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**“Urbanism destroys history, but it can’t beat its spirit”:
The redevelopment of the Barri de la Catedral in Francoist Barcelona
(1939-1959)**

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**“Urbanism destroys history, but it can’t beat its spirit”:
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(1939-1959)¹**

Olivia Muñoz-Rojas Oscarsson

Abstract

Barcelona’s transformation into a global destination after Spain’s transition to democracy has received significant attention from international scholarship, but this is less the case for developments under Franco’s dictatorship (1939-1975) that paved the way for the city’s perceived attractiveness today. A critical examination of two of these developments in the 1940s and ‘50s – the disencumbering of the area in front of the cathedral and the disclosure of sections of the Roman city wall – and the discourses around them reveals the interplay of long-standing planning and archaeological concerns, nostalgic and ambiguously dissenting reactions among observers at the time, and the gradual emergence of Barcelona as a tourist city. Such interplay subtly mirrors the often unacknowledged eclecticism of the dictatorship’s urban discourse and practice.

Keywords

Planning and heritage, cultural discourse, tourism, Barcelona, Franco regime

Few visitors about to enter Barcelona’s Gothic Quarter today suspect while they stand on Avinguda de la Catedral (the Cathedral Avenue) and photograph the old cathedral or the Roman gate on Plaça Nova that an entire centuries-old neighborhood, including the shoemakers’ late-medieval guild house, stood there some sixty years ago. In discussing the opening of Avinguda de la Catedral in post-civil war Barcelona and the excavations of the Roman city wall along Tapineria street and the new avenue, this article is concerned with

1. **PLEASE NOTE:** This article, with the title ‘Archaeology, Nostalgia, and Tourism in Post-Civil War Barcelona (1939-1959)’, was published online in the *Journal of Urban History* on 25 April 2012. See <http://juh.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/05/07/0096144212443709>

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Barcelona's Roman and Gothic pasts under Franco. However, inevitably perhaps, in looking at transformations that took place under Franco and have remained in place until our days the article also places the reader's attention on the Francoist legacy in present Barcelona.

The plans for a transversal avenue flanking the cathedral existed since the mid-nineteenth century when the first comprehensive urban reform plan for Barcelona was designed. The latest version of the plan for the avenue was approved in 1934, and the works were about to commence when the Spanish Civil War broke out in the summer of 1936. The excavations, on the other hand, had commenced in the early twentieth century, and were part of a long-standing project aimed at (re)creating a Gothic Quarter in old Barcelona as Joan Ganau has explained in this journal some time ago.²

Although the dictatorial regime that General Franco established after the Civil War (1936-1939) sought a complete break with the building and heritage ideals of the previous Republican regime and achieved this rhetorically in many ways, it did not in much of its practice.³ After the war, Barcelona's Francoist city council simply resumed both the opening

2. Joan Ganau, "Reinventing Memories: The Origin and Development of Barcelona's Barri Gòtic, 1880-1950," *Journal of Urban History* 34, 5 (2008): 795-832. For a recent and extensive examination of the recreation of the Gothic Quarter, see Agustín Cocola Gant, *El Barrio Gótico de Barcelona. Planificación del pasado e imagen de marca*, (Madrid: Ediciones Madroño, 2011).

3. See, for example, M^a Asunción Díaz Zamorano, "Los modelos italianos y la restauración arquitectónica española de posguerra," in *XV Congreso Nacional de Historia del Arte (Modelos, intercambios y recepción artística: de las rutas marítimas a la navegación en red)*, Palma, October 2004, 1139; Sofia Diéguez Patao, "Pedro Bidagor. Dos contextos: Los años de guerra y posguerra en Madrid. De la sección de arquitectura de CNT a la Junta de Reconstrucción," in Carlos Sambricio (ed.) *Plan Bidagor 1941-1946* (Madrid: Consejería de Obras Públicas, Urbanismo y Transportes, Comunidad de Madrid & Nerea, 2003), 29-30; Julián Esteban-Chaparría, "The Conservation of Spain's Architectural Heritage: A Balance of Three Crucial Decades, 1929-1958," *Future Anterior* 5, 2 (2008): 34-52; Jordi Gracia García, *Estado y cultura: el despertar de una conciencia crítica bajo el franquismo (1940-1962)* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1996), 26-8; Carlos Sambricio, "De nuevo sobre el Plan Bidagor," in Sambricio (ed.), *Plan Bidagor 1941-1946*, 13-18; Carlos Sambricio, "Vivienda y ciudad", in *Primer Seminario DOCOMOMO Ibérico*, 13-15 November 1997, Zaragoza, 12-14; Gabriel Ureña, *Arquitectura y Urbanística Civil y Militar en el Periodo de la Autarquía (1936-1945). Análisis, cronología y textos* (Madrid: Ediciones Istmo, 1979), 115-16.

of the avenue and the excavations. So, although the projects themselves were not new, the discourse that unfolded around them during the 1940s and '50s is best understood within the dictatorship's evolving ideological framework. In the 1940s, a mixture of propagandistic uses of planning and archaeology and nostalgic accounts of old Barcelona dominated such discourse. This gave way to the celebration of the positive effects of the works for tourism, when tourists started arriving in the area in the 1950s, especially towards the end of the decade. In a broad sense, a closer reading of this changing discourse reveals a subtler and more eclectic panorama of approaches to urban planning, history and heritage under Franco than is usually acknowledged.

The article begins by examining the evolution of the works on Avinguda de la Catedral and the archaeological excavations between 1939 and 1959 based on administrative documentation produced at the time. It then looks into the discourses that evolved around the two processes over the 1940s and '50s by examining selected quotes and passages from relevant articles and comments published in the press. The article finishes by assessing the effect of the works and the discourses around them on the perception of Barcelona at the time and its budding condition as a tourist city by contrasting selected tourist and propaganda material that circulated during this period.

