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Introduction

The work of Antoni Gaudí falls within the artistic current called Modernism. It was a movement indebted to Romanticism and had its roots directly in pre-Raphaelite and symbolist styles. The basic traits of Modernism are the exuberance of forms, the ornamentation, the attention to detail, the use of plant motifs, the preference for curves and asymmetrical lines, the dynamism of the forms, etc. Gaudí, however, was a unique architect, the author of an unrepeatable oeuvre; an oeuvre that was marked by the construction of the Sagrada Família, a work he built simultaneously for many years alongside the construction of other emblematic buildings. Nevertheless, the final years of his life were dedicated body and soul “to the construction of the temple”, to the construction of the Expiatory Temple of the Sagrada Família.

“On making this temple I set myself the idea of following one of our traditions, a tradition that fits us perfectly, the Mediterranean tradition. All architectural style has emerged from the shelter of the temple, and all new art that that comes should be the same.”

Antoni Gaudí

Architecture by Gaudí

The architecture of Antoni Gaudí possesses many aspects and has many faces. In relation to the context of this book, however, I wanted to highlight just one: the symbolic content. Gaudí himself said, “I am geometry, which means synthetic”. We should remember that the Greek etymology of symbol (*sim-bolon*) means “that which joins”. In this sense, symbolism is something that is synthetic yet inductive. Therefore, to the statement that he was geometry and synthetic, Gaudí could have added that he was also symbolic.

The symbol is a consubstantial part of Gaudian architecture, it is an intrinsic

Photomontage that shows the appearance the temple will have according to Gaudí’s project.



Nature as a model

All temples must imitate nature, because all temples are, according to tradition, “cosmic”. In other words, it is made imitating the world, imitating nature, inasmuch as it is a work of God. The temple is an image of nature, because nature is the work of God and the temple is a sacred space built by men to praise God. We can therefore say that the temple-nature is the original temple, because it was obviously “built” before the Temple of Jerusalem or Temple of Solomon. Along the same lines, all the temples built throughout history are the same temple. All are a single temple, because they are a replica of the divine order or macro-cosmos. They are the imitation of the same model: nature.

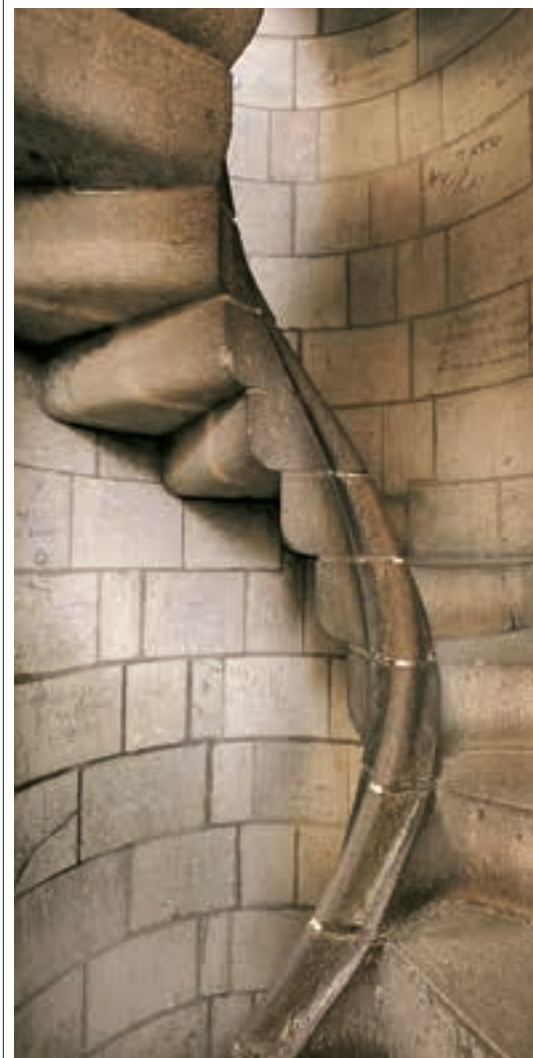
Consequently, the Gaudian attitude of imitating nature in his architectural work is fully coherent with his religious fervour. Since for a believer the human being has been placed on earth to continue the divine work.

