

Visit to the Historic Building of the Universitat de Barcelona

A Brief History



In the year 1401 King Martin the Humane founded a Studium Generale of Medicine in the city of Barcelona, and it was not until 1450 that King Alphonse the Magnanimous granted a charter for the establishment of a Studium Generale in Barcelona, which served to unify the city's existing seats of learning.

In 1536, during the reign of Charles I of Spain, work began on a building to house the Studium Generale. It was erected at the top end of the Rambla and to this day this stretch of the street bears the name Rambla dels Estudis. The University remained at this site until 1714, the year in which Philip V promulgated the Nueva Planta decrees ordering the transferral of the Faculties of Philosophy and Canon and Secular Law to the town of Cervera near Lleida. The University of Cervera remained active as a university centre from 1717 to 1837, the year in which the University was restored to its home in Barcelona.

The Convent of Carme and the city's Royal Academy of Medicine housed the University's faculties until 22 October 1863, when the first stone was laid for a new University building designed by the architect Elies Rogent. The building was to have a great impact on the city's urban development, since it was one of the first structures to be raised outside Barcelona's ancient walls. Although the building was not to be completed for another twenty years, the first lectures were already being given in 1871.

Highlights of the visit to the Historic Building:

The Main Entrance Hall – The Noble Stairway – The Upper Landing – The Rectors' Portrait Gallery – The University Courtyards – The *Paranimf* Gallery – The *Paranimf* – The Library

The Main Entrance Hall



The University's main entrance hall reflects the splendour and monumental character with which the architect sought to endow the Historic Building. From the entrance you have the possibility of heading off in a number of directions to explore the inside of the building. It is divided into three nave-like sections by two rows of seven Neo-Romanesque style pillars. These massive pillars support the groin-vaulted roof and their capitals bear the coats of arms of Spain's provinces.

Occupying niches around the hall are five commanding statues: Saint Isidore of Seville, Averroes, Alphonse the Wise, Ramon Llull and Joan Lluís Vives. The sculptures are the work of the Vallmitjana brothers, and were commissioned between 1875 and 1876.

The Noble Stairway and the Upper Landing



The Noble Stairway takes you up from the entrance hall to the first floor via a flight of steps that branches off in two directions. The steps to the left lead you to the gallery and the University's assembly halls – the *Aula Magna* and the *Paranimf*, while those to the right take you through to the Rector's offices and main meeting room.

The walls of the landing are adorned with paintings loaned to the University by the Prado Museum in Madrid in the nineteenth century. Also of interest are the tapestries bearing the various coats of arms adopted by the University of Barcelona at different moments in its history, and the coat of arms above the stairway, encircled by the Order of the Golden Fleece.

Rectors' Portrait Gallery



The gallery serves as an antechamber to the UB governing body's main meeting room. Here hang the portraits of all the UB's rectors since the University was transferred back to the city from Cervera. The initiative was the idea of Julián Casaña, rector of the University of Barcelona between 1876 and 1896. The rectors wear academic dress, comprising a gown, hood and the square cap known as the biretta.

University Courtyards



The twin courtyards around which the two wings of the Historic Building are built were home to the University's first faculties: the Arts Faculty (now only housing courses in philology) and the Science Faculty (now mathematics).

The courtyards comprise two floors of 11x7 covered arcades, and a third level that is open to the sky. The variety of plant motifs decorating the capitals at the top of the pillars are unmistakably inspired by the medieval Catalan monasteries of Ripoll and Sant Pere de les Puel·les.

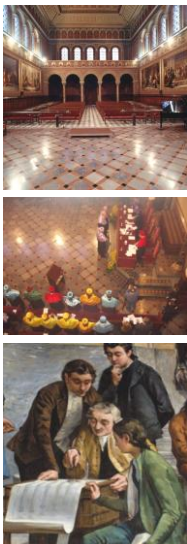
Paranimf Gallery



The *Paranimf* Gallery links the Sciences courtyard on one side of the building with the Arts courtyard on the other. It provides access to three of the University's finest structures: the *Paranimf*, in the centre of the gallery and at the heart of the building, as well as the *Aula Magna* at one end and the Library at the other.

To the right of the doorway to the *Paranimf* is the stone coat of arms of Charles I of Spain, which used to preside over the main entrance to the building of the university that stood at the top of the Rambla.

Paranimf



The *Paranimf* is the most emblematic part of the Historic Building. Designed to be the heart of university life, it sits right in the middle of the building directly above the main entrance hall. The *Paranimf* is the place where the University's main institutional ceremonies are held, including the inauguration of the new academic year and the awarding of honorary degrees.

The richly ornate decoration of the hall contrasts with the Neo-Medieval austerity of the rest of the building, in particular the façade and the courtyards. The interior walls are covered with decorative motifs in Neo-Mudejar style, while the magnificent collection of paintings representing key moments in Spain's history gives the room its internal coherence. The decoration is completed with allegories of the natural and social sciences, and representations of the monarchs who played leading roles in the University's history.

Library



Elies Rogent lavished his attention on the library. He set aside a large area for it and designed its cedarwood bookcases and the room's decoration. Its most notable feature is the Reading Room, illuminated with natural light from its high glass ceiling installed in 1868.

The initial collection was built up from the works formerly held in the libraries of the monasteries that had been dissolved in 1838, and from some of the works held in the university library in Cervera. Today, the UB boasts the second largest collection in Spain.

Towers



The building comprises a central body and two wings each capped with a tower. The tower on the left as you face the building has a clock and bells mounted on a decorative iron structure. This was installed in 1877 replacing Rogent's original plans for a central bell tower, which was never built.