

# HISTORIC ORGANS OF THE PAÏSOS CATALANS



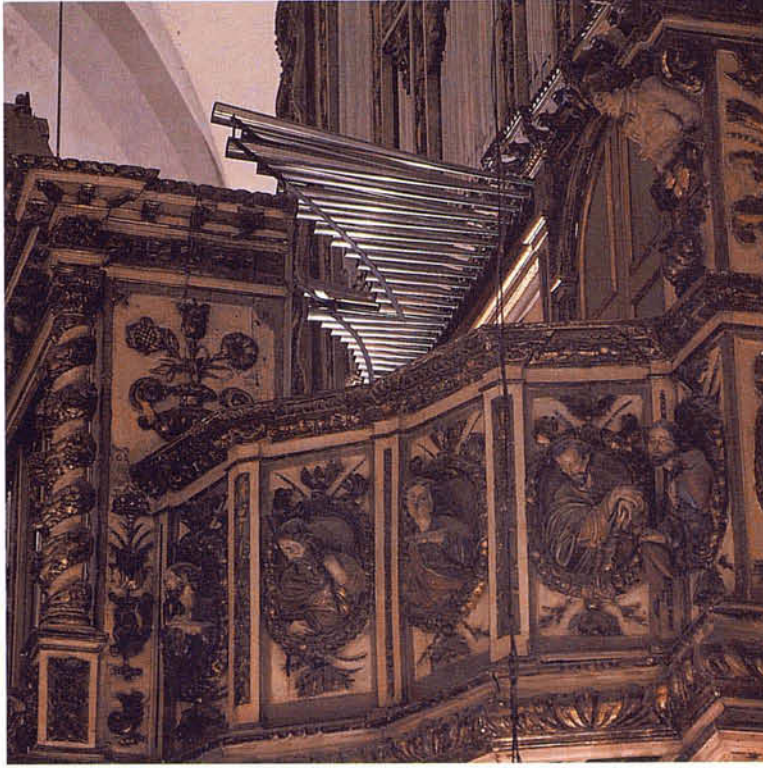
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BARCELONA CATHEDRAL

THE ORGAN WAS ADOPTED AS THE PRINCIPAL LITURGICAL INSTRUMENT IN CATALONIA DURING THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES, AND IN THE EARLY 15th CENTURY ITS USE BECAME CONSIDERABLY WIDESPREAD AND CONSOLIDATED.

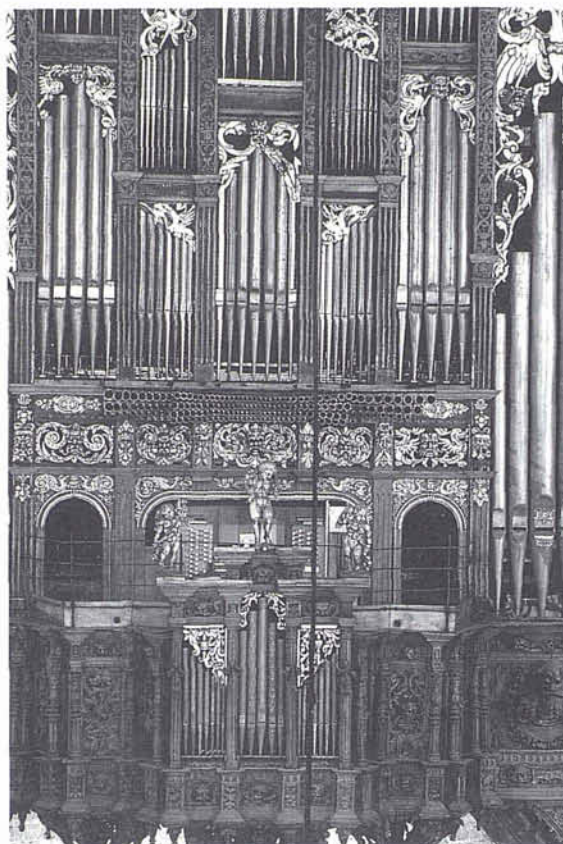
GABRIEL BLANCAFORT MASTER ORGANIST

MUSIC



CHURCH OF SITGES, BARCELONA





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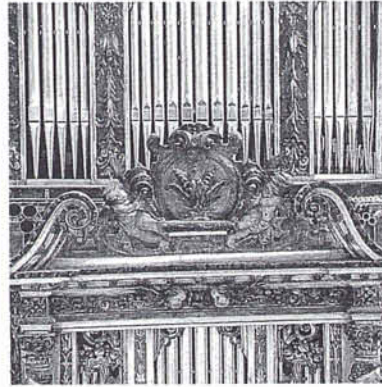
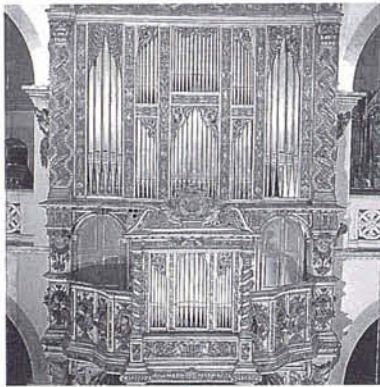
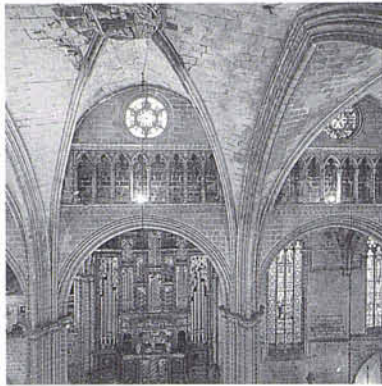
BARCELONA CATHEDRAL