Gaudí, however, went much further than the Modernist movement in the sphere of architecture, because Modernism imitated natural forms only as decoration, whereas he studied the constructive laws of nature to solve architectural problems. Gaudí never made a literal imitation of nature, but rather approached that which he considered the essence of natural forms, since it was not about copying nature, but harmoniously building, following its laws. This is because the temple should not aim to be a “realistic” image of the world, but rather a “structural” one; in other words, it must produce the intimate and mathematical structure of the world. It must seek out and imitate the harmony of this world.

The temple built by men must be an imitation—in the sense of prolongation or continuity—of the grand temple that is nature, which is the work of God, of the beginning or of the grand architect of the universe. “The great book, always open and always a good idea to make the effort to read, is that of nature; other books have come out of that and also have the interpretations and errors of man. There are two revelations: one, doctrinaire, of morals and religion; and the other, a guide through the facts, which is that of the great book of nature” (*Imitating the work of nature*). With the project of the Sagrada Família we can say that Gaudí united or reunited both revelations. This is why it is said that the symbols of the Sagrada Família are related to one of the two revelations, or form part of Christian iconography or nature. In any case, these two sources are ultimately related, in that one derives from the other. A text by Philo of Alexandria explains it clearly: “The supreme and true temple of God is the cosmos as a whole. As a sanctuary it has the holiest part of the reality of the universe; heaven; as sacred objects, the stars, as priests, the angels”. Every part of the temple corresponds to a part of the cosmos. When the sacred forests become houses or buildings, the rudimentary enclosures become walls, the trees pillars, stone is the altar, the cave becomes the shrine of the apse and the roof is assimilated into heaven, etc. It can be said that the temple is a sacred landscape petrified or worked in stone.

Gaudí’s architectural attitude, however, is not only motivated by his religiousness of Christian faith: there are intrinsically architectural reasons, a long way from its religious nature. “Architecture creates the organism and that is why it must have a law in consonance with nature”, said the architect. Even more so, “everything comes from the great book of nature; all the styles (architectural) are organisms related to nature”.

Nature is the organism of organisms, in which we find all the structures, all the architectural solutions. It is therefore the only model to be taken into account. It is what he baptised with the name of “geometry of nature”. Just like all products of pharmacopoeia come from products we find in nature, all



Pinnacles of the Temple compared with stalks of *Sedum nicaeensis*, the forms of which, it seems, inspired Gaudí.

Spiral staircase of one of the towers of the Nativity façade and longitudinal section of the shell of a horned auger (*Turritella communis*)

Symbolism of the Sagrada Família

The symbolism that Gaudí reflects in the Sagrada Família is not sustained only through the imagery and the painting, but also incorporates the symbols into the architecture, giving an expressive character to his works. This is one of the most significant characteristics of all Gaudian architecture. This is why some commentators have classified the Sagrada Família as a mystical poem.

On the same line, it can be said that Gaudí's architecture in the Sagrada Família is the mysticism represented by the sensuality of natural forms, or what is the same thing, the morphology of nature.

