

The Güell Pavilions of Antoni Gaudí as an example of *new mythology*

Los Pabellones de la Finca Güell como ejemplo de *nueva mitología*

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ABSTRACT: The Güell Pavilions are known for being the first work that Antoni Gaudí built for the person that would become his main patron, Eusebi Güell. For years, these buildings have been considered to have some functional roles, and to contain some sporadic references to the *L'Atlàntida*, a poem written by Jacint Verdaguer. In this paper, however, I will argue that this work of Gaudí is more than this, since *L'Atlàntida* was already a good example of the idea of a *new mythology*, and Gaudí intertwined these literary references with "aesthetic geometry", which had been reconstructed by the German artist Peter Lenz. I will show where and how this geometry is present in the Güell Pavilions. As a result, these buildings will reveal as an organic work, and a good example of the idea of a *new mythology* applied to plastic arts.

Keywords: Antoni Gaudí; Güell Pavilions; *L'Atlàntida*; *new mythology*; aesthetic geometry.

RESUMEN: Los Pabellones Güell son conocidos por ser la primera obra que Antoni Gaudí construyó para la persona que sería su mecenas principal, Eusebi Güell. Durante años se ha considerado que estos edificios básicamente tienen un papel funcional y que contienen algunas referencias a *L'Atlàntida*, el poema escrito por Jacint Verdaguer. Pero en este artículo explicaré que esta obra de Gaudí es más que esto, pues ya *L'Atlàntida* era un buen ejemplo de la idea de *nueva mitología*, y Gaudí relacionó estrechamente estas referencias literarias con la "geometría estética", que había sido reconstruida por el artista alemán Peter Lenz. Mostraré dónde y cómo esta geometría está presente en los Pabellones Güell. Consecuentemente, estos edificios se revelarán como una obra orgánica, y un buen ejemplo de *nueva mitología* aplicada a las artes plásticas.

Palabras clave: Antoni Gaudí; Pabellones Güell; *L'Atlàntida*; *nueva mitología*; geometría estética.

YEARS OF CONSTRUCTION AND FIRST DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK

In 1883, the count Eusebi Güell i Bacigalupi bought some land to expand a summer estate that his family had in Les Corts de Sarrià (now part of Barcelona). Shortly after this, the count commissioned Antoni Gaudí to build a series of components that con-

sisted of a wall that delimited the property, three entrance doors, and some recreational and decorative elements in the garden and in the mansion. Around the main entrance to the estate, is where the architect erected the most important buildings: the gatekeeper's lodge, the stables, and a lunging ring. From 1884 to 1887, Gaudí dedicated to construct these buildings, which are considered to



▪ Fig. 1. Antoni Gaudí. General view of the Güell Pavilions. 1884-87. Photograph of the author.

be the first important work that the young architect did for the man that would later become his main patron, and which mark a turning point in his artistic creation¹. This group of buildings is what today is known as the Güell Pavilions. And what I propose next is to study the meaning that Gaudí wanted to give to this work, and how he managed to communicate it.

Two large blocks can be identified in Güell Pavilions. On the right hand, there are the stables, formed by a large rectangular space with transverse parabolic arches that support the roof²; and next to it, the lunging ring, which has a square shape and is

¹ This was the last work where Gaudí used the neomudejar style, which he had developed in Casa Vicens (1883-1888), and in El Capricho (1883-1885).

² Gaudí had already used the parabolic arches in the Mataró Workers Cooperative (1878-1882), and in Casa Vicens.

topped by a dome garnished with *trencadís* mosaics³. On the left hand, there is the gatekeeper's lodge, which is comprised of a central body flanked with two smaller ones each one topped by a dome that in the middle has a chimney that works as a fan and that is also covered with *trencadís*. Between the two blocks, there is the main carriage entrance, which consists of a wrought iron grille in the shape of a fierce dragon with a large open throat and wings, but which is chained. The catch of this door is fixed into a low pillar on the left side, which ends up with a bell that has a joyful sound, and next to it there is another small door for pedestrians. The hinges of the great door are fastened to a

³ This is the first work where Gaudí used this technique that consists in creating surfaces covered with fragments of various ceramic pieces, which he would later develop in several works, having one of its most successful expressions in Park Güell.

tall pillar on the right-hand side, which supports a neoclassical-style pedestal that, in turn, is crowned with a shape that appears to represent a tree branch rich in fruits. Both the horizontal orientation, formed by the arrangement of the aforementioned spaces, and the vertical one, accentuated by parabolic openings, decorative motifs, and above all the chimneys, the pillars and the dome, are important in this work as a whole (Fig. 1).