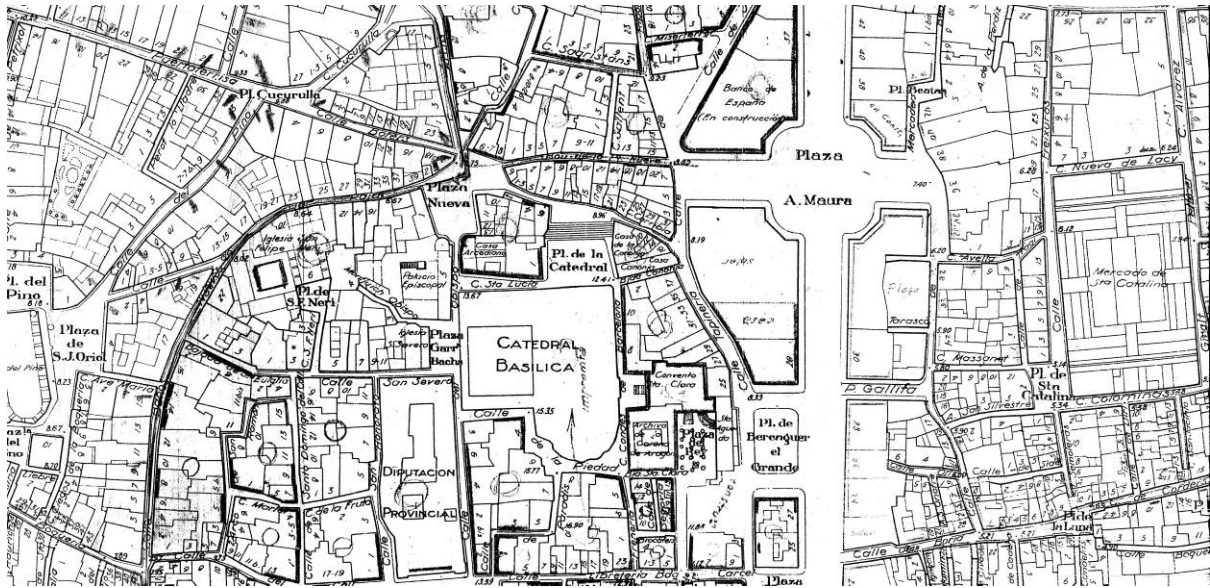


Fig. 1 Plot map of the area around the cathedral as it looked like before the Civil War when the Barri de la Catedral still existed. Courtesy of Arxiu Municipal Administratiu de Barcelona.



Fig. 2 Plot map of the same area today with Avinguda de la Catedral stretching from Plaça Nova to Santa Catalina marketplace.

The opening of Avinguda de la Catedral

The works for the opening of Avinguda de la Catedral commenced in 1939, shortly after the end of the Spanish Civil War. However, the plans to transform the area in front of the cathedral were old. From engineer Ildefonso Cerdà's 1859 pioneering urban reform plan for

Barcelona to Joaquín Vilaseca's 1930 inner city reform plan, the idea to open up a transversal avenue across the old district was never abandoned, and saw different versions in the plans of, most notably, Àngel Baixeras (1889) and Antoni Darder (1918). Behind it lay the belief that a transversal avenue would improve circulation across the old district and create a more porous, and consequently healthier, urban environment. Sanitation was thus one of the original motivations for the projected avenue. The course and dimensions of the avenue were maintained almost unchanged in the various plans that succeeded one another during the seven decades between Cerdà's and Vilaseca's plans. In all of them, the avenue connected the eastern end of the old town with the western end, across the core of the old district, running in front of the cathedral. The resistance posed by residents and avant-garde architects and urban planners such as Josep Lluís Sert who opposed the transformations;⁴ the traumatic precedent of the opening of one of the perpendicular avenues projected by Cerdà, Gran Via A (Avenue A) or Via Laietana, in the early twentieth century; and finally, the civil war, were apparently delaying the construction of the transversal avenue indefinitely. Yet, in spite of the conflict and the drastic regime change that followed, a number of pre-war urban development projects were resumed; among them the plans for Avenue C, later called Avinguda de la Catedral. The project appears as one of the post-war city council's priorities in its first report on projected and accomplished works, published in 1941.⁵ In the end, only a minor portion of the projected avenue would be carried out. Initially, only the section that ran from Antonio Maura square to Plaça Nova (New Square) – which this paper considers – and a little later the section stretching in the opposite direction from Antonio Maura towards Santa Catalina marketplace (Figures 1 and 2).

4. Urbanización y Reforma 2-D-3/Caja 15655/Caja 215/Expediente 1/Año 1934, "Expediente promogut per l'Associació de Veïns afectats per a la Reforma, Gran Via C" (Barcelona: Arxiu Municipal Administratiu de Barcelona).

5. Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, "La obra realizada por el primer Ayuntamiento de Barcelona después de la Liberación, 26 enero 1939–26 enero 1941" (Barcelona: Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 1941), 41.

Vilaseca's reform plan for inner-city Barcelona was approved by the city council plenum sixteen months before the civil war broke out. One of its aims was to "connect singular sites within the old district", that is, historical monuments such as the cathedral, the archdeaconry and the Episcopal palace.⁶ Vilaseca's proposal was not alien to the much debated nineteenth-century idea of disencumbering aimed at providing better views of churches and other historic buildings. It was also in line with previous efforts directed towards creating a more homogenous monumental ensemble in the old district, which began in the early twentieth century, and were closely associated with the conservationist views of the Catalanist party *Lliga Regionalista* formed in 1901.⁷ However, according to Florensa, it was during 1926 and 1927, as Barcelona prepared for the World Exhibition of 1929, that the more organized genesis of this venture took place.⁸ Over the years, the old district had gradually become known as the Barri Gòtic or the Gothic Quarter, even though as Duran i Sanpere explains, the area hosted constructions from many the different periods.⁹ Yet, because the Catalan Gothic at the time was associated with one, if not the most splendid epoch in the city's history it seemed somehow natural to identify the entire old district with it.¹⁰ Thus, in addition to the argument on the need for sanitizing the old district, the need for embellishing historic Barcelona was as important to contemporary inner-reform planners and heritage experts.

Those who had argued against the principle of disencumbering and this kind of monumentalization projects (from the nineteenth-century architects Camillo Sitte and Charles

6. Actuación Patrimonial/Caja 045962/Expedientes 1185-1186/Año 1949, "Plano de reforma y de urbanización y enlace de los puntos singulares del casco-antiguo de la ciudad. Memoria. Barcelona, [blank] de enero 1930" (Barcelona: Arxiu Municipal Administratiu de Barcelona).

7. Agustí Còcola Gant, "El barrio gótico de Barcelona. De símbolo nacional a parque temático," *Scripta Nova. Revista Electrónica de Geografía y Ciencias Sociales* XV, 371 (2011). Accessible at <http://www.ub.edu/geocrit/sn/sn-371.htm>

8. Adolfo Florensa, *Conservación y restauración de monumentos históricos (1927-1946)* (Barcelona: Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 1959), 6.

9. Agustí Duran i Sanpere, *Barcelona i la seva historia. La formació de una gran ciutat* (Barcelona: Curial, 1973), 227.