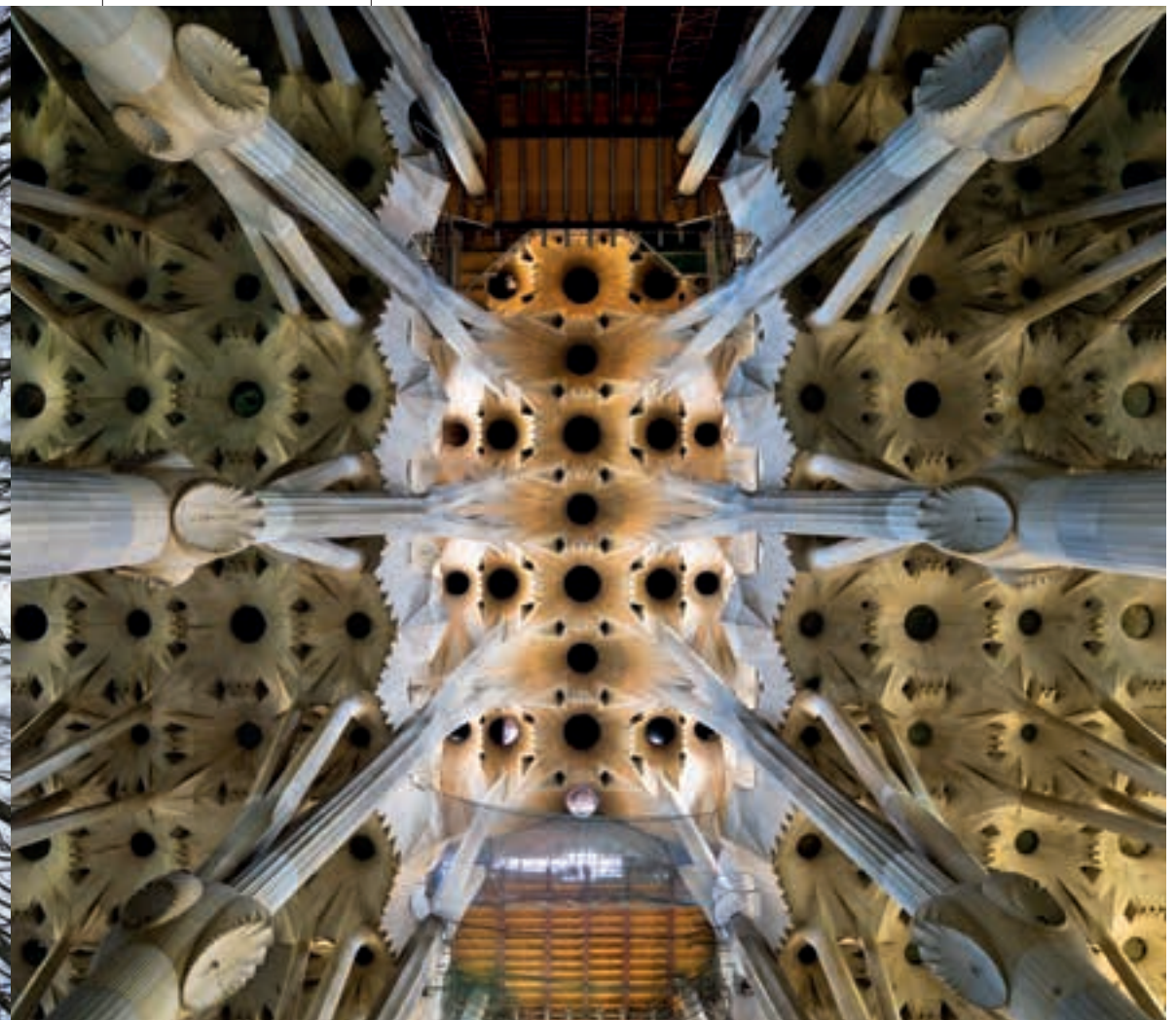
The old dichotomy between functionality and beauty of the symbol is nearly always brilliantly solved in Gaudí's work. To the false question as to what should prevail, the catechistic intentionality or the expressive beauty—a variant of the classical polemic between background and form—Gaudí's reply is always based on the great divine guide: nature; where, incidentally, this dichotomy is not posed, because it has no sense. The adoption of this attitude relates Gaudí to traditional thought, which does not conceive a form separate from a background. The external is always a reflection of the internal. In short, two levels manifest the same reality. Therefore, they can never be seen separately, as two different things.

