

Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926): The Manuscript of Reus

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Summary. Many of Gaudí's original documents (writings, drawings, etc.) were destroyed during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) when riots erupted in the architect's studio located inside the Sagrada Família temple in Barcelona. Fortunately, surviving documents had been relocated long before to other places by architect Domènec Sugrañes Gras (1878–1938). Among those documents rescued was Gaudí's notebook, also known as *El manuscrit de Reus* (The Manuscript of Reus), rediscovered by Catalan architect Cèsar Martinell (1888–1973) during the preparation of his book, *Gaudí. His life, his theory, his work*, published in 1967. [Contrib Sci 12(2):145-149 (2016)]

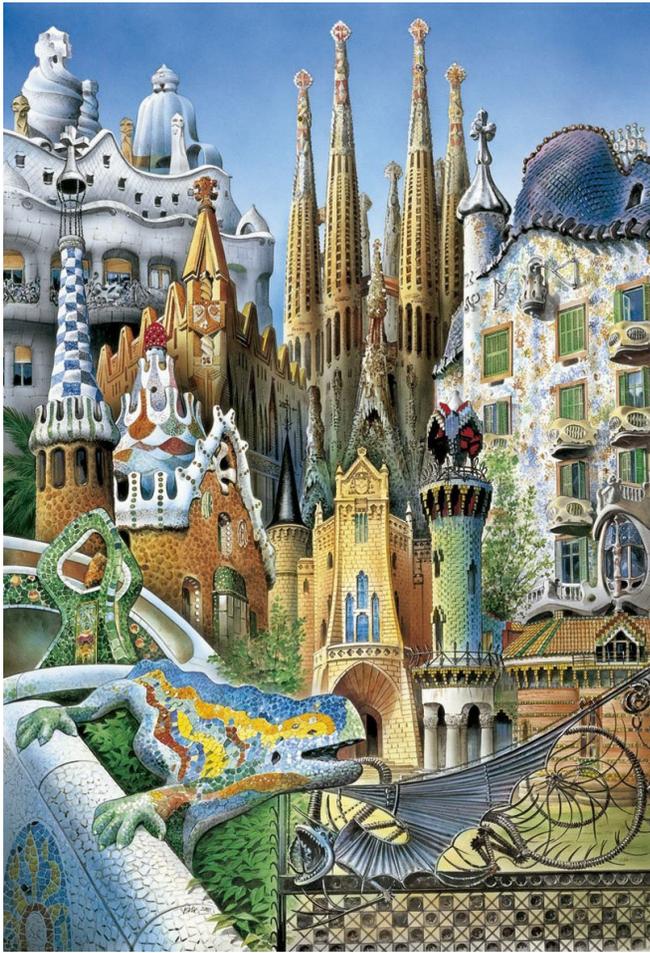
Keywords: Gaudí, Antoni (1852–1926) · Manuscript of Reus · Modernism

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Something new about Gaudí: the art of transformation

It is hard to say something new about this man, this world-renowned genius whose work has been studied and celebrated by so many. However, it is also true that, for as much that is written about something or someone, there will always be something new to explore and to learn. This stems from an eagerness to get to the heart of a figure of such a

category. In the case of Antoni Gaudí i Cornet (Reus or Riudoms, June 25, 1852–Barcelona, June 10, 1926), each new book, biography or study of his life uncover a different facet of his personality and provides new knowledge about him, but, at the same time, opens further doubts, creates additional questions, and piques greater curiosity. This is rewarding both for those who merely admire his work from a distance, as well as for those who delve into his work and deeply appreciate its brilliance.



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Drawings composition of the main architectural works of Antoni Gaudí in the city of Barcelona.

An architect's designs are the best representation of his own personality. Even for experts on Gaudí, his handwriting and verbal and written correspondence offer new insight into his personality, sense of life and maturity reached with years and experience. Unfortunately, his life was tragically shortened. He was 73-year-old when he suffered a streetcar accident on June 9, 1926, which resulted in his death three days later in a ward of the old Hospital de la Santa Creu, Barcelona.

However, Gaudí's life and career were long enough to leave an extraordinary legacy, both in terms of monuments and followers. Thus, his disciples could continue working not only as a continuation of their master's work, but also by providing and applying numerous architectural concepts of their own that complete and complement their collective work. Today, mentioning Modernism in Catalonia, its origins and manifestations around the world, undoubtedly recalls the

works of Gaudí and his contemporaries, Lluís Domènech i Montaner (1850–1923), Josep Puig i Cadafalch (1867–1956) and Josep Maria Jujol i Gibert (1879–1949), alongside many other disciples and followers.

