

Barcelona is the heart and motor of the autonomous region of Catalonia in the northeast corner of Spain. Catalonia is Spain's leading economic region with almost 20% of national production for a region that is only 6,3% of Spain's extension and has just over 15% of the population. There are more than 6 million inhabitants in Catalonia and of these close to 70% live in Barcelona and the immediate surroundings (metropolitan area). With almost 4 million people, Barcelona has one of the largest metropolitan areas among Mediterranean cities. Recent developments such as the new high speed train link to Madrid and eventually to France, or the expansion of the port and the new airport runway and terminals will allow Barcelona to grow even further.

BARCELONA'S HISTORY

As the capital of the Autonomous Region of Catalunya, Barcelona has played an increasingly important role in Spain's recent political and economic life. In the 2008 general elections Spain's governing party was left in a minority position and needs the support of the different Catalan parliamentary groups, which means that the central government must make political and economic concessions. In the Catalan autonomy elections held at the end of the year 2006, a similar scenario occurred and there is a tripartite left wing government that promises to achieve further self-government for Catalonia thanks to the good relationship with the Spanish governing party. Once again Catalonia will be central to Spanish governability and Catalan influence in Madrid should increase somewhat. However, in this brief introduction we shall start much further back, with Barcelona's origins as a city over 2,000 years ago.

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chose to have a commercial port. The name of Carthaginian ruler Amilcar Barca is often referred to as the origin of the name Barcino, later used by the Romans. The Carthaginians were replaced by the Romans in the 1st century B.C. who preferred Tarraco (modern day Tarragona) as their regional capital. Barcelona has several surviving monuments from this period, concentrated around the Plaza Sant Jaume and the gothic quarter. During the third century AD Barcino replaced Tarraco in importance and became the major Roman outpost in the area of Hispania Citerior; the Roman walls, still visible as part of later buildings in the Gothic quarter, were reinforced in this period to repel the Frankish and German invasions.

With the disintegration of the Roman Empire came the invasion of the Visigoths who occupied Barcino in 415 A.D. and renamed the city Barcinona. Three hundred years later at the beginning of the 8th century the moors conquered Barcelona during their drive from northern Africa to the south of France. Only one hundred years later, the Franks led by Louis the Pious occupied Barcelona and established a strong military presence in what became known as the Spanish Mark, the front line of a constant battle between the Christian kingdoms of the North with the Arabs. This conflict eventually evolved into what became known as the Reconquest.

The Carolingian Empire established a number of Counties and the most important of these was that of Barcelona. The origins of the Catalan nation are to be found in Wilfred the Hairy, Count of Barcelona who established a hereditary system of succession. Before his death in the year 898 he managed to unify the county of Barcelona with the rest of the Carolingian territories. In the year 988 Count Borrell II achieved independence from the Carolingian kings for the County of Barcelona and became the dominant political and military force in the region later known as Catalonia. The 11th and 12th centuries consolidated Barcelona as an important Mediterranean city.

BARCELONA'S GOLDEN AGE

In the year 1070 gold was the medium of exchange in 95% of the commercial transactions. The internationalization of trade by way of maritime transportation was fundamental in the development of 12th century Barcelona, and soon the city became as influential as Genoa or Venice. The growth of the city then and later was to be directly related to the increasing importance of its port. There are still some buildings from this prosperous period, such as the romanesque style church of Sant Pau del Camp or the chapel of Santa Llúcia in the Cathedral. A good selection of artwork commissioned or purchased by Barcelona's rich patrons can be seen in several of the city's museums, such as the MNAC (National Museum of Catalan Art) or the City History Museum in the Plaça del Rei.

Jaume I "The Conqueror" established the "Consell de Cent" in the 13th century, an innovative form of government. The Cathedral of Barcelona was begun in the 13th century and shows just how prosperous the city had become. It was the preamble to the building boom of the 14th century when Barcelona was reaching out and conquering foreign

ports under Jaume II. The chapel of St. Agatha in the Royal Palace of the Plaça del Rei was built for Jaume II, who died in 1327. The foundations of the church of Sta. Maria del Pi were laid in 1322 and the church of Sta. Maria del Mar was begun in 1329. The plague decimated the population of Barcelona and at one point half the councillors and 4 of 5 magistrates had died. But the building boom continued unabated until the end of the century.

Under Pere III (1336-1387) the city was particularly embellished with civil buildings. The vaulted halls of the Saló del Tinell and the impressive vaulted structure of the royal shipyards (Reials Drassanes, today the Maritime Museum) are part of this building crusade. Pere III embarked on a series of Mediterranean wars and had his galleons built in Barcelona's shipyards. Public building activity was matched by private investment and the results can be seen on the Carrer Montcada, for instance, with palaces built for Barcelona's wealthy merchant families.