The inspiration in nature was so intense and evident that for the production of the sculptures he used life-size models emptied with plaster: human

The Devesa in Girona and tree-like structure of the central nave of the Temple of the Sagrada Família.

beings—living or dead—, plants, diverse objects. If the result was not what he expected, he had mannequins built, on the other hand easier to manipulate than human beings. The sculptures, therefore, like his architecture, are based on the structure of the forms.

The forms or the geometry can act on nature, on the reality of the setting and, above all else, on people. When the form of a building is added to the materials—clay, wood, stone, etc.—, which at the same time has its particular energy, we obtain an authentic “creation” as a result. This is why buildings have life, and therefore their own energy. Without doubt, we find structures and forms with the capacity to provoke emotion and spiritual heightening. Temples, such as the Sagrada Família, must invite contemplation and serenity.



The apse

Dedicated to the Virgin, an admirable example of fertile virginity. The concept of the fertility of the virgins extends to the founding saints of religious orders: Saint Anthony the Abbot, Saint Benedict, Saint Scholastica, Saint Bruno, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Clare and Saint Elias. The seven chapels, in the form of a half hexagon, are dedicated to these saints, whose images are situated in the buttresses, base and canopy. The pinnacle of the canopy ends with the anagram of Christ, while that of the buttress culminates in cereal ear. The seven chapels will also recall the seven sorrows of Saint Joseph and in each one there will be a Holy Family.

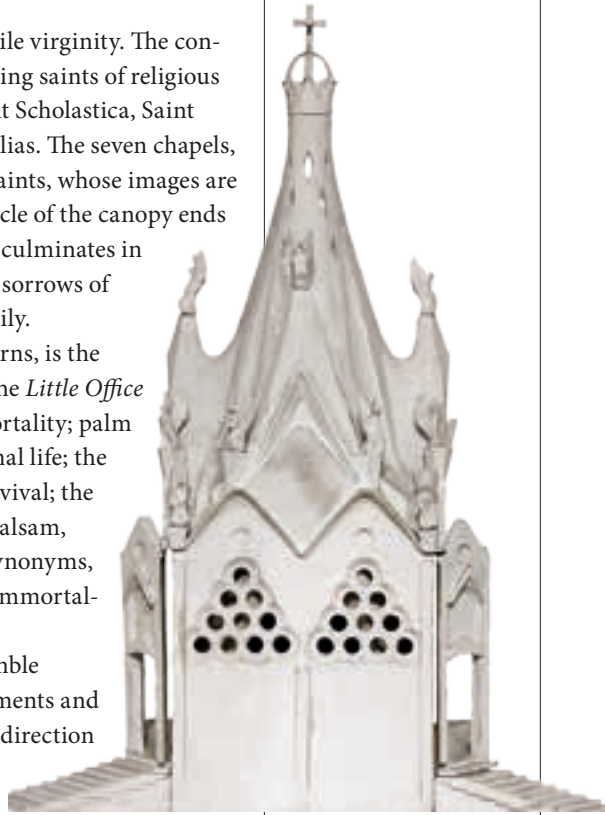
On the high railings of the chapels, around the lanterns, is the floral ornamentation mentioned in the antiphony of the *Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary*: the cedar, symbol of immortality; palm trees, resurrection and immortality; the cypress, eternal life; the cinnamon or tree of paradise; roses, perfection and revival; the olive tree, which symbolises peace and serenity, and balsam, oleoresin. Symbolically, all these floral elements are synonyms, since from different angles their symbolism refers to immortality and eternal life.

The ears, whether from cereals or from the most humble plants that flower all over, crown the ends of the pediments and pinnacles. Fleeing from these Marian symbols, in the direction of the earth, are the reptiles that take the form of gargoyles, snakes, dragons, salamanders and lizards.

The lanterns of the seven chapels, pyramids of an octagonal base, culminate with invocations to the Messiah, symbolised by the antiphonies of the last week of Advent, called the O. The symbols are placed within a large O and are: *O Sapientia*, *O Adonai*, *O Radix Jesse*, *O Clavis David*, *O Oriens*, *O Rex gentium* and *O Emmanuel rex* [Puig Boada, p. 54] (10-03).

