

# The Archaeological Museum of Catalonia (MAC)

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Along with the National Museum of Catalan Art and the Museum of Science and Technology of Catalonia, the Archaeological Museum of Catalonia (MAC) is one of Catalonia's three national museums and one that has a truly singular role in the network of Catalan museums.

## What is the MAC today?

The MAC was created by Catalan Museum Law 17/1990 as an independent organism dependent on the Catalan Ministry of Culture. More recently, Law 7/2011 on fiscal and financial policy created the Catalan Agency of Cultural Heritage (ACdPC), on which henceforth the MAC was to depend. This transfer was not formally carried out until the approval of Decree 198/2013, in which the statutes that would govern the running of the ACdPC were defined. These statutes foresee that the Catalan national museums will become Decentralized Organs attached to this new Agency but run by their own boards of trustees. The Agency is a public company belonging to the Catalan government that is run from the Ministry of Culture.

Nevertheless, administrative and organic links have always existed – and continue to do so, albeit within a different framework – between the MAC and the National Archaeological Museum of Tarragona, which is owned by the Spanish state but run by the Catalan government (Generalitat de Catalunya).

The seven centres belonging to the MAC extend across Catalonia: the Barcelona Archaeological Museum, the Greek-Roman remains of Empúries, the Girona Archaeological Museum, the Iberian settlement of Ullastret, the Iberian-Roman and medieval settlement at Olèrdola and, finally, two research stations, the Underwater Archaeological Centre (CASC), with a focus on Catalonia, and Iberia Graeca, with its focus on the whole of the Iberian Peninsula.

The MAC also works with the ACdPC in managing the archaeological sites that are property of the Catalan government: the Iberian settlements of La Moleta del Remei (Alcanar),

Sant Miquel (Vinebre), Coll del Moro (Gandesa) and Palamós castle, and the Iberian towns of Molí de l'Espígol (Tornabous) and Castellet de Banyoles (Tivissa).

In 2010, the MAC was encouraged by the Catalan government to organize and provide support for a network of municipally owned museums and visitable archaeological sites scattered throughout Catalonia (Museum of Badalona, Banyoles County Archaeological Museum, La Noguera County Archaeological Museum, Can Oliver Iberian Settlement Museum in Cerdanyola, Museum of Gavà and L'Urgell County Museum in Tàrraga). From 2015 onwards, *Arqueoxarxa*, a new echelon of this network that complements the existing museum network, will come into effect with the incorporation of a series of partner entities

(Salvador Vilaseca Archaeological Museum in Reus, Museum of Lleida, Museum of Lloret, La Roca dels Bous Archaeological Park and site, Museum of Les Terres de l'Ebre and the late Roman Castellum Fractumin Sant Julià de Ramis).

Two other thematic networks already exist that are linked or related to the MAC: the Iberian Route and the Cave Art Route. The former consists of nine sites (but not including those Iberian settlements that the MAC considers as its own and that are owned by the Catalan government) that are municipally run. The latter route preserves exam-

ples of Levantine cave art and consists of a group of shelters in Ulldecona (Ermita del Remei) and Montblanc (Serra de Prades) and the cave-art site of El Cogul owned by the Catalan government. Despite their names, these sites are not in fact part of any 'route'; rather, they belong to a network that bestows them with a label of excellence, both in terms of their cultural importance and their visitor facilities. This network of cave-art sites also coordinates joint activities and acts as a means of communication that complements the other activities that each individual centre runs under its own steam. The selection of the cave-art shelters was based on the existence of management structures (interpretation centres) that are particularly dynamic in nature.



*Archaeological Museum of Catalonia-Barcelona.  
(Photo Archive of MAC)*

The MAC thus supports and cooperates with archaeological museums in Catalonia at all levels, which justifies its definition as a 'national' territorial museum given that it is present, directly or indirectly, throughout the whole of Catalonia.

Thus, as a museum, the MAC is singular in structure. It provides a recognizable 'brand name' for the wide range of elements of Catalan archaeological heritage that it represents, and provides facilities for visitors at differing levels of museological organization. Specifically, the MAC embraces 37 museums and archaeological sites, of which seven are an organic part of the MAC, six are owned by the Catalan government and run by the MAC, ten are municipally owned museums, three are cave-art interpretation centres (two municipally owned and one government-owned) and 11 are municipally run archaeological sites.