These are the main features of the Güell Pavilions. But to understand well how the various parts are located, the shapes they have, and the representations that appear there, it is important to know the context in which this work was conceived: both the personal relationships between people involved, as well as the cultural and political situation that existed at that time.

ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN COUNT GÜELL, GAUDÍ AND VERDAGUER

To begin with, it is important to know that when Eusebi Güell commissioned Antoni Gaudí to build these pavilions, both shared a friendship with a person that at that time was already a well-known writer: Jacint Verdaguer (1845-1902). This poet and priest had been travelling for two years by the ships of the *Compañía Transatlántica*, a shipping company that was owned by Antoni López López, at that time one of the richest men in the country, and who was Eusebi Güell's father-in-law. During these trips, Verdaguer finished a long epic poem that he had begun around 1866, called *L'Atlàntida*. In 1877, after the ship docked in the port of Barcelona, the writer presented his poem in a literary competition known as *Jocs Florals*, and he won the extraordinary prize. This award gave him celebrity, and contributed to the fact that, in the context of the *Renaixença* (Rebirth), a movement that claimed the recognition of the Catalan culture, the poem *L'Atlàntida* became an example of how artistic creation can illuminate new cultural and political horizons. That same year, Verdaguer

began working as the priest of the family López, and this led to his frequent contact with the tycoon's son-in-law, Eusebi Güell, and later with Antoni Gaudí. From that moment on, the three became good friends, a friendship that had a peak precisely in the year 1884, when Eusebi Güell commissioned Antoni Gaudí to work in his estate of Les Corts de Sarrià. In fact, while Gaudí was working on the Pavilions, Eusebi Güell and Jacint Verdaguer made a trip together through Europe, visiting countries such as: France, Switzerland, Germany, and Russia⁴.

In this context, then, it is not surprising that Verdaguer's poem *L'Atlàntida* influenced the work that Gaudí made in the Güell Pavilions. And to illustrate how this influence took shape, I will present below: first, a brief summary of the content of *L'Atlàntida*; then, an explanation of the sources of this type of composition; later, the description of how this poem appears in the pavilions made by Gaudí; and finally, some reflections on the singular way how the architect interpreted this literary work.

THE PLOT OF *L'ATLÀNTIDA*

This poem contains a myth from ancient Greece that basically explains how the hero Heracles – who in ancient Rome corresponded to Hercules – travelled beyond the gateway of the Mediterranean to reach the "Island of the Blessed", where there was the garden of the Hesperides: an orchard where existed a tree with golden apples that provided love and fertility, what made these fruits highly coveted, and was the cause that this tree was guarded by three maidens, the Hesperides, and a fierce dragon named Ladon. Based on this, what Verdaguer did in his poem was to interpret this classical myth to adapt it to his time and his land, so that, for instance, the golden apples were replaced by more Iberian fruits, golden oranges; and the main hero of the narrative, after reaching

⁴ Later, Verdaguer captured the experiences of this travel in his writing entitled *A vol d'ocell*.

the Hesperides and killing the dragon, took a branch of this tree with magical powers, returned with it to the Mediterranean shore, and transplanted it into several places of the Iberian land to thus producing a revival of the cultures already existing there. In addition, in the interpretation presented by Verdaguer, the figure of the artist appears as a subject capable of emulating the hero, someone who tries to make his work an agent promoting the cultural *Renaixença*. This can be clearly seen in the dedication that Verdaguer wrote to Antoni López López in a manuscript that he gave the tycoon in 1876, and that later was reproduced in the edition of 1878, in which the poet compares the pages of the writing he delivers to the leaves of the orange tree that Heracles had brought from the garden of the Hesperides and that the artist had longed for in his travels across the Atlantic; a dedication that Verdaguer ends with these words: “[...] and I can only offer you, if you please, these leaves of the golden fruit tree⁵.”

However, this way of presenting a myth, that is, interpreting an already existing story and placing the artist-interpreter in a prominent place, was an innovation by Verdaguer or had been done before by other authors? And if there were precedents, how could they have come to Verdaguer’s knowledge...? The next two sections will be devoted to answer these questions.