The two sets of stairways that border the apse on both sides are crowned by ears. Here stand out the gargoyles, sea snails with a large outline beside the eastern *Levante* and land snails beside the western *Poniente*, and some lower channels supported by perforated corbels.

(Right page) Photograph of the apse and drawing by Francesc Berenguer of what it will be like.



Plaster model of the chapel of the Assumption situated in the middle point of the apse.



Cathedral of Girona

The chapel of the Assumption by the sculptor Bonifás, source of inspiration, according to Gaudí himself, for the design of the same chapel in the Temple of the Sagrada Família.



The spiral staircases

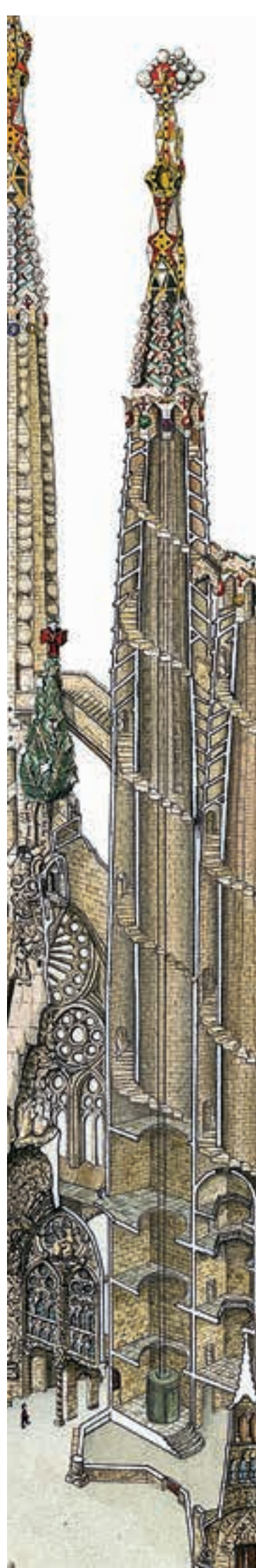
The ascension to the mountain-temples of Egypt, India, China or pre-Columbian America was like making a journey to the symbolic “centre of the world”. In this sense, the symbolism of the stairway is also related to the symbolism of the tree.

The climb up the stairway enables a change of level, of register, passing from a profane space to a sacred one. Thus, the natural location of temples is the peak of the mountains, the highest point. Hermitages are often found at the top of mountains or in high spots.

One of the symbols of the stairway is that of spiritual evolution by stages or states. It is the *scala dei*. The spiral stairways of the towers of the Sagrada Família are heirs to this architectural tradition of temple-mountain that has its origin in Sumer. The bell towers of the Sagrada Família are like ziggurats that enable one to transcend the profane space, the earthly space. The spiral stairway is, in fact, the most perfect and spiritual way of climbing there is, since we rise up through a circular movement. The movement we make on a spiral stairway also reminds us of the dances of the swirling dervishes.

(Right page)
Drawing of the interior of a bell tower and model of one of the tubular bells that Gaudí thought of placing inside the towers.

Overhead view of the spiral staircase of one of the towers of the Nativity Façade.



The bells

The sound of a bell always symbolises the power of the creator, and who wields this power in the first and last instant is God. A splendid and beautiful text says, “When the bells peal, it is God speaking”. The bells are also the instruments that make it possible for Jesus Christ to be the chronocrator, the lord of time.

The fact that the bells are placed at the highest point of churches, the bell tower —apart from the practical function of sounding out—, also strengthens, due to their height, the symbol of belonging to divinity: they are the voice of God. The very shape of the bells, similar to that of the heavenly vaulting, reinforces this relationship with divinity.

The bells of churches or temples are often hanging, so they also take part in the mystical symbolism of objects that hang between heaven and earth.