10. Ibid. 217.

Bulls to the members of the GATCPAC in the 1930s) claimed that it was precisely the tightly built, low-rise urban fabric around the monuments that emphasized the size and monumental qualities of the latter. Unlike his predecessors' plans, Vilaseca's plan for Avenue C deliberately avoided any of the important commercial streets such as Portaferrisa and Carme, because of the expensive expropriations it involved. The architect acknowledged, on the other hand, that some historical buildings like the house of the shoemakers' guild on Corribia street, in front of the cathedral, would be affected by the opening of Avenue C, and suggested the building be reconstructed elsewhere.¹¹ Vilaseca planned a 25-meter wide avenue with several lanes. It was thus conceived as a road for wheeled traffic.

By the end of the Civil War in spring 1939, the Barri de la Catedral (the Cathedral neighborhood) – essentially the blocks that stood opposite the cathedral, along Corribia, Bou de la Plaça Nova, and Plaça Nova – had been hit repeatedly by the Francoist air force and were almost ruined. Most façades remained, but the interiors were practically hollow.¹² The buildings were eventually leveled to the ground, making space for the new avenue. Not only had the bombings facilitated the task of the pickaxes by destroying those houses that stood in the way of the projected avenue, they had also forced many residents to abandon the neighborhood making it easier for the new municipal authorities to justify the expropriation and demolition of the buildings. In this sense, the opening of Avinguda de la Catedral was the result of an exceptional combination of the kind of lengthy negotiation processes that urban interventions usually involve and the abrupt interruption of an unrelated event, the Civil War,

11. Eventually, the façade was reconstructed on Sant Felipe Neri square, which was also significantly remodelled after its destruction by the bombs during the Civil War.

12. Details of the destruction can be found in the documents that the Fire Department and the Passive Defence Board produced during the war, and are now kept in the Municipal Administrative Archive of Barcelona.

which accidentally changed the urban fabric, improving the prospects for carrying out the planned transformation.¹³

The works for the avenue unfolded in three stages. During the first stage and immediately after the war the area was cleared from the debris of the bombed houses and the ruined buildings were gradually demolished. This took between two and three years. In the second stage the actual urbanization works on the basis of Vilaseca's plan were approved and implemented. The works included a project to homogenize the façades opposite the cathedral as a means of ensuring that the viewer's attention focused on the temple and the 'Gothic' ensemble behind it without being distracted by other buildings.¹⁴ The third stage focused on the realignment of the emerging avenue and the adjacent Tapineria street with the aim of improving the view of the Roman city wall, sections of which were being disclosed in the other, parallel project that will be discussed shortly.¹⁵

By the end of the 1940s, as the avenue took shape, the area received the visit of General Franco and other public figures, including Eva Perón, the Argentinean first lady. Once the houses that made up the Barri de la Catedral disappeared there was enough room in front of the cathedral to organize an arrival and welcome ceremony that matched the taste and expectations of the dictatorship. Prior to the war it would have been impossible to arrive at the cathedral by car as both Franco and Eva Perón did – let alone accompanied by a flamboyant retinue of horses and guards.

13. I discuss wartime destruction as a catalyst for urban redevelopment in relation to the works on Avinguda de la Catedral in more detail in Olivia Muñoz-Rojas, *Ashes and Granite: Destruction and Reconstruction in the Spanish Civil War and Its Aftermath* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), 119-62.

14. Gestión Urbanística/Expediente 323/Año 1944, "Façades Nova Urbanització" (Barcelona: Arxiu Municipal de Barcelona).

15. Gestión Urbanística/Expediente 1747/Año 1951, "Alineació Tapineria, Avenida Catedral" (Barcelona: Arxiu Municipal Administratiu de Barcelona).

The disclosure of the Roman city wall

During the works for the opening of Via Laietana (Avenue A) in the early twentieth century several blocks of houses that were once been built outside the Roman stronghold, now along Tapineria street, were demolished. As a result, the remains of a 75-metre long section of the ancient city wall emerged. It took several decades to clean and restore the Roman ashlar, fill in the existing gaps with brickwork, and lower the ground to the primitive level. By 1953, the works on this section of Tapineria known as Plaça de Ramon Berenguer el Gran (Ramon Berenguer the Great's square) were concluded and presented publicly by municipal chief-architect Adolfo Florensa. The restored section of the city wall could be contemplated from a specially created ornamental garden that included fragments of loose Roman pillars and a statue of Ramon Berenguer III.¹⁶

The excavations continued along what architects knew was the original course of the Roman wall, and the houses at the corner of Tapineria and Corribia, at the back of the chapter house, were demolished subsequently. The old chapter house was originally L-shaped, partly following the course of the city wall, which makes a turn left here, further marked by the presence of a polygonal tower. For centuries the houses hid the building's L-shape and the remains of the Roman wall that were part of their inner walls. Now the old houses were replaced by yet another small garden from which the newly 'liberated' section of the ancient city wall could be admired.

16. Adolfo Florensa, "Murallas romanas en Barcelona", *Revista Nacional de Arquitectura* 132 (1953), 9.

Following this the municipal excavation team freed the section that ran from the cathedral towards the two Roman towers on Plaça Nova, where rows of houses concealed the north-eastern façade of the old archdeaconry. The archdeaconry was originally built in the twelfth century and remodeled in the sixteenth century, and the first rows of houses on Corribia and Plaça Nova were directly attached to the façade, the solid, massive stone-work having turned into part of the inner walls of the houses. Two municipal orders were passed in 1955 and 1956 to demolish numbers 2, 4, and 6 on Corribia and numbers 10 to 13 on Plaça Nova.¹⁷

The disclosure of the archdeaconry's Renaissance façade revealed the remains of the ancient military belt, which had been incorporated into the former when the building was originally constructed. Moreover, the removal of the houses on Plaça Nova, and the virtual disappearance of the square, significantly improved the view of the two Roman towers that once formed Barcino's north-western city gate. At the feet of the left tower, the base of one of the pillars that once upheld the aqueduct that brought water to the Roman colony was found.¹⁸ As a means of further recreating Roman Barcelona, an imitation of the first arch of the aqueduct was reconstructed.¹⁹ The arch, surrounded by a small gravel-garden, stands by the towers still today (see figure 5).

The finding of the pillar base was not an isolated event. Parallel to the works on Avinguda de la Catedral and the disclosure of the city wall, archaeological excavations took place along the ancient military belt. Among others, two marble heads representing Emperor Antoninus

17. Gestión Urbanística, Expediente 8245, 1955, "Enderroc cases C. Corribia" (Barcelona: Arxiu Municipal de Administratiu de Barcelona); (Anon.), "Derribos en la Plaça Nova," *Diario de Barcelona*, 13 October 1957.