### MAC management

The management of the Archaeological Museum of Catalonia is highly decentralized. Each branch or management centre (the name given by the ACdPC) manages an annual budget for activities and running costs under the supervision of the Agency, which has the final say on staff and investment in projects. The MAC is responsible for coordinating the museological aspects of its work, that is, the themes and subject matters highlighted by its various branches. The MAC works to unify the criteria used in its collections (acquisitions, loans and deposits, documentation of objects, conservation and restoration), to coordinate all scientific research and to establish documentary criteria (library and photographic archive), and is also in charge of the diffusion of the MAC brand through its website. The director of the MAB is also the director or coordinator of its Barcelona branch, which acts as the centre that binds together all the individual parts of the network.

### History of the MAC-Barcelona

The former Barcelona Archaeological Museum – i.e. the MAC-Barcelona – is the forerunner of the current MAC because, like

the MAC, it too was created with the idea that it would one day become a national museum; indeed, today, it is the only one of the branches of the MAC that possesses the capacity to act as a national entity. The MAC-Barcelona dates back to 1935 and was the brainchild of Pere Bosch Gimpera, one of the most important figures in the history of Catalan archaeology. The Museum was set up during the Second Spanish Republic as a great national museum of archaeology of a Catalonia that was then still in the process of coming to terms with its own identity (albeit without today's current territorial concepts). The aim was to exhibit singular and, above all, attractive objects belonging to ancient cultures to delight and educate the Catalan population. The concept of territory as we understand it today did not become current until the end of the twentieth century, when the Museum Law was enacted decreeing that national museums were those entities that were present within the official boundaries of Catalonia. Originally, the Museum operated throughout the Iberian Peninsula and even mounted an expedition to Nubia, although it was most active in Catalan-speaking areas – even in those that lie beyond the official boundaries of Catalonia. Its territorial scope was secondary to the promotion of the Museum in scientific circles and so intervention in sites outside Catalonia was legitimate if it entailed an increase in the Museum's prestige.

Indeed, the Museum's founders envisaged a grandiose archaeological museum that would house a number of different collections and boast – if possible – spectacular specimens and museum facilities recreating ancient buildings and transmitting ideas and knowledge to visitors in a highly accessible way. Aside from its historical collection based on nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century concepts of museums, many of the Museum's specimens and pieces came from donations, purchases and excavations carried out over a broad territorial scope. Of the excavations, the enduring link between the Barcelona Archaeological Museum and the Empúries site was of great im-



*Archaeological Museum of Catalonia-Girona. (Photo Archive of MAC)*



*Archaeological Museum of Catalonia-Empúries, The Forum. (Photo Archive of MAC)*

portance. In fact, from 1935 onwards the director of the Museum was also the director of excavations at Empúries, but it was not until the 1980s that this duplicity of functions began to change. The archaeological works in Empúries since 1908.

Other branches have joined the MAC project as decreed expressly by the Museum Law. For example, the museum in the Iberian settlement of Ullastret had been opened by the Girona Provincial Council in 1961 (although excavations had been underway there since 1947); the Olèrdola Museum, inaugurated in 1971, is the most recent of the museums in the network.

### MAC headquarter in Barcelona

This article discusses above the headquarter of the MAC in Barcelona, that is, the former Archaeological Museum of Barcelona, given that the subject of this monograph are the museums in the city of Barcelona; however, it is important to appreciate that the MAC headquarter in Barcelona are but part of a larger and more ambitious whole. Nonetheless, of all the archaeological museums, it is the one that, given its history, collections and character, is best placed to act as the fulcrum of the MAC network or even to stand alone as the National Museum of Archaeology. Even so, another Catalan archaeological museum – the National Archaeological Museum of Tarragona (MNAT) – should also be recognised as of national importance and, like its Barcelona counterpart, also possesses the standing and the ability to act as a national museum. This museum should be considered as the grand museum of the history of Roman Catalonia.

