this sense, legends give us information about the historical past of a community, but especially too, about how this community has lived through the past and interpreted it.

The history of the city of Girona is reflected in its legends. The agitated past of Girona, resulting from its geographic and strategic situation and because it is a gateway to the entrance of various cultures, its years of bad harvest, famines and epidemics, its heroic resistance in times of siege and the people's devotion to the saints of the city...all of these elements...have left their stamp on each and every one of Girona's legends.

The act of narrating a legend is, in itself, a ritual which attempts to make those who are listening to it identify with the group it belongs to, with a common heroic and victorious past. Apart from giving a feeling of belonging to the group, the legends also carry the imprint of the character of the community and pass on the community's values, beliefs and rules, as well as the punishments that are applied to those who deviate from this behaviour.

The legends, apart from their aesthetic, cohesive and socialising function, have also been used to fit together the individual pieces of knowledge from each period so as to explain and attribute a reason and origin to unknown, frightening or inexplicable phenomena: springs, lakes, bridges, strange sounds and so on.

Legends are living, they are not static, but, when passed down they evolve, they adapt to new times or to the imagination of every narrator. For this reason, we find different versions of the same legend. Some are borrowed from other cultures, adapted to the cultural characteristics of the group. Though originally the legends were the fruit of popular creation and were passed on by word of mouth, there are also legends of learning which have become popular.

The society of scientific knowledge and of the new information technologies has not stopped the process of the creation of legends, but instead the legends have adapted to the new context and it is now the internet that is used to disperse them. Urban legends about celebrities, commercial brands and horror stories appear, and very often, the basic themes are the same as those of the old legends, although they have been modernised and adapted to today's context.

Nuri Ros Rue

Journalist and Anthropologist

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(*) 14 legends related to Saint Narcís
 20 legends related to the city of Girona
 and the surrounding areas
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1 Banyoles Lake

Banyoles Lake is an irregular figure of eight in shape. From north to south it is 2,080 metres in length and has, from east to west, a width of 730 metres.

The maximum depth is some 60 metres and it is fed by subterranean waters from the River Lleirca and the Borró Stream.

The lake started to form in the Cuaternaria Age, 250,000 years ago.

With so many years of life, the lake has seen everything happen near its waters: children-eating dragons, water nymphs...and even The Olympic Games.

12



250,000 years ago - Banyoles (Girona).



This is the legend of a farmer called Morgat who was witness to the birth of Banyoles Lake. Many thousands of years ago, where now the church of Santa Maria of Porqueres stands, there was a fertile plain with wheat fields, which extended as far as the town of Banyoles. On the day in question, Morgat went to plough the field with his bullocks, just as he usually did. After a while, Morgat heard a voice calling "Morgat, Morgat, take your plough and take shelter". Our farmer stood in his tracks. Yes it was strange! That voice, so clear...where was it coming from? Surely it was his own imaginings? Morgat looked to the left and then to the right and could not see a soul...he thought that as he had already had breakfast some time ago, perhaps hunger was playing a dirty trick on him...and he continued with his work. The cattle had not made two steps when he heard the voice yet again, insisting: "Morgat, Morgat, take the cattle and go home". Poor Morgat did not understand anything...if it wasn't the cattle speaking, he had no idea where the voice could be coming from. He returned to work, thinking that the sooner he finished, the sooner he could start for home. But the voice came again and this time it was even clearer and louder: "Morgat, Morgat, go home or you'll regret it". This time Morgat paid attention to the voice, he herded

up his cattle and home he went as fast as he could! When he arrived at the farmhouse, he heard a very loud noise, as if the ground itself was shattering. Morgat turned round and saw how, from under the fields, huge waves were bursting out and raging over the the whole land, flooding it and taking with them trees and crops. When the waters calmed down, a lake appeared which stretched from the area of Lió up to Estunes and also from where the church of Porqueres stands today as far as the town of Banyoles.

Since that time, Banyoles Lake and its mysterious surroundings has received fantastic beings such as the Dragon of Banyoles or the goges. The goges are water nymphs who live at Estunes, at the foot of the Sant Patllari mountain chain. By day they live in underground passages, with walls of gold studded with precious stones and protected by a fine web of silk. At midnight, these fairies come out to put out the light of the moon and to wash their fine veils and see their reflexions in the waters of the lake. Have you never seen them?