THE ORIGINS OF THE IDEA OF A NEW MYTHOLOGY

The interpretations and reinterpretations of myths exist since myths themselves exist. But the idea of reinterpreting a classic myth while readapting it to the reality and the problems of the moment, this is something that appeared consciously and explicitly in the modern age, and especially in the Germany of the second half of the 18th centu-

ry, becoming, in addition, a specific theme of aesthetic reflection. The first author to treat it in this way was one of the greatest representatives of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, Johann Gottlieb Herder (1744-1803), and more specifically in two writings: *From the new use of mythology (Vom neuern Gebrauch der Mythologie)*; and *Iduna, or the apple of rejuvenation (Iduna, oder der Apfel der Verjüngung)*. In the first essay, written in 1767⁶, the philosopher proposes to promote German literature making a new reading of mythology, a task that can be summarized in the following six points:

1. What is important in the use of myths is not so much their content, as the way of using them: showing old thoughts, but in a new, beautiful and poetic way.
2. This way of using myths has already been practised by the ancients and the moderns. We can learn from them, but we must know how to practise it based on our reality.
3. What we can learn from these authors is, above all, the fact that to exercise this activity well it is required to know how to complement two forces: a) the analytical capacity (more typical of philosophers), and b) the synthetic capacity (more characteristic of poets).
4. If we manage to complement these two forces: we will form our creativity; we will be able to rejuvenate the past, understand the present, and orient ourselves better towards the future.
5. Therefore, this use of mythology will lead to a critique of culture and society, with effects on politics.

5 “(...) y sols puc oferir-te, si et plauen, eixes fulles del arbre del fruit d’or”, Jacint Verdaguer, *L’Atlàntida*, in *Obra completa* (Vic: Eumo, 2002), 91.

6 This writing is part of the first important work in Herder’s career, entitled *Fragmente. Über die neuere Deutsche Literatur*, 1766-1777, a work that made Herder a well-known writer in the educated circles of the Germany of his time.

6. And this appropriate way of using mythology is called *new use of mythology* or *new mythology*.

In the second writing, *Iduna, or the apple of rejuvenation*, a work that appeared in 1796⁷, Herder deals with a Nordic myth that explains that the goddess Iduna possessed some apples that produced rejuvenation, that is, immortality, to those who ate them; a fruit that becomes a symbol of poetic creativity, and, more specifically, of the idea of *new mythology* that Herder himself had defended a few years earlier. And with this, the philosopher argues that not only classic myths, but also myths of cultures that at some point we have despised for considering them inferior, may be used for a *new mythology* that generates immortality, that is, which remains in the memory of future generations.

A few months after the publication of this second essay of Herder, three young men that then had completed their studies at the *Tübingen Stift*, that is, Schelling, Hölderlin and Hegel, wrote some pages that later have become known as *The oldest system program of German idealism* (*Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*). And at the end of this writing, when explaining how they understand beauty, the idea of a *new mythology* appears, explained as a “mythology of reason”, that is: “myths that are rational”, as well as “philosophical ideas that are mythological”, so that “the people become reasonable” and “philosophers become sensitive”, and finally “both can join hands”⁸.

Subsequently, the idea of a *new mythology* was worked on in depth by early romantics, especially by the authors of the Jena Circle. Thus, in the *Conversations on Poetry*

⁷ This writing appeared in a very different context to the first one, that is: at the end of Herder’s life and when he was already a well-known author. The work was published in February 1796 in the journal directed by F. Schiller entitled *Die Horen*.

⁸ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*, in *Werke und Briefe* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1969), vol. 2, 649.

(*Gespräche über die Poesie*, 1800), Friedrich Schlegel, by mouth of a character called Ludovico, defends the idea of a *new mythology* arguing that not only the ancients, but also modern authors such as Dante, Cervantes and Shakespeare have created *new mythology*. Furthermore, he argues that this idea is important to found symbolic art⁹. And Schelling, in the *Lessons of Würzburg* (*Würzburger Vorlesungen*, 1804), also arguing that *new mythology* is symbolic art, relates the possibility of making true art to the awareness of “the spiritual unity of a people”¹⁰.

Throughout the 19th century, several European thinkers and artists continued to develop the idea of a *new mythology*, a paradigmatic example being Richard Wagner¹¹. In this writing, however, we will focus on how this idea penetrated the culture of Catalonia, and more specifically the works of Verdaguer and Gaudí that here we have begun to study.

L’ATLANTIDA AS AN EXAMPLE OF A NEW MYTHOLOGY

Given what has been explained above on how from Herder to Schelling the idea of a *new mythology* was treated, I think it is not difficult to glimpse that this idea is present in Verdaguer’s *L’Atlàntida*. Thus, also the Catalan poet took an old myth and consciously transformed it, replacing some specific elements, such as, for example, apples with oranges, and expanding parts of the narrative,

⁹ Friedrich Schlegel, *Gespräche über die Poesie*, in *Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1796-1801)* (Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1967).

¹⁰ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Würzburger Vorlesungen*, in *Historische Kritische Ausgabe, Reihe II, Nachlass* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frohmann-hollzboog Verlag, 2020), vol. 7, 1-2.