A document key for understanding the idiosyncrasies of this artist is his notebook, happily recovered and whose facsimile edition is preserved in the Municipal Museum of Reus, his hometown. Lluís Miquel Pérez i Segura (former Mayor of Reus), Jaume Massó Carballido (currently an archaeologist at the Salvador Vilaseca Museum of Archaeology) and Joan Bassegoda Nonell, who served as President of the Friends of Gaudí Association, co-wrote a booklet with useful and insightful comments on the Manuscript (facsimile edition) that assist in drawing a portrait of the famous architect.

With a beautiful prose these authors reveal their own thoughts on reading the Manuscript and how it affirms several well-known aspects of the architect's character and work. The booklet also presents drawings and several sketches by Gaudí, including one for the Spanish Pavilion at the Centennial International Exhibition held in Philadelphia in 1876, and another of the showcase of the Catalan glove maker Esteve Comella for the World Fair in Paris (1878), scrawled on the back of one of Gaudí's business cards.

The Manuscript contains Gaudí's notes between 1873 and 1879. As indicated by Pérez Segura, its interest lies in the unique opportunity that the Manuscript offers to observe the architect's handwriting and to appreciate the most remarkable facets of his character, evident in his notes. The drawings featured in its pages also foreshadow what would later appear in some of his greatest works.

The notes, texts, drawings and plans contained in the Manuscript cover the time from when Gaudí was a student to months after graduating from the School of Architecture in 1878. Among the few surviving original documents written by the architect, the Manuscript is wider in scope and more diverse in content. Specifically, there are nine pages featuring a variety of sketches of items including: a solar clock; organic motifs; the aforementioned Comella showcase; human figures appearing to be angels; a capital alongside notes on both decimal and sexagesimal numeral systems; congruent shapes; a series of floors, probably within a hospital, as the caption reads Boston Free Hospital; the faint outline of the façade of a structure appearing to be a church; and a reliquary.

We know that a lot of original documents, such as the Manuscript, were kept in the artist's studio at Sagrada Fa-

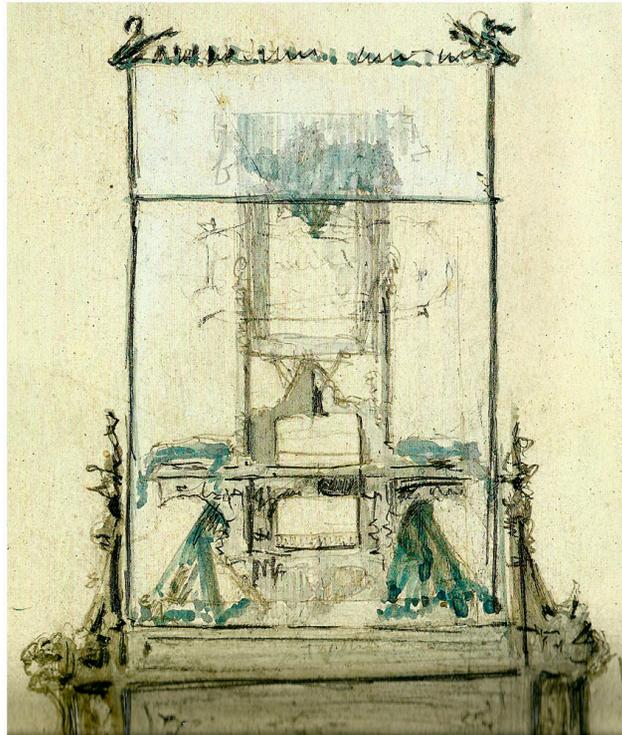
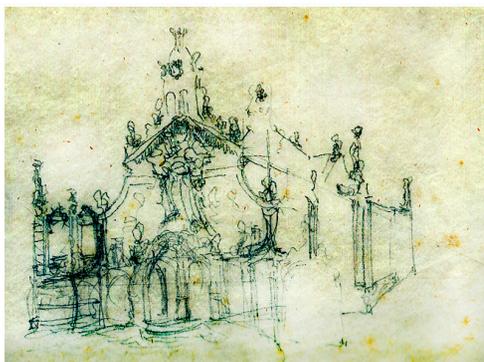
milia temple but were destroyed by riots and fire during an assault on the temple at the start of the Spanish Civil War in July of 1936. Fortunately, some of Gaudí's original documents—including the Manuscript—had been moved long before to another location, a task carried out by Domènec Sugrañes Gras (1878–1938), who, like Gaudí, was an architect from Reus. He succeeded his master in continuing work on the Sagrada Família temple. However, according to Joan Bassegoda, it is estimated that more than six hundred records were lost, an invaluable amount of documentation including plans, notes, drawings, and models. These had been gathered over a whole lifetime devoted to architecture and reflect Gaudí's use of complementary elements and very diverse materials, their transformation into true works of art, and his unusual application of geometric and mathematic concepts in the physical structures underlying his buildings.