2 Geriό, founder of Girona

A handful of mythological heroes from all over the Mediterranean passed through Girona's territory to found a city, to act out some passages from Homer's Odyssey and participate in a few combats of war. Túbal, Geriό, Heracles-Hercules and Pirene tinge the lands of Girona with myths and epic tales.

14



2220 B.C. - Girona.

L E G E N D S O F G I R O N A



Gerió, son of Crisaor and Col-lirroe, is represented as a giant three-headed monster. On one of his journeys around the Mediterranean, he arrived in our parts from North Catalonia, where he founded Cotlliure and then, in the land of the Laietans, on top of a small mountain, on the right bank of a river named The Onyar, Geriό founded a city which he baptised with the name, you will never guess which, Geriona! However, the lands that Geriό conquered, were not orphans, but in fact belonged to the Kingdom of Túbal, the King of Iberia. Geriό fought against Túbal in a bloody battle in which Túbal died and so Geriό took possession of his lands. Túbal's daughter, the beautiful Pirene, fled to take refuge in the mountains of the north. Geriό, however, was not satisfied with the disappearance of Túbal and fearing that Pirene, the legitimate heiress to the Iberian lands, might snatch the throne back one day, searched for her all over the realm. The three-headed giant knew that Pirene had hidden in the woods of the north and started a fire there. And now that no one could hinder his yearning for power, Geriό settled in the south of Iberia. By chance, fate brought Hercules to these lands to carry out his twelve tasks. The powerful hero found the beautiful Pirene. The heiress had survived the terrible fire but she was in her last agony. Before she died, she had time to tell Hercules how her father was killed by Geriό, who had usurped his kingdom, and how he had set fire to the lands where she was taking refuge.

Hercules, on hearing the story and seeing the beautiful heiress dead, felt the desire within him to take revenge on behalf of Pirene. Moreover, one of the 12 tasks to be carried out in the Mediterranean area, it is said it was the tenth, consisted of stealing a herd of cattle from Geriό. Hercules set off towards the lands of the south, where he found Geriό's herd, guarded by his two-headed dog, Ortre, in the city of Gades. Hércules killed the two-headed dog and took possession of Geriό's herd of cattle. The tenth task was now accomplished, but still Hércules was not satisfied: he wanted to fulfil his personal revenge for the death of the beautiful Pirene. So Hercules continued his search for Geriό. When he found him, they confronted each other in a terrible battle that caused the lands of the realm to quake. Hercules killed Geriό striking him with his sword on both sides of his head. After killing the tyrant, Hercules gave over his lands in the north to Geriό's sons. The Gerion triplets, in order to obtain pardon for the memory of their father, enlarged Girona from the Gironella Tower so that it formed a triangle and, at each corner, they built a tower. And the mountains where Pirene had died, were baptised the Pyrenees in her honour.



3 Afra's conversion

One of the few things that we know about Saint Narcís, before he came to Girona definitively, is his journey with his assistant, the Deacon, Saint Feliu of Augusta (Augsburg). On that journey, he went to the house of Afra, a beautiful pagan woman, who, according to legend, was so moved by her guest's religion that she decided to convert to Christianity herself.

16



304 A.D. - Augusta, (Augsburg), Germany.

LEGENDS OF GIRONA



Saint Narcís arrived in Augsburg with his deacon, Saint Felix and, as they were looking for shelter for that night, divine providence took them to Afra's house. Afra was a follower of the pagan religion of Venus. The mistress of the house invited the travellers to stay at her home that night and ordered her servants to prepare rooms. It seems that the lights were not ready and Afra scolded the servants. Then, Saint Narcís blessed the oil lamps with his hand and, without having put in a drop of oil nor lighting them, they lit up by themselves, bringing about a miraculous brightness. Afra was amazed at the miracle and became interested in her guests' religion. After a long night of theological conversation with Saint Narcís, Afra repented for her previous life, wished to renounce her old religion and receive the waters of baptism. After a week Afra and her servants, Digna, Eunòmia and Eutròpia converted to Christianity.

The news reached the ears of Gaius, the prefect of the city, who ordered Afra's capture and death. Saint Narcís hid in the house of Hilaria, Afra's mother, so as to carry on with his evangelical tasks. He created the

Diocese of Augsburg, and transformed Hilaria's house into a cathedral. The first bishop was Afra's uncle, Dionís, who had also converted to Christianity.