### *The Museum and its collections*

The Museum's collections consist of pieces originating from excavation campaigns carried out by the Museum in Catalonia, the Iberian Mediterranean Basin and the rest of Spain. They are also based to some extent on donations and purchases received and made over the years. Of greatest interest are the collections from the Argar culture, from Ibiza and from the Iberian culture, above all from Puig de Molins, Castellet de Banyoles in Tivissa and Calaceit. Of similar significance are the collections of Greek material from the Iberian Peninsula, above all from Empúries. The Roman part of the collection corresponding to the ancient Barcino is also of great value (i.e. the monumental doorway, statue of the God Priap, mosaic from the circus of the former minor Count's Palace, the mosaic of the Three Graces), as well as the mosaics from Can Pau Birol and Belerfont

in Girona and those from the villa of Romeral in Albesa. The Museum's Roman tombstones are also of note. The Museum also contains a number of singular objects from the period corresponding to the transition from late antiquity to the Middle Ages (Byzantine capitol of Sant Polyuktos from the church of St Miquel in Barcelona and the Vissigothic treasure from Torredonjimeno in Jaen). Finally, the Museum also contains a large collection of around 60,000 pieces corresponding to the pre-historic period in Catalonia.

From 2015 onwards, the Museum will have at its disposal 7,000 m<sup>2</sup> of archaeological storerooms in the town of Cervera. These will be used to store material obtained during preventative actions and research activities for which there is no receptor museum near the site from which they originate. This collection will provide the MAC and other institutions with a wide-ranging collection of archaeological objects that will be useful essentially for setting up temporary and permanent exhibitions, with priority given, above all, to the interests of the national museums.



**National Archaeological Museum of Tarragona.**  
(Photo Archive of MAC)

### *The Museum's displays*

In 2010, 70% of the permanent exhibition was restructured and as a result is today fresher and more up-to-date. Even so, the nature of the collection has an important influence on the way it is displayed and on the themes that are presented to visitors. The Museum still has some displays such as the Pompey Room and the Roman section that date back to 1952. These are still of interest since their use of idealized recreations of parts of the Roman *domus* to display pieces (as opposed to the simple use of conventional display cases) was ahead of its time. Thus, the Museum strives to recreate the context of its pieces to help visitors fully appreciate their worth. Finally, however, the Museum has preserved the style of the 1980s in the case of its Roman (on the first floor of the permanent exhibition rooms) and Iberian (in the so-called central "ring") material, which is presented in a more aesthetically pleasing way with far less emphasis than before on recreations of contexts.

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### *Temporary exhibition policy*

In recent years the Museum, which will celebrate its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2015, has organized a series of temporary exhibitions as part of a strategic policy aimed at revitalizing its work. The Museum's Barcelona branch has habitually – albeit somewhat sporadically – organized important exhibitions (e.g. in 1965-67, exhibitions of material from Spanish excavations in Nubia,

primitive cultures from Equatorial Guinea and cave paintings from Tassili) and in recent years has settled into an rhythm of three medium-sized exhibitions and two smaller ones annually. The temporary exhibition area covers 400 m<sup>2</sup>, although the so-called central “ring” is also used for small-scale exhibitions. In addition, the *Arqueoxarxa* network also produces its own exhibitions, which tour around the other Catalan archaeological museums.

The criteria used to choose the exhibition themes essentially attempt to examine current problems by looking back to the past (sex, beauty, democracy) and to raise modern archaeological questions and topics that will attract visitors’ attention. Exhibitions aim to find a link with contemporary ways of thinking via transversal subjects that encompass disciplines such as art (both plastic and scenic), science, anthropology and – naturally – history. A great deal of imagination and creativity are expended and, to give added force to the end product, the Museum arranges swaps and loans with other museums outside Catalonia and Spain to further promote the “Mediterraneanity” that is such a part of the Museum’s make-up.

Examples of the exhibitions that have been held in the Barcelona branch of the MAC in recent years that link current problems with the past include: *History of the boudoir. Art and beauty in ancient times* (2013), *Demos. How to make decisions in a democracy* (to open in 2015), *Innovation and food in pre-historic times* (programmed for 2016), *Greek wine in L’Empordà* (programmed for 2016); exhibitions relating to subjects linked to current affairs: *Indiana Jones* (2012), *Otzi, the man of the snows* (2012), *The cut skulls of the Ibers in Catalonia*, whose first version was produced by the MAC-Ullastret and opened in Ullastret in 2014, but whose full version is programmed to open in Barcelona in 2015, *The Prodigious Decade, the Mancomunitat of Catalonia 1914-1924* (inaugurated in 2014); and themes linked to the Mediterranean: *The Treasures of Vilajoiosa* (opened in 2014) and *The Boat of Deltebre* (produced by the MAC-Girona and the CASC), which will reach Barcelona in 2015.