18. (Anon.), "Un pilar del acueducto romano de la Calle de los Arcs," *Diario de Barcelona*, 18 February 1958.

19. (Anon.), "El primer arco del acueducto," *Diario de Barcelona*, 29 April 1958.

Pius (86-161AD) and his daughter Faustina the Young (ca 125-175AD) were found.²⁰ Initially some people believed the male head depicted the legendary Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180AD), whom Faustina the Young married in 146AD.²¹ Stone vessels, pillars and funerary stones, including an altar stone dedicated to 25-year old Nicia by her husband and children, were also among the findings.²² The press followed the discoveries closely, and was keen to emphasize the personal interest that mayor José María Porcioles took in the excavations – and symbolically speaking, the interest the regime took in the resurrection of Roman Barcelona.²³

The archaeological works were led by municipal chief-architect Adolfo Florensa and the head of the Municipal Historical Archive Agustí Duran i Sanpere. Florensa was appointed municipal chief-architect in 1924 and remained on his post throughout Primo de Rivera's dictatorship (1923-1931), the Second Republic (1931-1936), the Civil War, and part of the Franco regime.²⁴ Duran i Sanpere, in turn, was appointed head of the archival section of the Catalan government's Cultural Heritage Service in June 1936, shortly before the war broke out. He then became responsible for safeguarding Catalonia's historical archives throughout the conflict.²⁵ Thus, both Florensa and Duran remained on their posts after the war despite having served the Republic and the Catalan autonomous government, and even though they

20. (Anon.), "Las excavaciones de la muralla romana de la calle de la Tapinería," *Diario de Barcelona*, 14 April 1959.

21. (Anon.), "Dudas sobre el busto hallado en las excavaciones de la calle Tapinería," *Solidaridad Nacional*, 15 March 1959

22. (Anon.), "Las excavaciones de la muralla romana de la calle de la Tapinería"; (Anon.), "Nuevos hallazgos históricos y artísticos," *Diario de Barcelona*, 26 July 1959; (Anon.), "Un amor romano," *La Vanguardia Española*, 11 March 1959.

23. (Anon.), "El alcalde visitó las excavaciones de la calle Tapinería," *La Vanguardia Española*, 21 March 1959; José Piñol Riús, "Enriquecimiento del Tesoro Monumental de Barcelona. La grandiosa obra de restauración de la muralla romana de la calle Tapinería," *El Correo Catalán*, 24 September 1959.

24. See *Adolf Florensa i Ferrer (1889–1968)*, Manuel Ribas (ed.) (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2002). See also Juan Pedro Yániz, "El Gobierno militar," *ABC*, 10 August 2006.

25. See Eulàlia Duran i Grau, "Agustí Duran i Sanpere. Semblança biogràfica" (Barcelona, 2000 [1999]).

had been associated with the *Institut d'Estudis Catalans* (Catalan Studies Institute). Duran underwent the perceptive administrative purge that the dictatorship imposed on most Republican appointees, but unlike many other former Republican staff, he was cleared eventually. The city council probably realized that it could not do without the two heritage experts despite their background.

Nevertheless, the rhetoric used by the administration to justify the projects changed and was adapted to the Falange's²⁶ ideological program – a synthesis of National-Syndicalist revolutionary ideas and traditional Hispanic values, essentially ultra-Catholicism and Empire. Simultaneously, the reactions to the projects – especially if they were critical – could not be expressed as openly in the new context of physical repression and censorship. Nonetheless, a number of articles and writings in the press transmitted a clear sense of disapproval and critique of the reforms, often in the form of nostalgic renderings of how the disappearing Barri de la Catedral had looked like in the past.

Reactions to and discourses around the two projects

Thus, in the writings of those who praised the reforms there are often traces of the typically Falangist rhetoric, which was especially strong early on in the regime. The Iberian Peninsula's Roman past was perceived by Falangist historians and ideologues as the earliest golden age of the Hispanic nation. From there, a huge leap was made reaching sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Imperial Spain, which was deemed the most glorious period in Spanish

26. For readers who are less familiar with the Franco regime, the Falange was the state party, the ideological backbone of the regime, and one of the pillars of the *Movimiento Nacional* (National Movement). For a history of the Falange, see Stanley G. Payne's classic work *Falange: A History of Spanish Fascism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), or, by the same author, *Fascism in Spain, 1923-1977* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999). See also, Sheelagh Ellwood, *Historia de la Falange* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2001).

history, notably because of its architectural style and colonial town planning principles. The centuries in between when Spain was under Islamic domination were generally either ignored or portrayed as periods of decay (although at the same time, the Goth or Visigoth kings that led the *Reconquista* against the Moors were also exalted). Hence, the unveiling of the ancient city wall was appropriated symbolically and celebrated beyond its archaeological significance as the resurrection of one of the periods the city could take most pride in, the time when Barcelona (Barcino) had been a Roman military colony.²⁷

This enthusiasm for the material recovery of Roman Barcino contrasted with the sentiments of nostalgia that other authors and the residents of the Barri de la Catedral shared and manifested in writing, especially during the 1940s. In these writings we find a celebration of the genuine atmosphere that impregnated the Barri de la Catedral since old; an atmosphere that was the result of a unique combination of physical and social elements: the narrow street-grid, the presence of monumental buildings and the traditionally popular and dynamic mercantile activity of the area. It was an atmosphere, finally, that had allegedly survived almost intact until the Civil War. Several medieval guild houses had existed in the neighborhood; and right until their disappearance, Corribia, Bou de la Plaça Nova and Plaça Nova hosted an extraordinary number of traditional stores, workshops and taverns.²⁸ The Barri de la Catedral was also famous for its annual celebrations of the neighborhood's patron saint, Sant Roc, who, according to the legend, had once saved Barcelonans from a deadly plague.

27. See, among others and in chronological order, Manuel Ballester Ferrer, "Desde la Vía Layetana hasta la puerta de Don Quijote," *El Correo Catalán*, 4 June 1939; Ramón Aliberch, "La nueva Tapinería. El Pasaje de los Condes," *Hoja del Lunes*, 29 November 1943; (Anon.), "Crónica de la Jornada. En la Avenida de la Catedral," *La Vanguardia Española*, 28 November 1956; José Piñol Riús, "Enriquecimiento del Tesoro Monumental de Barcelona. La grandiosa obra de restauración de la muralla romana de la calle Tapinería," *El Correo Catalán*, 24 September 1959.

28. (Anon.), "Recuerdos de la vieja Plaza Nueva," *Destino*, 21 December 1946.