Afra dedicated her life to preaching Christianity in the city; meanwhile the authorities were not far behind her. Then, on the 7th of August, 304 she was captured while she was preaching to a group of followers. Afra did not want to give up, nor renounce her new religion and, with great courage, she accepted her martyrdom. Afra was burnt alive on one of the banks of the River Lech. Saint Narcís admired the Saint's bravery so much that he took charge of her body and arranged a tomb for her. When Saint Narcís left for Girona, he took one of the Saint's bones as a relic.

The people of Girona and the neighbouring villages greatly admired the story of Saint Afra, and some years later, in 1344, they decided to honour her by building a sanctuary which they built at Ginestar, in the district of Sant Gregori. Saint Afra's Day is celebrated every 5th of August. And according to the saying: "On Saint Afra's Day flies will not bite nor will bees sting".



4 Saint Narcís' housekeeper

We will now tell of an apocryphal legend, which was only created a short time ago, but which, just like the legend of the cocollona, has become truly part of Girona's legend book. It is the legend of a rather gossiping, but good-hearted housekeeper, who Saint Narcís had supposedly employed at his house in el Pou Rodó (The Round Well).

18



304 B.C - Al carrer de les Mosques, 1, de Girona.



St Narcis' housekeeper was the great aunt of Afra who accompanied Saint Narcis when he settled in Girona, when he came back from his stay in Augusta. This good woman was over one hundred years old, but in appearance she was surprisingly young and blooming. She had baby soft skin and she was majestically fat. The housekeeper had great cooking virtues and had invented some exquisite dishes such as goose with pears and stuffed apples and black sausage; she knew about medicinal plants and knew how to cast spells. Once, when she was angry, she filled all the churches of Girona with cobwebs and strange many-coloured spiders.

Sant Narcis' house keeper was very proud, she dressed up in ostentatious hats and bright coloured dresses with little bells sewn along the hems. She went for walks around the streets of Girona, with her servants, who carried her in a chair when she became tired of walking. This much-loved character, however, had one fault: she was rather a gossip; she liked to listen to people's private matters and spread their business about the town. One bad day, she told some gossip about Sant Narcís that reached the ears of the Saint. Saint Narcís became angry and removed her from her position.

The housekeeper, who had been so loved, became the laughing stock of the city. She was seen walking along the streets in a dazed state and she did not even change her expression when people crossing her path, threw their leftovers at her. One day she had a vision of the martyrdom of Saint Narcís and Saint Feliu. Not long afterwards, the vision became a reality and, from that time on, the housekeeper lived a life of penitence and dedicated herself to looking after the the poor and weak.

When the housekeeper felt that her own death was very near, she lit a bonfire in front of the Cathedral of Girona and, in a final act of love towards those that are least valued, she invented a mint soup, for the ill and the poor.

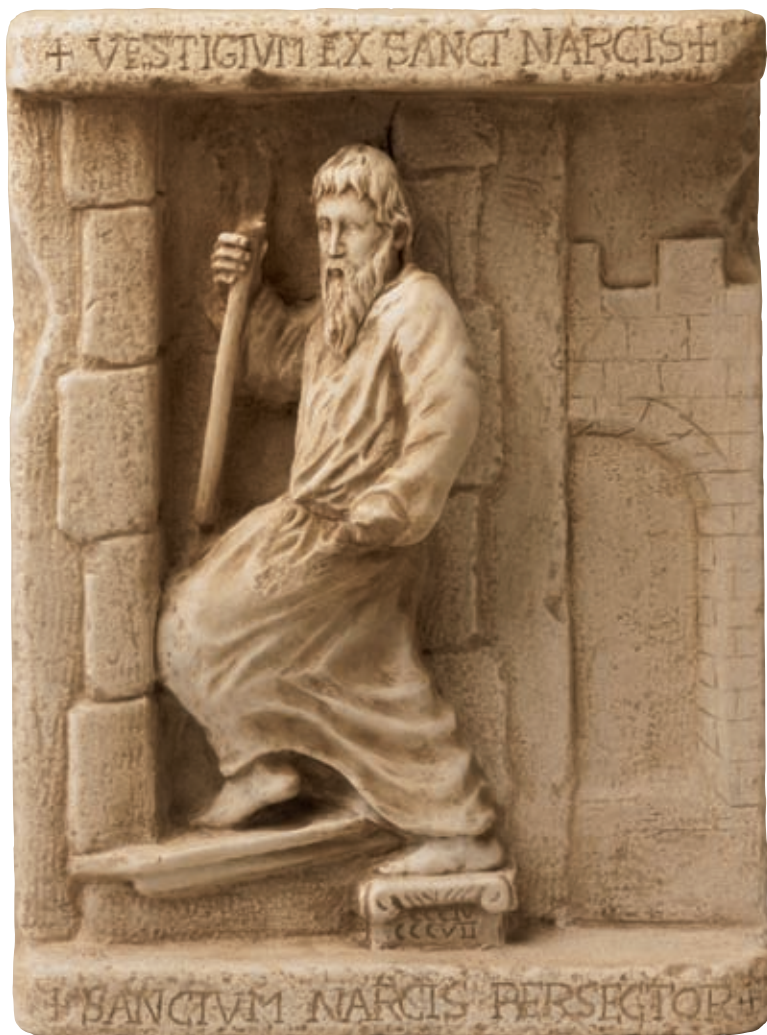
It is said that, when they buried her, her large body was as light as a sparrow. In memory of the penitent housekeeper, the people of Girona raised a statue in Girona stone, near to where she had lived, in a house near the little gardens in front of the Arabian Baths. It represents the figure of the housekeeper, standing up, large bellied, the book of Mysteries in her hands.