## Activities

The Museum’s activities operate in spaces arranged in concentric circles. The first such space is the quarters or districts that are closest to the Museum, which, in this case, are the districts of Poble Sec and Hostafrancs. The Museum works directly with local schools through workshops and visits. It also works with local resident groups such as *Rua Xic*, which has set up a citizen participation project in collaboration with the Museum and the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Its aim

is to encourage local people to become culturally active via the Museum and its heritage. For example, on 22 November 2014, various groups and associations from Poble Sec organized a street parade that finished with a work of theatre performed in the Museum devoted to the way in which ancient Iberian, Greek, Phoenician and Roman cultures blended in together. The Museum always attempts to use a style of language that is accessible for all those who live locally, which in this case includes people from many different parts of Spain and the European Union, and from non-European Union, African and Asian countries.

The second space is designed to reach out to people from Barcelona and the rest of Catalonia through joint projects with the Catalan Museum of National Art, the Catalan Museum of Science and Technology, the Institute of Theatre and the Vila Cases Foundation of Contemporary Catalan Art. The motivation here is to incorporate different modes of communication and expression (e.g. the visual and scenic arts, dance, music, literary narration, poetry and so forth) into the Museum’s discourse as a means of attracting a wider public. In order to reach some of the foreign communities living in Bar-

celona guided visits are organized in Italian, Greek, Arab, German, English and Chinese and other foreign languages.

The Museum is also designing new activities with foreign tourists in mind. This segment of the Museum’s public has always been somewhat ignored, perhaps because only eight per cent of the Museum’s visitors are foreign tourists despite the city’s pulling power as a tourist attraction. Tried and



**Archaeological Museum of Catalonia-Barcelona, Colonizations Room. (Photo Archive of MAC)**



**Archaeological Museum of Catalonia-Barcelona, Pompey Room. (Photo Archive of MAC)**

tested communication tools such as audio-guides and QR codes and applications for mobiles and tablets are needed to be able to attract this new public.

Today, all the Museum's activities combine the classic guided visit with workshops and dramatized visits and, as a way of establishing a dialogue between different types of objects, there are plans to present the Museum's pieces in art galleries in Barcelona and, reciprocally, works of art in the MAC-Barcelona.

The combination of different languages and formats, along with more traditional conferences on scientific research or the work of museums, is today standard practice in the Museum – nothing new in terms of the world's museums, but still good examples of some of the Museum's current activities.

### Research

Albeit with differing degrees of implication, the various branches of the MAC are currently cooperating on 28 research projects and, of these, the MAC is the main instigator and lead investigator in 14. In the other 14, it is working as a partner in projects led by other researchers and by other Catalan, Spanish and European institutions. The MAC is currently cooperating with the following research centres: Barcelona University (2 projects), Catalan Institute of Archaeology (ICAC, 2 projects), Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona (1 project), German Archaeologisches Institute in Madrid (1 project), Paul Valery University in Montpellier and the Museum of Lattes (1 project), Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) and the Spanish Research Council (CSIC) in Barcelona (1 project), Autonomous University of Barcelona (1 project), Barcelona University (UB), the *Soprintendenza* of the Archaeological Heritage of Tuscany, Granada University and Rovira i Virgili University in Tarragona (1 project), Lleida University (1 project), ICAC and UB (1 project), Girona University (1 project) and the Spanish equivalent of the Open University (1 project). The branch involved in most research projects is that of Empúries, with 14 projects, and in some cases research work is shared between a number of different branches.

The MAC-Barcelona is at the head of two separate projects (the north-east of the Citerior: from Scipio Aemilianus to Caesar – the Militarization of the Landscape as a model for Territorial Planning, and in the Iberian town of Molí de l'Espígol), and is actively collaborating with a third (Olèrdola). The MAC also hosts a research group, Emergent, recognized by the Catalan government, that studies nature and hegemony in ancient times.

The Museum is currently preparing an Archaeological Resource Plan to provide guidelines for future research. Amongst other objectives, the Plan aims to regulate the Museum's research and ensure that it complies with the goals of the Museum and contributes to its strategic lines of work. Thus, the project differentiates between basic and applied research projects, although all the research carried out by the MAB will be guided by the abovementioned criteria. The Plan will also lay out the Museum's strategy regarding scientific diffusion and publications. It will establish who its researchers are and will define the guidelines on the media (printed press, radio, TV). It will also work closely with other infrastructures involved in museum research in Catalonia: the Underwater Archaeological Centre (CASC), MAC-Girona, MAC-Barcelona and, above all, the Laboratory of Human Palaeopathology (discussed below).