For years the Manuscript and other documents remained preserved—and mostly forgotten—until Cèsar Martinell (1888–1973) became highly interested in them while preparing his book, *Gaudí. His life, his theory, his work*, a 500-page volume published in 1967 by the Committee of Culture of the Architectural Board of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands.



Portrait of Antoni Gaudí.

Prior to this publication, Enric Casanelles, then Secretary of the Friends of Gaudí Association, also mentioned this notebook in his book, *A new vision of Gaudí* (Barcelona, 1965).



The Manuscript of Reus. Drawings and sketches made by Antoni Gaudí.

Since then, the Manuscript has received the attention of many experts and writers and has been translated into various different languages, including Japanese.

In the words of Joan Bassegoda, “The Manuscript of Reus is a beautiful set of handwritten notes by Gaudí, which reflect the personality of a young student, full of energy and eager to conquer the world of architectural design”.

In 1984, UNESCO declared three of Gaudí’s works as World Heritage Sites: Park Güell, the Palau Güell, and the Casa Milà. Later, in 2005, this selection was expanded to include four additional works: in Barcelona, the Casa Vicens, the Nativity façade and the Crypt of the Sagrada Família temple, and the Casa Batlló; and, in the neighbouring town of Santa Coloma de Cervelló, the Crypt of the Colonia Güell. Altogether, these seven buildings are known as the Works of Antoni Gaudí, which, according to UNESCO, “reflect an eclectic, very personal style to which Gaudí gave free rein in the field of architecture, as well as in the design of gardens, sculptures, and indeed all the arts”.

It seems appropriate to summarize the explanation provided by UNESCO for having selected these Gaudí buildings as World Heritage Sites, as the Manuscript of Reus, attests to all of these achievements:

- “The work of Antoni Gaudí represents an exceptional and outstanding creative contribution to the development of architecture and building technology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.”

- “Gaudí’s work exhibits an important interchange of values closely associated with the cultural and artistic currents of his time, as represented in Modernism of Catalonia. It anticipated and influenced many of the forms and techniques that were relevant to the development of modern construction in the 20th century.”
- “Gaudí’s work represents a series of outstanding examples of the building typology in the architecture of the early 20th century, residential as well as public, to the development of which he made a significant and creative contribution.”

We initially wondered what more could be said of a figure such as Gaudí. This short text is a mere preface to what many others will have to say and discover about a master who, through his Manuscript, has allowed us to experience firsthand the ingenuity, beauty, and novelty with which he designed his enthralling creations. The Manuscript of Reus provides a glimpse of how this genius was capable of forging an art that is accessible to everyone and that perfectly combines industriousness in its creation, simplicity in its use of materials, and the sublime in the final product. 

Acknowledgements. Authors thank the collaboration of Carmen Chica and Ricard Guerrero, from the AE-BKH, in the preparation and final form of this article.

Competing interests. None declared.



About the images on the first page of the articles in this issue. Articles of this thematic issue of CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENCE, devoted to the activities of the AE-BKH, show in their first page one photograph of a *trencadis*, a type of mosaic used in Catalan Modernism, created from broken pieces of ceramic, like tiles and dinnerware. Names and pages between parentheses indicate the authors and initial pages of the articles: Photo 1 (see Guerrero & Mas-Colell, p. 79); Photo 2 (see Martí et al., p. 83); Photo 3 (see Piqueras & Guerrero, p. 93); Photo 4 (see El-Awady, p. 99); Photo 5 (see Newman, p. 109); Photo 6 (see Skinner, p. 117); Photo 7 (see Chica, p. 129); Photo 8 (see Costa-Guix, p. 141); and Photo 9 (see Gomis & Katte, p. 145).