As is well known, sounds are essential and basic elements of the rite in all traditions and religions. They are also important elements for all the peoples, from Chinese gongs to today’s electrical bells. In these cases the sounds mark and point out the cyclical rhythm, that is, time. We could say, however, that the sound of the bells is in some way an opposite and complementary sound to that of the drums, which are also rhythm of the cycles and fundamental elements of rites. So if the drum represents the beats of the earth or of telluric energy, then the sound of the bell is the beat of heaven or of cosmic energy.

One is the sound of matter; the other, of the spirit.

The sound of the bells in the Sagrada Família was one of Gaudí’s great concerns, something that led him to make an in-depth study of everything related to bells and acoustic physics.

The fact that the towers, the most emblematic and characteristic element of the Sagrada Família, are bell towers, gives us an idea of the importance he afforded them. In total there will be 84 bells. On the Nativity Façade he placed tubular percussion bells; on that of the Passion, tubular organ bells, which will sound with injected air, and on the Glory Façade, bells tuned to the notes of E, G and C, the easiest notes to obtain. Moreover, the bells of the Nativity and Passion façades, which will contain the notes, will be able to played like a piano or harmonium.

The stone blinds characteristic of the upper part of the bell towers are designed to favour the diffusion of sound given off by the bells. When all the bells of the Sagrada Família sound, we will be able to say without doubt that we are listening to celestial music.



Three kings of the Orient

The three kings of the Orient, the three wise men, present in the adoration of the Baby Jesus, were three priests of the Zoroaster religion, Zoroastrism, also known as Mazdaism. This priestly class possessed deep knowledge of magic and astrology. For the Greeks, *mago* was the priest of the Zoroaster religion. When Saint Matthew wrote the word *magos*, he did not do it using the current meaning of the word, but referred to those wise oriental or Mede priests.

The extensive knowledge of astrology —remember, among other things, the ziggurats were temples and astrological observatories, or it was them who left us the 12 signs of the Zodiac as we know them today— enabled them to understand and interpret the meaning of the star. The astrological reality of the star was a Jupiter-Saturn conjunction in the sign of Pisces, which indicated the exceptional nature of the person born under that sign. The birth of Jesus Christ inaugurated the era of Pisces, replaced recently by the sign of Aquarius.

The knowledge of how to interpret the dream they had had but did not inform Herod of, that they had found the Baby Jesus, since Herod's intention was probably infanticide.

The tradition according to which Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar were the white, blonde and black Kings respectively, indicates that it was the whole of humanity —all races— that adored the Messiah.

The symbolism of these three magi-priests and of their offerings is very rich. The sculptures of the façade represent the three kings at the time of the adoration. In an early symbolic interpretation, gold symbolises the power of the kings, frankincense the divine adoration and myrrh the very suffering of the human condition. With this offering, they recognised the coexistence, in that child, of royal power, divine majesty and human nature.

A deeper reading, however, leads us to the following interpretation. The gold that Melchior offers represents alchemy, the science of human transmutation. Symbolically it is associated with the sun, another central element and very rich symbolically. However, gold and the sun are also associated with fire, the transforming element par excellence.

The frankincense of King Caspar is astrology, the science that governs the life of men. The influence of the stars on men is realised through the air element and the frankincense is linked to this element.



The myrrh of King Balthazar is magic, the science of transformation or acting in the material world, associated with the element of water.

Thus, a symbolic reading of the three Magi shows us the profound possibility of transformation or growth that the birth of the Baby Jesus offered humankind. The triad of Melchior-alchemy, Caspar-astrology and Balthazar-magic enables the following interpretation: the union of the science “from here below” (magic) with the science “of there above” (astrology) leads to the transformation or transmutation of the human being (alchemy).

Another reading may also be made, according to which the gold is the earth, the myrrh the heart and the frankincense the spirit or spirituality.



Details of the offerings of the Magic Kings: Balthazar-myrrh.



Caspar-incense.



Melchior-gold.