Journalist Ana Nadal de Sanjuán respectfully acknowledged the “hygienic and aesthetic advantages” of the transformations in the Barri de la Catedral, but suggested, “they hurt insofar they demand the sacrifice of the very roots and substance of old Barcelona.”²⁹ Ricardo Suñé, one of the most determined defenders of old Barcelona, lamented that there was nothing left of Tapineria street by 1945, only “the mutilated street [...], devoid of the atmosphere of the olden days.” Among others, Suñé explained, “the classical ‘xapiners’ or ‘tapiners’ are gone and so are the tailors.”³⁰ According to Francisco Curet, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Catalan term *xapiners* or *tapiners* was used to refer to the makers of *tapines*, a special kind of shoe wear, but the name had since been used to identify shoemakers, who tended to concentrate on Tapineria street.³¹ But not only artisans and their workshops were mourned. When number 8 Bou street was demolished, architect and author Oriol Bohigas reminded his readership that the building hosted famous Catalan eighteenth-century painter Viladomat’s studio, describing the painter as “an example for generations and a *maestro* to the people” (italics added).³² Weekly magazine *Destino*³³, in turn, disapproved the loss of Plaça Nova as a result of the demolition of the blocks that made up the Barri de la Catedral, claiming that

29. Ana Nadal de Sanjuán, “Fragmentos de historia barcelonesa que desaparecen,” *La Vanguardia Española*, 16 November 1943.

30. Ricardo Suñé, “Cosas de la Tapinería,” *El Correo Catalan*, 10 August 1945.

31. Francisco Curet, “La Tapinería,” *Diario de Barcelona*, 11 September 1959.

32. Oriol Bohigas, “El primer taller de Viladomat ha desaparecido,” *Ramblas*, 6 May 1946.

33. It should be noted that the magazine *Destino* was known for not being fully aligned with the regime. It was founded by Catalan sympathizers of the Falange in 1937, turning more liberal and Catalanist in the 1940s. Among its numerous contributors were Josep Pla, Carles Soldevila, Ana María Matute and Miguel Delibes. See Isabel de Cabo and Jordi Casassas i Ymbert, *La resistencia cultural bajo el franquismo: en torno a la revista Destino, 1957-1961* (Barcelona: Ediciones Àltera, 2001).

what was once a secluded space is now simply a transit road and the modernity of neighboring Via Laietana has evaporated the subtle aroma of Barcelonism that floated over the square ten years earlier [i.e., prior to the war].³⁴



Fig. 3 Section of Tapineria street today. The old buildings that stood on the right were demolished in order to disclose the Roman city wall. Fragments of loose Roman pillars can be seen lying in the grass in the background.

It was not until 1959, more than ten years after *Destino*'s critique of the opening of transit roads in the old city, that another inner-city reform project was approved, which explicitly recommended not opening new streets, but forming squares instead, and thus replaced a linear planning logic with one of punctual interventions – on paper at least.³⁵

34. (Anon.), "Recuerdos de la vieja Plaza Nueva," *Destino*, 21 December 1946.

35. V. Martorell Portas, A. Florensa Ferrer and V. Martorell Otzet, *Historia del Urbanismo en Barcelona* (Barcelona: Editorial Labor, 1970), 97.

Suñé and Curet in turn paid homage to the moribund Corribia by delving into its etymology. Their nostalgic accounts ensured that the genesis, existence and demise of the street were immortalized in the (Francoist) press annals of Barcelona before the street disappeared physically. Their explorations reveal almost as much about the etymology of the street name as they do about the context in which they were written, and arguably deserve closer attention. According to Suñé, Corribia was simply a derivation of the original term *corribla* that once referred to the streets that followed the course of the city wall or “linking all the ‘vilanoves’ [the new conurbations that emerged outside the walls] and each city entrance with the next one.”³⁶ However, this neat historical explanation did not quite satisfy the author’s imagination, and a few years later he devoted another article to the agonizing street. Paraphrasing the title of Robert Hill’s famous film *The dangerous blonde* (1924), his article ‘*Una rubia peligrosa*’ narrates the legend of the *Cua rubia*, the blonde young woman that once resided in the neighborhood.

All men went crazy about her, regaling her, and giving her all kinds of attentions and gifts. Nevertheless, the ‘Cua rubia’ eventually sought to get rid of them in the most criminal way. (...) The ‘Cua rubia’ seduced the gallant man that most suited her and once she had obtained everything she wanted from him, she had him killed by her loyal bailiffs, and his corpse was thrown into the sea through the subterranean corridor [beneath the street] that led to the seashore.³⁷

Suñé explained that there were several subterranean passages that ran underneath Corribia and its environs. According to the legend, these led to the *Avernal* (Avernus) or hell, and among them, was the one “beneath the disappeared street of ‘Infern’ – which was destroyed

36. Ricardo Suñé, “Estampas Barcelonesas. El triunfo de la ‘Corribia’,” *El Correo Catalán*, 14 October 1943.

37. Ricardo Suñé, “Estampas Barcelonesas. Una rubia peligrosa,” *El Correo Catalán*, 17 October 1946.

when Via Laietana was opened.”³⁸ Suñé intertwined the legends about the *Cua rubia* and the subterranean passages that led to the Avernus, and ended the article by spurring his readers’ imagination:

Perhaps the corpses of her lovers were brought directly to the infernal mansion and the ‘Cua rubia’ was paid a certain percentage for each of them! Let us see who among you dares to find out...³⁹

The legend about the *Cua rubia* contains a number of elements that highlight the relevance of the Barri de la Catedral in the Barcelonan imagination further. The deceitful nature of the *Cua rubia* can be viewed as a metaphor for the labyrinthine disposition of the medieval street-grid and the subterranean passages of the Barri de la Catedral – and the old town, in general. The same way the *Cua rubia* deliberately misled her victims and had them killed in the dark, subterranean galleries, the dense network of narrow streets and unpredictable turns caused a sense of confusion and vulnerability in visitors and dwellers. A further analogy between these bodily and urban experiences conjures the image of the male body lost in the folds and cavities of the female body, recurrent in classical and medieval literature.⁴⁰ The fact that the subterranean passages that Suñé describes led indistinctly to the Avernus and the seashore evokes the Roman myth according to which Lake Avernus (in Campania, Italy) was the entrance to the underworld, hereby exposing an ancient association between hell and water.⁴¹ In the context of Barcelona, this association can be understood historically as well. For a long time, some would argue that until fairly recently, Barcelona “lived with its back to the sea”, to use a popularized expression. A key aspect of all urban reform plans, from

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. For a discussion on the analogy between women and labyrinths, see Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s sexual poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), esp. 79, and Rosemary Sullivan, *Labyrinth of Desire: Women, Passion, and Romantic Obsession* (Cambridge: Counterpoint, 2002), esp. 128. For an examination of the woman as a metaphor for the city, see Eva Maria Rapp, *The metaphor of the city in the Apocalypse of John* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004), esp. 193-6.