5 Saint Narcís' footprint

Not many facts are known about the life of Saint Narcís before he arrived in Girona. Nor is there any agreement on the origin of the Saint. Most of the information about him is from the period when he was in Girona, during the last part of his life, since only three years after coming to the city, he would die as a martyr, while he was celebrating mass, in the year 307 A.D. Even though he was only in the city so few years, Saint Narcís had time to leave his footprint, in the literal sense of the expression.

20



305 A.D. - Al carrer de les Mosques, 1, de Girona.

L E G E N D S O F G I R O N A



The story tells us that, at the end of the year 304 of our times, Saint Narcis arrived in Girona with his deacon, Saint Feliu, and at the beginning of the year 305, he decided on Girona as his episcopal residence. According to popular memory, the Bishop Saint settled in a house between Saint Narcis Street, Carrer Pou Rodó, and Carrer de les Mosques. At that time, Christianity was gaining followers and this was seen as a threat to the Roman Empire. The Emperor Dioclecius ordered the last great persecution against the Christians, during which Saint Narcis met his end in martyrdom, together with his deacon Saint Felix.

Out of the historical facts, the legend was born: during one of these persecutions, Saint Narcis thought up an escape route, a good enough idea for the best secret agent, for foiling his pursuers. Saint Narcis fled from the house in Pou Rodó by getting out through the window, but at the same time it occurred to him to leave a footprint facing the other way; so that it appeared that he had entered the house and not gone out of it.

When his pursuers arrived at the house, they saw

the footprint and, supposing that the Saint was hiding inside, went in to search for him again and again in every corner of the house, and this gave Saint Narcis time to hide somewhere else far away. After that, the footprint remained on the sill of that same window of Number Five, Carrer Pou Rodó, at the very heart of the mythology of Girona, just as Joan Amades recounts, in his Book of Catalan Customs in 1952.