REBELLION AND DEFEAT

Between 1479 and 1516 Barcelona's rulers were more interested in rich and productive Castile, also theirs, than in promoting the Mediterranean seaboard. However, the potential of Barcelona to be as important for international trade as Genoa or Venice always kept them interested in maintaining their mandate. Barcelona had a unique status, and was considered a partner of royal Spain, and as such enjoyed special freedoms. The representative parliamentary assembly (Les Corts) could limit central control over Barcelona. In the early 17th century, with the Spanish monarchy teetering due to excessive growth and economic mismanagement, the Catalans began to worry about losing their immunity from taxation. This period of constitutional conflict was especially noticed in Barcelona, where all the Catalan institutions inherited from the Middle Ages were

Barcelona City Hall: Saló de Cent



Barcelona Cathedral.



Barcelona City Hall: Consolat de Mar Hall



Saint George and the Dragon in the Saló de Cent



based. The elevated cost of the 30 years war and the hostilities with France starting in 1635 brought the Spanish need for men and money to Catalonia. In 1640 a revolt against Spain began in Barcelona and spread to the rest of Catalonia. The rebels changed their allegiance to Louis XIII of France. Catalonia's people and wealth were decimated during the next 16 years, with the 1652 siege of Barcelona by Don Juan José de Austria ending the rebellion. The conquering general was a generous winner and a remarkable rebuilding of the city followed, only to be wasted with the 1680 and 1690 wars against France.

The war of Spanish Succession marked the end of Catalan privileges. Relations with the Bourbon king Philip V were bad from the start due to his totalitarian political ideas. The royal viceroy in Barcelona repeatedly infringed the Catalan constitutions. Although Barcelona's merchants were generally peaceful they could stand no more interference from Spain and stated that as a sovereign nation they had a right to secede from a monarchy that no longer respected their rights. As a result of all this turmoil, on June 20th, 1705 Catalonia signed a treaty with England and Genoa and sparked a war with the Spain of Philip V. The war with Spain lasted 9 years and ended with the surrender of Barcelona on September 11, 1714, today celebrated as Catalonia's National day. Philip V abolished the traditional Catalan constitutions and Barcelona became a mere provincial city, humiliated by the permanent presence of an occupying army in what is today the Ciutadella Park. But, as resourceful as ever, the defeat made Barcelona's people turn to creating wealth again, starting new industries based on direct trade with Americas, and the beginning of industrialization importing cotton. The economic indicators at the end of the 18th century skyrocketed and set the stage for a splendid period of economic expansion and commercial growth.

BARCELONA: SPAIN'S INDUSTRIAL PIONEER

The rapid economic expansion of Catalonia was stopped suddenly by the Napoleonic wars of the early 19th century. The post war years and the 1821 yellow fever epidemic caused the generally optimistic Barcelona city council to publicly declare that they doubted if the city would ever recover. By 1836 the recovery was complete and Barcelona was back on track developing different industries. Spain's first mainland railway was built between Barcelona and Mataró, 30 kilometers to the north, in 1848.

After the Spanish revolution of 1868 which removed the Bourbons from power in Spain, Barcelona and Madrid came to a relatively peaceful coexistence. In Barcelona the political tendency of Catalanism started gaining ground and there was a resurgence of interest in Catalan institutions, traditions and culture. The prosperity of the age was reflected in the 1888 World Exhibition and Barcelona became a city of cafes and terraces with a flamboyant bourgeoisie.

The early years of the 20th century saw social unrest as the tension increased between the rich industrial barons and the working class. The ideas of social anarchists such as Kropotkin and Bakunin had become well established in Barcelona during the 19th century, but a different breed of violent anarchists from France came to Barcelona and gained a strong following. Sadly Barcelona became known as the city of terrorist bombs. There were general strikes in 1901 and 1902, and in 1909 Barcelona saw riots that lasted a week and extensive destruction, including the razing of 70 buildings belonging to religious orders that were systematically burned. These events were known as the Tragic Week and the actual reason for the explosion of popular anger was the military draft that took soldiers to Morocco. Those with moneyed families or connections could easily get off the list. The government used the Tragic Week to

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attack the anarchist movement in Barcelona. Famed republican pedagogue Francesc Ferrer i Guardia, founder of the Free School and ideologically close to the anarchists, was pointed out as the instigator and executed in spite of the international outcry.

But not all was strife and conflict. These were also the years of Modernism and very strong cultural currents were at work in Barcelona. In the 1931 general elections the left wing republican coalition won and forcibly exiled King Alfonso XIII. This was the beginning of the second republic and it allowed for great strides in Catalan aspirations. Socialist leader Francesc Macià returned from exile in Paris and became the president of Catalonia's Generalitat. Macià's ambitious plans for the city were cut short by the military insurrection of 1936. The Spanish Civil War was the beginning of one of Spain's darkest periods and the Catalan national identity was totally repressed. Not until Franco's death and the new Spanish constitution of 1978 did Catalonia regain a measure of self government with the Estatut de Autonomia.

The 1992 Olympic Games produced the most extensive changes to the city in all its history. We can see and admire all the physical changes such as parks, museums, roads, infrastructure; but even more important is that which you can't see but you can sense: the pride and enthusiasm that Barcelona's people have regained and that they are able to transmit to visitors.

Sheldon Nazar

The Catalan Generalitat Palace



Casa de l'Ardiaca: the dancing egg of Corpus Christi



Barcelona Cathedral choir stalls



Montjuïc's Magic Fountain dances with light and sound