Making a dream come true

This comparative chronology covers the time from when the temple's promoter, Josep Maria Bocabella, had a dream about building the temple (1877), until Gaudí's death (1926). It also includes the political and cultural events relevant to the history of Catalonia and Spain (some of particular importance in the life of Gaudí), as well as showing what was developed in the field of science and art and which represented a landmark in the history of western culture.

“The work of the Sagrada Família is slow because the owner of this work is in no hurry”.

Antoni Gaudí

Josep Maria Bocabella bought the site where the Temple would be built for 172,000 pesetas.



1882

Comparative chronology 1877-1926

H HISTORY
G GAUDÍ
A ARTS
S SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
R RELIGION

1877

A Verdaguer publishes

L'Atlàntida.

A Tolstoy publishes

Anna Karenina.

A Dostoyevsky publishes *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*.

A Monet paints *Interior of the Saint-Lazare Station*.

1878

G Gaudí designs the lampposts in the Plaça Reial in Barcelona.

1879

A Lluís Domènech i Montaner constructs the building of the Montaner y Simón publishing house.

S Thomas Edison develops the first electric light bulb.

1880

A Rodin sculpts *The Thinker*.

A Maupassant publishes *Soirées de Medan*, considered the Naturalist Manifesto.

1881

A Monet paints *Snowy landscape at dusk*.

A Richard Wagner premieres *Parsifal*.

R Proclamation of the Virgin of Montserrat as patron saint of Catalonia.

1882

A William Le Baron Jenney builds the first skyscraper in Chicago.

A Manet paints *The bar of the Folies Bergère*

1883

G Antoni Gaudí begins El Capricho and Casa Vicens.

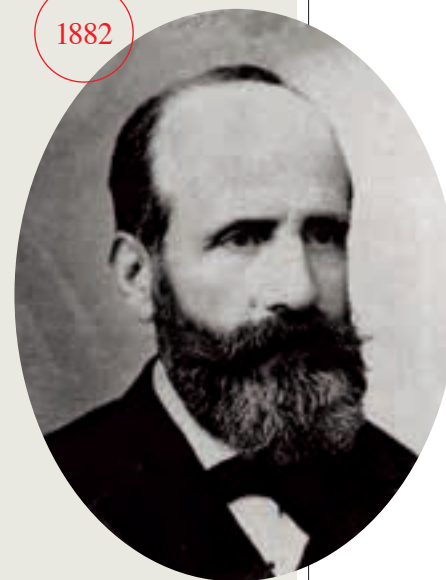
A John Augusto Roebling completes Brooklyn Bridge.

1884

A The angular stone of the Statue of liberty is laid.

A Leopoldo Alas “Clarín” publishes *La Regenta*.

1882



1885

H King Alfonso XII of Spain dies. The reign of María Cristina begins.

A Nietzsche publishes *Zarathustra*.

A Verdaguer publishes *Canigó*.

S Louis Pasteur develops the anti-rabies vaccine.

1886

H Valentí Almirall publishes *Lo Catalanisme*, the first work that lays out the principles of political doctrine of Catalan autonomy.

A Jean Moréas publishes the Symbolist Manifest in *Le Figaro*.

G Gaudí builds the Palau Güell and the iron gateway of the dragon in Pedralbes.

S Karl Benz patents the first automobile.

1887

A Renoir paints *The Large Bathers*.

1888

H The UGT is founded in Barcelona (General Union of Workers)

H The Universal Exhibition of Barcelona is held.

A Josep Vilaseca builds the Arc de Triomf of Barcelona.

A Gaietà Buigas builds the Monument to Columbus in Barcelona.

The first stone of the Sagrada Família is laid under the direction of Francesc de Paula del Villar.