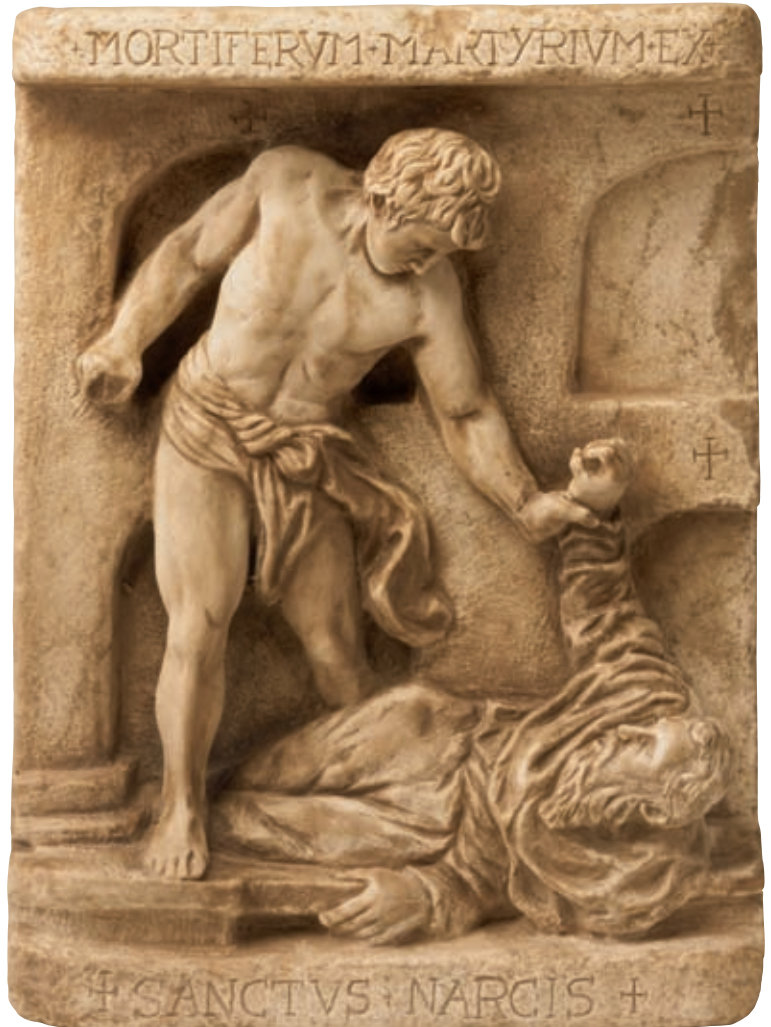
The cult of unearthly footprints is very old and appears in various cultures around the world, which interpret them in different ways: footprints belonging to Christian saints, or to the devil, to Buda, to Adam... The Ancient Greeks and Romans celebrated a cult of De Bacus' and Heracles' footprints and it is possible that the first Christians adapted them to their new religion. Near Girona we have other examples of these footprints: in the Gavarres and the Guilleries, we find the footprints of Saint Marti and his horse, and in the rest of the Catalan speaking countries, in Mallorca and in Valencia, they are interpreted as the hoof prints of King Jaume I the Conquer's horse.



6 The catacombs

The word catacomb is derived from the Greek 'katá', below, and 'kymbé', excavation, and refers to subterranean places where the first Christians met to pray, bury their dead and glorify their martyrs. In the time of the persecution against Christianity, the Christians had to hide in the underground areas of cities in order to be able to celebrate their cult.

22



*Beginning of the IVth Century of our era, during the last great persecution of the Christians.
Near the Church of Saint Felix and El Carrer del Pou Rodó, Girona.*



The city of Girona suffered the persecution of Christianity, just as all the cities of the Roman Empire did. It is for this reason that the first Christians of Girona were obliged to meet in secret in the catacombs. There is no physical proof of the existence of catacombs in Girona, like in other cities, but there is documentation which speaks of the catacombs of Saint Feliu. Saint Narcís deacon, Saint Feliu, was buried in these catacombs and for many years he remained there, forgotten by the people of Girona. After some centuries, his tomb began to give out the sweet smell of saintliness which reminded the city of his presence. The people of Girona opened up his tomb and took him to the great altar in the church which, since then, has been consecrated to the veneration of this Saint.

It is believed that house Number One, on the Carrer de les Mosques, is where Saint Narcís lived, and very near to where he suffered martyrdom with his dean there was an entrance to the catacombs of Girona, and as Jaume Marquès i Casanovas relates in his book, a collection called Old Girona, this connected them to the well in the cloisters of the Cathedral or to that in in the church of Saint Feliu. A part from the catacombs of Saint Feliu, the Girona subsoil may

also hide the mythical crypt of the primitive Romanesque cathedral, which has never been found.

The catacombs form part of the legends of the subsoil of the city, and are said to be next to the network of subterranean passages which, as has been proved, run under the whole of the old quarter and which come out beyond the city walls. An example of these is the well-known tunnel of the Carbonera, which connects today's City Art Museum, with Carrer Ballesteries, at the corner of the Pujada de Saint Feliu. Some of these passages had military purposes and connected the Torre Gironella with the bed of the Galligans River and the castle of Montjuic. Others connected private houses or convents and churches. The Jews used some of these passages to escape from the Jewish Quarter when they were attacked by Christians.

Perhaps one day, when work is carried out on one of the houses, the entrance to the catacombs will come to light and we will finally find out about the underground history of the city.



7 Charlemagne

In the Middle Ages, the people of Girona, like people of many other towns of the period, were fascinated by the deeds of Charlemagne, whom they considered to be their founder. Despite the fact the Frankish Emperor did not found Girona, he did free it from Muslim domination in the year 785 A.D. Many quite extraordinary legends about Charlemagne's relationship with Girona have survived, as well as a legacy of buildings and objects, related in one way or another to the Emperor with the Long Flowing Beard.

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785 A.D., Freedom from Muslims - Girona.