41. Cf. Arne Neset, *Arcadian waters and wanton seas: the iconology of waterscapes in nineteenth-century transatlantic culture* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009), 96-7.

Cerdà's to Vilaseca's, was to link the mountain to the sea. Since Roman times, Barcelona had been conceived as an enclosed city, separate from the seashore.⁴² Even when the city began to expand outside the walls it did so towards the mountains and less along the shoreline. Wealthy Barcelonans always believed that the farther from the sea they lived, the better.⁴³

Notwithstanding the stimulating and multifaceted legend of the *Cua rubia*, Suñé's initial account of the etymological origins of Corribia prevailed. In 1956, Francisco Curet picked up the subject again, clarifying and settling the historical origins of the street: "Corrible or Corribla is the [fragment of the circumference of the first Roman enclosure] that has preserved the old generic name with some minor alterations, a relic or vestige of its remote origins."⁴⁴

A few months later, *La Vanguardia Española* claimed, in a dramatic tone, that the last demolitions on Corribia not only did away with the street as a relic of remote origins, but "increased the agony of Plaça Nova in its final days" as well. The article went on to suggest that once the last houses on Corribia and Plaça Nova were demolished, "the square would have disappeared in its genuine sense;" and with this, "a stage of Barcelona's history during which closed and secluded spaces predominated will solemnly end, and the present stage, which favors broad and neat avenues, will have triumphed" (Figures 4 and 5).⁴⁵ This last quote expresses most clearly the tension between progress and nostalgia (or the battle

42. This apart from the longstanding existence of fishermen's settlements along the shore as Manuel Delgado points out. See Manuel Delgado, *La ciudad mentirosa: fraude y miseria del "modelo Barcelona"* (Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata, 2007), 115.

43. The sea was long perceived as bringing not only goods and prosperous traders, but also "undesirable" people along with epidemics that slyly introduced themselves inside the city wall.

44. Francisco Curet, "Viejas calles de Barcelona. La calle 'Corribia'," *Diario de Barcelona*, 23 March 1956.

45. (Anon.), "En la Avenida de la Catedral," *La Vanguardia Espanola*, 28 November 1956.

between “urbanism and history”, as someone put it⁴⁶) that synthesizes the reactions to the works that led to the disappearance of the Barri de la Catedral.



Fig. 4 Last remains of the old houses attached to the Roman wall and its polygonal towers along former Corribia and Plaça Nova (1957). Courtesy of Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat, Arxiu fotogràfic de Barcelona, Signatura C120/165.

46. (Anon.) “Por la perduración de[l] espíritu [de la Plaza Nueva] velan las dos torres de las murallas romanas, a cuya sombra es venerada la imagen de San Roque”, *Diario de Barcelona*, 26 October 1955.



Fig. 5 The same view today: Plaça Nova and Avinguda de la Catedral.

Implications for tourism and the image of Barcelona

Artistic guides and catalogues devoted to Barcelona and published in the 1940s mostly commenced chronologically by introducing ancient – or essentially Roman – Barcelona to the reader. In *Barcelona Antigua. Arquitectura Civil*, which is part of the fifth volume of *Cataluña Artística*, published in 1942, Agustí Duran i Sanpere begins by establishing that the Roman remains are the earliest ancient urban remains of any relevance in the city.⁴⁷ José Gudiol Ricart in turn presents “the Roman city as the seed of the great Barcelona of today” in one of the volumes of *Guías Artísticas de España* published in 1946.⁴⁸ As early as 1943, Ramón Aliberch also noted that few modern cities could offer the “cultivated traveler” such a

47. Agustí Duran i Sanpere, “Barcelona Antigua. Arquitectura Civil,” in *Cataluña Artística* (Barcelona: Librería Verdager, 1942), vii.

48. José Gudiol Ricart (ed.), “Barcelona,” in *Guías Artísticas de España* (Barcelona: Editorial Aries, 1946), 6.

special environment as that found in Barcelona's "Ancient Quarter" [sic].⁴⁹ However, it is not until the following decade that we find more explicit references to tourism in relation to Roman Barcelona and the works on Avinguda de la Catedral. In *Visite Barcelona, Cataluña y las Islas Baleares*, published around 1950, visitors are encouraged to visit ancient Barcelona on the morning of their second day in the city.⁵⁰ They are offered a detailed itinerary that begins on Placa Nova and ends at Plaça de Ramon Berenguer el Gran after walking the streets surrounding the cathedral and admiring different monuments such as the Episcopal palace, the House of the Archdeacon, the convent of the Clarisas, and the remains of the Roman wall that could be contemplated after the demolitions along Tapineria and Avinguda de la Catedral.

In an article published by *Solidaridad Nacional* in April 1955, architect Federico Ulsamer mentions the "enormous buses from which tourists from all over the world get off in front of the cathedral."⁵¹ Ulsamer celebrates the city council's careful restoration of the Roman gate, which together with the opening of Avinguda de la Catedral, provides a genuine "entrance door" to the Gothic Quarter.⁵² Like the ceremonial arrivals of Franco and Eva Perón mentioned earlier, the concept of tourist buses parking in front of the cathedral would have been unthinkable prior to the demolition of the Barri de la Catedral. After the disappearance of the old neighborhood, tourists could be dropped off conveniently right in front of the cathedral. From there they could safely and comfortably visit the temple and adjacent monuments, and access the Gothic Quarter in larger groups. In similar terms, Oriol de la

49. Aliberch, "La nueva Tapinería. El Pasaje de los Condes."

50. (Anon.), *Visite Barcelona, Cataluña y las Islas Baleares (Guías Turísticas de España)* (Barcelona: Ediciones Perrier, [1950?]).

51. Federico Ulsamer, "La puerta del Barrio Gótico debe terminarse urgentemente," *Solidaridad Nacional*, 27 September 1955.