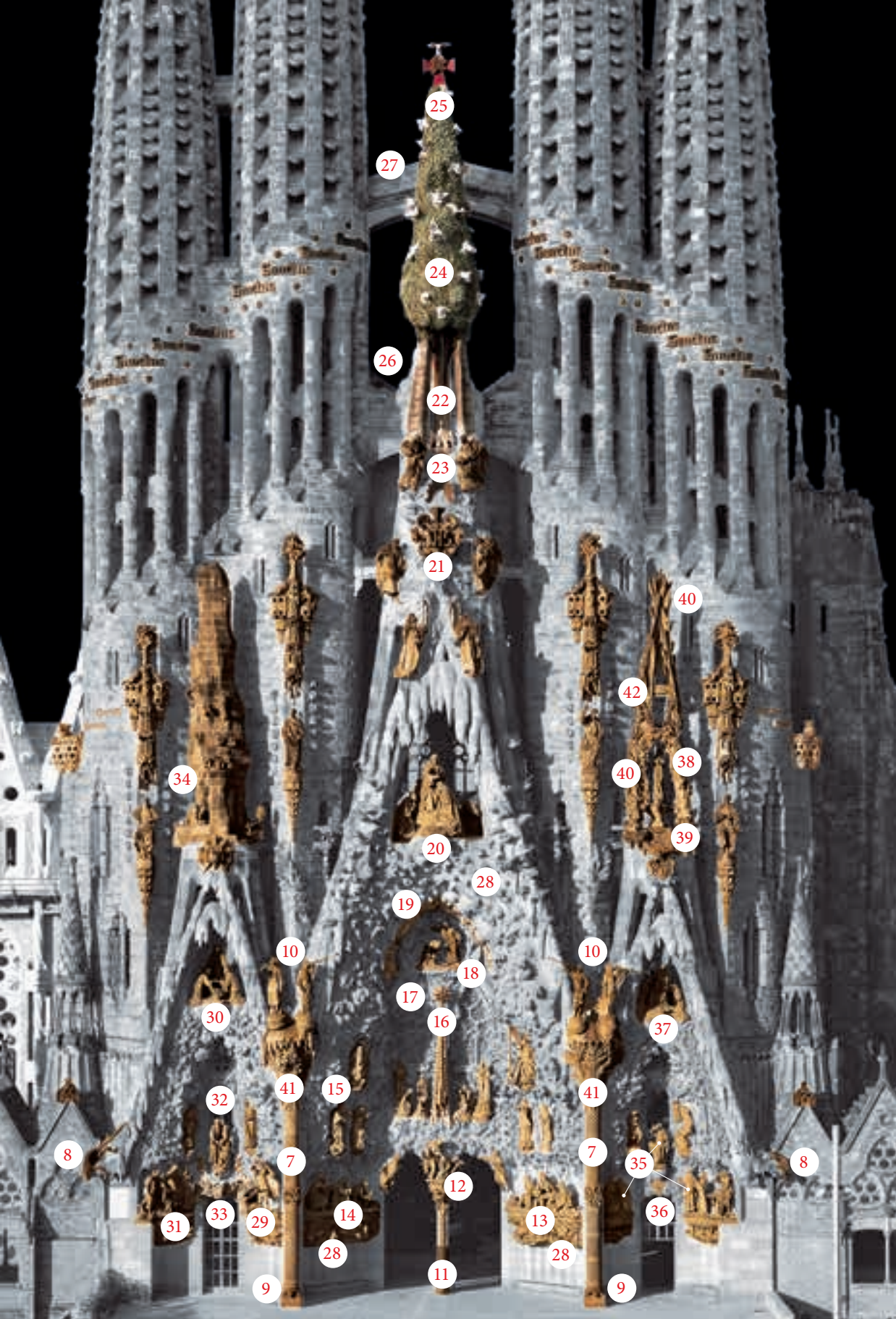
1882

First façade planned in neo-Gothic style.



On the 3 November the young architect Gaudí takes over the direction of the Sagrada Família.

1883



⁵ Hope Doorway ⁴ Charity Doorway ⁵ Faith Doorway

⁴⁴ Faith Doorway ⁴³ Charity Doorway ⁴⁵ Hope Doorway

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|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
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| 51 Alpha-Omega | 57 Veronica | 63 Ascension of Jesus |

¹ Nativity Façade

² The Passion Façade