### Laboratories and restoration workshops

The MAC in Barcelona has two restoration workshops for archaeological material, one of which specializes in *opus scutulatum*. These workshops only work for the Museum since external restoration is handled by the Catalan Centre for the Restoration of Moveable Art.

One of the most important sections of the Museum is the Laboratory of Human Palaeopathology and Palaeoanthropology set up by Dr. Domènec Campillo, which is currently in the process of being restructured. The new formula will involve agreements with businesses in the sector whose aim is to revitalize the Laboratory, which possesses what is probably one of the best reference collections in the whole of the Spanish State. This measure will be fundamental for the Museum given the prestige it will generate and the new life it will give to the MAC research section, currently under reform.

### Publications

The MAC's publications form an essential part of its research work and diffusion. The Museum publishes a number of scientific monographs that complement the monographs that each branch publishes. The Museum also publishes two journals whose aim is to ensure that its work reaches a greater public: *Cypsela*, dealing with pre- and protohistory, and *Empúries*, dealing with colonizations, the classical world and the later periods of antiquity. In all, 18 numbers of the former publication have been produced since 1976, while the latter – one of the oldest of all Catalan archaeological publications – has been published since 1939, with to date a total of 55



**Archaeological Museum of Catalonia-Barcelona, Educational section. (Photo Archive of MAC)**

editions. All branches of the MAC-Barcelona can publish in both journals, although *Cypsela* is closely linked to the MAC-Girona and *Empúries* to the MAC-Barcelona.

### Library

The future of the MAC's libraries is to develop a network incorporating the libraries of each of the MAC's different branches. We should thus picture a collection shared by four physical library spaces. This library is specialized, above all, in research, and possesses 57,000 books and documents, of which only those in Barcelona are fully catalogued (around 20,000). Although the remaining documents have only been listed, in 2015 a programme aimed at cataloguing all the material held by the other MAB branches will get underway. The catalogued documents can be consulted in the CCUC (Collective Catalogue of the Universities of Catalonia) and so the use and appreciation of these documents is guaranteed. The idea of intra-library loans is being examined (excluding certain difficult-to-find publications), as is the possibility of organizing virtual loans using Skype or a similar service. Diffusion is made via digital bulletins that contain details and summaries of all new acquisitions.

The MAC library is of extraordinary importance given that the documents it possesses go back to the nineteenth century and run right up to the present day. In Catalonia there are few archaeological libraries that have as many documents covering such a broad space of time.

### Historical archive

The MAB-Barcelona possesses an important fund of documents that date from 1920 to the present day. This archive, which is partially digitalized, is essential to the understanding of the history of Catalan archaeology and is probably one of the most important collections of archaeological documents in the country.

### Photographic archive

After the library and historical archive, the photographic archive is the third of the documentary cornerstones of the MAB. This exceptional collection contains 146,171 items and, as in the case of the other two institutions, is fundamental in the appreciation of the history of Catalan archaeology and, above all, its relationship with other museums and research work.

Modern Catalan archaeology – that is, its origins and progress up to the current day – cannot be understood without

reference to this documentary heritage (library and historical and photographic archives).

The Catalan Museum of Archaeology is currently undergoing a process of redefinition and adjustment in light of the changes that have occurred in the organization and management of Catalan cultural heritage (i.e. the creation of the Catalan Agency of Cultural Heritage). There is no doubt that a museum with history has to continually reinvent itself in order to adapt to the new realities of the day. Nevertheless, one thing has not changed – the need that Catalan archaeology has for a “showroom” that can divulge to Catalan society and the rest of the world the results of its research and the advances that it has made, and that can transmit effectively the knowledge acquired concerning the cultures and ways of life in times past in the country we know as Catalonia. Moreover, the Museum also acts as a window to the world to show Catalans what past cultures and ways of life beyond Catalonia were like; the Museum must act as a means of communication between cultures.

The Catalan Museum of Archaeology is a means and sphere for transmitting knowledge that can perform this function. This article represents an attempt to describe how this museum model, spread throughout Catalonia, works. We hope that it has been successful in explaining the full complexity of the project and its reality, which aims to combine modernity and history.



**Archaeological Museum of Catalonia-Barcelona, Library. (Photo Archive of MAC)**

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