**C**atalonia, like other countries of the Christian west, adopted the organ as its principle liturgical instrument during the high Middle Ages. To be precise, the first account of an organ comes from the monastery of Tona in the year 888. We also have the first name of an organist, the Tarragona Canon "Lucas magnus organista", in 1164. From those remote beginnings, in which written accounts are often found alongside the petrified illustrations of pillars and bass-reliefs, we come to the knowledge of a considerable spread and establishment of the organ in our churches during the early years of the 15th century, both in Catalonia itself and in the Kingdom of Valencia, Roussillon and Majorca, and not only in the cathedrals, but even in such out of the way places as Vila Real, Monçó, Claramunt, Catí, Elna, Millàs, Valldigna, etc. Of all these pre-

sences, only the memory remains. 1459 is a fundamental date, when the German Franciscan Leonhard Martin built the first "Grand Organ", for Barcelona cathedral, introducing into the Paísos Catalans the central European style of Gothic organ, made up of two or three instruments of different sizes but joined in a single body and case, or else of one large and one small organ, known as a Chair organ, each responding to a different keyboard. These three organs are arranged on three levels, and contained in a finely-carved, polychrome wooden case which can easily reach 10 or 12 metres in height and 4 or 5 in width, ideally suited to the Gothic nave. In the following years, the organs of the cathedrals of Valencia, Girona, Majorca and Perpignan were built in the same style. The last two still preserve their

cases and constitute the most important relics of our organ heritage. It's worth mentioning that these instruments were normally situated, and would be for centuries, on one side of the nave, very close to the heart of the cathedral, and subsequently also close to the presbitary. In the mid-16th century, the organ reached its almost definitive technical perfection, following the invention of the system of registers which allowed the separation of the many rows of pipes which in the Gothic organ always sounded together. This allowed the introduction of new registers of stops, such as the stopped pipes, flutes and reed-stops, infinitely increasing the sound and musical properties, to such an extent that sooner or later all the existing instruments had to be rebuilt, sometimes down to the case itself, thus giving rise to the plateresque or baroque style of





organ, the one most commonly handed down to us today. This change coincides with the highest point in the development of the Catalan school, which between 1540 and 1670 created the greater part of the important instruments, such as those of the cathedrals of Barcelona and Tarragona, which still survive, or those of Valencia, Tortosa, La Seu d'Urgell, Alicante, Esparraguera, Cardona, Manresa, Terrassa and Martaró, which, like so many others, have now disappeared. It is painful now to remember the almost total holocaust suffered by our rich organ heritage in just a few days of July 1936, from which only Majorca escaped. For this reason, the island preserves valuable examples which still have their original sound material, such as those of Santa Creu, Sant Francesc, Els Socors and Sant Jeroni, in the city, and those of Santanyi, Felanitx,

Sòller, etc., though these are from a later date. Other 18th century baroque organs in Catalonia which have survived the decimation are to be found in Solsona, Montblanc, el Vendrell, Viella, Torroja del Priorat, Sant Llorenç de Morunys, and in Barcelona in Sant Sever and the chapel of Sant Oleguer, in the Cathedral. There is also an extremely valuable example in Morella, and one, the best-preserved of all, in Santa Maria de Maó. Others, having preserved their structure and case, have been faithfully rebuilt, like those of Castelló d'Empúries, Torredembarra and Sitges. It is important to draw attention to the ignorance of students of music in Spain and abroad as regards the existence of a Catalan school which has nothing to do with the Castilian school. This is due partly to the present shortage of instruments in the Països Catalans and partly

to a standpoint which is geographical and political rather than historical and cultural. When one speaks of the "órgano español", one almost always means the Castilian organ, as happens in other aspects of culture and the arts. Few authors have realised that the Catalan organ, chronologically, precedes the Castilian organ by a couple of centuries, since the latter reached its peak between 1740 and 1800. Also, the Castilian organ preserved the single keyboard until almost 1700, maintaining the characteristics of a small (or "positive") organ, though highly developed and with very particular features, such as the divided stops and horizontal trumpets. Even the juridical status of the parish organs was different, since the Castilian organs belonged to the diocese, while the organs of the Països Catalans belonged to the town. ■