52. Ibid.

Ribera praises the reconstruction of the ancient belt “to the delight of scholars and the pleasure of tourists” in an article published in 1959.⁵³

Ulsamer’s and Ribera’s references are not coincidental. A few years earlier, in 1951, the Franco regime had created the Ministry of Tourism with the clear intent of turning tourism into a fundamental economic activity. As early as 1938, while the Civil War was still going on, Franco created the Servicio Nacional de Turismo (National Tourism Service). A year later, after the end of the war, the Service was renamed Dirección General de Turismo (General Directorate of Tourism), and made dependant on the powerful Ministry of Government led by pro-German Ramón Serrano Suñer. Taking inspiration from Nazi Germany’s Kraft durch Fraude and Fascist Italy’s Opera Nazionale del Doppolavoro, at this early stage, tourism was seen more as a propaganda tool for controlling the masses – the State having formally the monopoly on tourist activities – and less as a source of economic growth.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the Franco regime realized soon that tourism could be a relatively comfortable means of obtaining urgently needed foreign currency.⁵⁵

The regime’s initiatives in this sense never reached the proportions they did in Germany and Italy, but included, nevertheless, similar elements such as fixed routes and trips to the sites that the regime took most pride in such as battle fields and what was seen as genuinely ‘national’ sites like El Escorial, Segovia and Toledo.⁵⁶ From 1947, there were two so-called

53. Oriol de la Ribera, “Tres veces ensanchó sus murallas. Derribado el último recinto, ni el Tibidabo puede constituir un obstáculo para su expansión”, *El Correo Catalán*, 24 September 1959.

54. Ana Moreno Garrido, *Historia del turismo en España en el siglo XX* (Madrid: Editorial Síntesis, 2007), 152-3.

55. See Rafael Esteve Secall and Rafael Fuentes García, *Economía, historia e instituciones del turismo en España* (Madrid: Ediciones Pirámide, 2000), 95-6.

56. Moreno Garrido, 153.

national routes, one starting in Madrid that encompassed several towns in Castile, and one commencing in Barcelona, covering northern Spain as well as a few Castilian and Catalan towns.⁵⁷

A booklet with the title *Apología turística de España* (something akin to ‘Touristic tribute to Spain’), published by the General Directorate of Tourism in 1943, offers some insight into the kind of image of Spain and its regions that the regime aimed to transmit to domestic and foreign visitors alike. Of Catalonia, and Barcelona more specifically, it says:

[T]he smiling figure of Barcelona, the robust and slender city of culture and work.

Work and culture share the layered coating of millenary monuments. Catalan activity is not about scampering about without a norm or a goal; it involves intelligent and accurate dynamism, rhythmic and tenacious.

[...]

[Catalonia] keeps the illustrious vestiges of its past; worships History and Archaeology as elements of culture and evidence of lineage. Barcelona has corners and monuments of this kind, which are full of interest.”⁵⁸

On the one hand, the excerpt is illustrative of the stereotypical celebration of Catalan prosperity and industriousness; on the other, it suggests an awareness of the potentially exploitable touristic value of the monuments and ruins of Catalonia, and in particular, Barcelona. The praise of Catalan affluence can be found in other official works too, including

57. See Ibid., 172-3.

58. Dirección General del Turismo, *Apología turística de España* (Madrid: Dirección General del Turismo, 1943), 41-2.

the scholarly book *Aportaciones a la historia del turismo en España* by Manuel Fernández Álvarez, published in 1956. There Barcelona is described as one of the three most emblematic Spanish cities in the fifteenth century (the other two being Santiago de Compostela and Salamanca). To Fernández Álvarez, late medieval and Renaissance Barcelona was synonymous with a city “full of goods and riches,” and travelers marveled at “the vitality of its port, the greatness of the city and especially its cleanliness.”⁵⁹ However, Barcelona, and Catalonia as a whole, became less prominent internationally in the sixteenth century, and more so from the eighteenth century. For the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European Grand Tour travelers who visited Spain, the region was more of a land of passage on their way to what they believed was the ‘genuine’ Spain (Castile and Andalusia). Many of them showed surprise at Catalonia’s relative degree of modernization and economic development, which they did not associate with the Iberian Peninsula.⁶⁰

Be that as it may, in these writings there is little of the spirit of the *Societat d’Atracció de Forasters* that Barcelonan entrepreneurs founded in 1908 to coordinate tourist-related initiatives and lobby for the importance of tourism as an economic activity. In truth, neither its spirit nor the society itself survived the Spanish Civil War.⁶¹ Its monthly publication, the magazine *Barcelona Atracció*, was suspended during the conflict. It was resumed in 1945, although no longer as a private venture. As suggested earlier, the regime’s aim was to use tourism to promote the new state and its values, and accordingly, it was the Junta Provincial de Turismo (the Provincial Tourism Board) that took over the publication of *Barcelona*

59. Manuel Fernández Álvarez, *Aportaciones a la historia del turismo en España* (Madrid: Secretaría General del Ministerio de Información, 1956), 27.

60. Sole Jiménez and Llorenç Prats, “El turismo en Cataluña: evolución histórica y retos de futuro,” *PASOS. Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural* 4, 2 (2006): 153-174, 154.

61. Cf. Luis Alfonso Garay Tamajón and Gemma Cànoves Valiente, “El desarrollo turístico en Cataluña en los dos últimos siglos: una perspectiva transversal,” *Doc. Anàl. Geogr.* 53 (2009): 29-46, esp. 36.

Atracción.⁶² A more folkloric aesthetics characterized the new edition, religious festivities and state sponsored events occupying a significant portion of the magazine's pages.⁶³ In addition, the magazine was also no longer available for free as it had been previously.⁶⁴

Although, as the excerpt from *Apología turística de España* and even some of the articles of *Barcelona Atracción* suggest, the regime saw Catalonia's, and in particular Barcelona's, monuments and archaeological remains as an asset for tourism, in practice, when it began to pay more serious attention to this activity in the 1950s, acknowledging its commercial potential, it was Catalonia's beaches that it showed interest in and less so its cities. The 1950s witnessed the birth of the so-called three-S tourism, *Sun, Sea, Sand*,⁶⁵ which would drastically alter the appearance of the Spanish Mediterranean coast, but also Spain's economy (and many would argue its political climate).⁶⁶

Hence, despite its monuments and millenary stones, Barcelona was not marketed by the Francoist authorities as a leading tourist destination. It is worth noting that unlike Palma de Mallorca, Valencia, Tarrasa, Pamplona and other localities, by December 1957, when the National Assembly of the Spanish Federation of Centres of Initiative and Tourism (Asamblea Nacional de la Federación Española de Centros de Iniciativa y Turismo) met in Barcelona, the city did not have a centre of this kind yet. Creating such a centre in Barcelona was, it

62. Cf. Albert Blasco i Peris, "Barcelona Atracción (1910-1936). Una revista de la Sociedad de Atracción de Forasteros" (PhD diss., Univeristat Pompeu Fabra, 2005), 457-8.

63. See, for example, *Barcelona Atracción* 311 (1946); *Barcelona Atracción* 323 (1949) and *Barcelona Atracción* 334 (1952).

64. Blasco i Peris, 457.

65. Jiménez and Prats, 157.

66. Although it is hard to question that gradual economic and political liberalization resulted from opening the country to tourism, it is important to stress that it was mainly through land speculation and corrupt town planning practices that small, age-old, picturesque seaside towns such as Lloret de Mar on the Catalan coast or Peñíscola further down on the Valencian coast grew into the aesthetically discordant and often cheaply built high-rise tourist complexes that we know today.

turns out, one of the items on the agenda.⁶⁷ This shows the extent of the rupture between the pre-war situation of Barcelona as an increasingly promising tourist destination and the absence of such a projection after the war. Instead, echoing its stereotypical historical depiction as a prosperous commercial port-city and reflecting the regime's appreciation of it as a city of work, Barcelona became more associated with a thriving, although slightly conventional location for commercial fairs and conferences, hosting more businessmen than tourists. During these two decades Barcelona appeared more akin to business cities like Milan in Italy or Frankfurt in Germany.⁶⁸

Consequently, the state did not invest in preserving and embellishing Barcelona's historic centre – this was left to the local administration. Barcelona city council was, in this case, successful in collecting sufficient funding to undertake both the opening of Avinguda de la Catedral and the disclosure of the Roman wall. By presenting the works as part of the post-war reconstruction of the old Barcelona, the city council managed to receive funding from the Instituto Nacional de Crédito para la Reconstrucción (National Credit Institute for Reconstruction), which the regime set up in 1939 to assist public and private owners with rebuilding.⁶⁹ A more substantial portion of the funding was granted as a loan by the Banco de España, the national bank.⁷⁰ In his prologue to Florensa's *Conservación y restauración de monumentos históricos (1954-1962)* (essentially a report on accomplished restoration works) published in 1962, mayor Porcioles subtly refers to a “solidly established tradition” by which Barcelona's local administration “has tended spontaneously” to offer its cooperation to the

67. V.V.A.A., [Assembly proceedings], (proceedings of the XXII Asamblea Nacional de la Federación Española de Centros de Iniciativa y Turismo, Barcelona, 2-3 December 1957), 10.

68. Jiménez and Prats, 165.

69. Jefatura del Estado, “Ley de 16 de marzo creando el Instituto de Crédito para la Reconstrucción Nacional”, *BOE*, no. 81, 22 March 1939, 1642-3; Gestión Urbanística/Expediente 1972 (Áreas devastadas)/Año 1939, “Expediente relativo al presupuesto extraordinario para la reconstrucción del Patrimonio Municipal dañado por la guerra, y nueva urbanización y mejora de las zonas devastadas de la ciudad” (Barcelona: Arxiu Municipal Administratiu de Barcelona).

70. See Gestión Urbanística/Expediente 1972 (Áreas devastadas)/Año 1939, “Expediente relativo al presupuesto extraordinario para la reconstrucción del Patrimonio Municipal dañado por la guerra, y nueva urbanización y mejora de las zonas devastadas de la ciudad.”

state in matters of restoration.⁷¹ At the same time, there is little doubt that the regime benefitted symbolically from the city council's initiatives. As has been explained, the recovery of Barcelona's Roman legacy suited the early regime's rhetoric on the historic supremacy of the Roman and Hapsburg Empires well.

Conclusion

Examining the processes and discourses that led to the opening of Avinguda de la Catedral and the disclosure of sections of the Roman city wall in post-civil war Barcelona involves exploring Barcelona's Roman and Gothic pasts under Franco as well as acknowledging the legacy of the dictatorship's urban interventions in today's Barcelona. The comfortable view of the restored Gothic cathedral from Avinguda de la Catedral and the sight of the Roman remains represent an essential part of the contemporary visitor's experience of the historic city centre. Both are the result of works initiated by the Francoist city-council during a period that many contemporary Barcelonans prefer to either forget or ignore.

As has been explained, the project for the opening of a transversal avenue across the old district was not new in 1939 when the Civil War ended. The works for the avenue were about to commence when the conflict broke out in 1936. The Francoist city-council simply resumed the plans that had been approved for the last time by the Republican city council, taking advantage of the fact that many of the houses that needed to be demolished had already been destroyed by the bombs that the Francoist air-force dropped on the city. Sections of the

71. José María Porcioles, prologue to Adolfo Florensa, *Conservación y restauración de monumentos históricos (1954-1962)* (Barcelona: Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 1962).

ancient city wall had been identified in the early twentieth century when Via Laietana was opened, and the unveiling was resumed after the war. Moreover, two of the key figures in both processes – municipal architect Adolfo Florensa and historian and archivist Agustí Durán i Sanpere – were reappointed by the Francoist city-council after the war despite their having served both the Republican and Catalan autonomous governments (presumably because the new city council could not find any suitable professionals to replace them).

These continuities in practice contrast with the discursive reactions to the projects in a number of post-civil war publications. Inspired by the Falangist historical imagination, those who favored the reforms celebrated the recovery of Roman military Barcelona at the expense of the urban fabric of later, allegedly less noble periods in the city's history. Meanwhile, other chroniclers mourned the disappearing Barri de la Catedral as the quintessential representation of Barcelona's genuinely mercantile tradition (and perhaps indirectly of the repressed Catalan language and culture). As the regime moved away from the Falangist doctrine and the works on the avenue progressed, journalists and writers abandoned more and more the passionate defense, alternatively, nostalgic lamenting of the early days, commenting instead on the practical aspects of the works, in particular their implications for tourism. As the number of visitors in the old city began growing in the 1950s, it became apparent that the removal of the Barri de la Catedral had turned the area into a tourist-friendlier space where buses could park and sightseers revel at the juxtaposition of Roman, Gothic and functional architecture. Thus, although Barcelona was not promoted as a leading cultural destination under Franco, there emerged a discourse on the significance that the redesign of the old district had had on tourism once the works on Avinguda de la Catedral were accomplished.

It is not just the eclectic or evolving approaches to urban planning, history and heritage under Franco that emerge from studying these two cases. The malleability of public discourse in relation to urban space is apparent throughout the history of the opening of the avenue and the excavations since their first inception, the opening in particular. From sanitation and circulation to disencumbering and embellishment, and from there to ideology, and, finally, tourism: different justifications for essentially the same works.

Bio

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