¹¹ On how the idea of a *new mythology* developed throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, see: Manfred Frank, *Der kommende Gott. Vorlesungen über die Neue Mythologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982); and Manfred Frank, *Gott im Exile. Vorlesungen über die Neue Mythologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988).

as is the case of the hero's journey through Iberian lands, with the intention that the myth would become closer and more attractive for potential readers of that moment.

In addition, Verdaguer did this using imagination and reflection, two aspects we have seen that are necessary when creating *new mythology*, and which Verdaguer intertwined very well, creating symbols presented in an accessible style and with a great literary quality; symbols that penetrated the collective imagination of people.

With this, Verdaguer achieved that this poem became a means of cultural criticism, a critique that conveyed a general discomfort with the situation of the moment, and the willingness to improve it.

And all this contributed to the fact that Verdaguer came to be a poet appreciated and loved by both low-class people without much culture, as well as wealthy people and intellectual elites, and became a reference in the struggle for the recognition of the language and the culture of Catalonia, the known as Catalan *Renaixença* (Rebirth).

Now, was Verdaguer aware of what the authors of *Sturm und Drang* and early Romanticism had written about the idea of a *new mythology*? And if so, by whom and in what way?

To resolve these questions, we can turn to Verdaguer's mail. Thus, when studying his letters, we can see that in May 1865 the poet personally met Dr. Manuel Milà i Fontanals, professor of Literature at the University of Barcelona and one of the main representatives of the Catalan *Renaixença*. From then on between the two there was a kind of student-teacher relationship, so that during the years 1866-68, when Verdaguer was working on *Colom* and *Espanya naixent*, the two writings that would become the preludes of *L'Atlàntida*, the poet sent the teacher several drafts, and the teacher evaluated them making certain criticism that the poet later took into consideration to improve his work¹². We also know that, over the

years, the relationship between Verdaguer and Manuel Milà i Fontanals evolved into a certain friendship, so that in September 1870, shortly before the poet celebrated his first mass as a priest, for which he had chosen a small hermitage next to a water source that was in the Plana of Vic, he wrote his teacher inviting him to attend, and that to try to convince him he wrote: "Come above all; we will taste the oranges from the garden of the Hesperides"¹³.

That is to say that professor Manuel Milà i Fontanals advised the poet Verdaguer during the process of creating the poem *L'Atlàntida*, both coming to share the meaning of one of the main symbols of this work: the orange tree with the golden oranges. And without a doubt, in the Catalonia of that time the professor Manuel Milà i Fontanals was one of the most connoisseurs of the *Sturm und Drang* and early Romanticism's authors¹⁴. Therefore, it is more than likely that through the relationship that Verdaguer had with Manuel Milà i Fontanals, the poet acquired the knowledge of what *new mythology* was that allowed him to apply this idea to *L'Atlàntida*.

THE PRESENCE OF L'ATLÀNTIDA IN THE GÜELL PAVILIONS

Once we have seen what the content and form of *L'Atlàntida* are, as well as the influences that the poet received in its elabora-

Verdaguer. 1865-1877 (Barcelona: Editorial Barcino, 1959-93), vol. 1, the following letters: from Francesc Masferrer to Verdaguer, 20th January 1865; from Verdaguer to Manuel Milà i Fontanals, autumn 1867; and from Verdaguer to Manuel Milà i Fontanals, January 1868.

13 "Vinga sobre tot; tastarem las taronjas del jardí de les Esperides", from *Epistolari de Jacint Verdaguer. 1865-1877*, the letter from Verdaguer to Manuel Milà i Fontanals, 29th September 1870.

14 On the knowledge that Manuel Milà i Fontanals had about Germanic thought of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, see his book *Principios de Estética*. See also the writing of Hans Juretschke entitled "Alemania en la obra de Manuel Milà i Fontanals", in *España y Europa: estudios de crítica cultural, Obras completas de Hans Juretschke* (Madrid: Complutense University of Madrid, 2001), vol. II, 743-774.

12 See from Verdaguer, Jacint, *Epistolari de Jacint*

tion, let us now see how this poem appears alluded in the work that Antoni Gaudí did in the Güell Pavilions.

As a start, we can say that, on the outside of the building, Verdaguer's poem is present in three elements. Firstly, as has been said, between the two large blocks that make up this construction, there is a tall pillar starting from a stone base, continuing with a long section made of bricks, then there is a neoclassical pedestal also in stone, and finally one finds a figure made of wires and hanging balls. Well, this peculiar figure on the top represents precisely the branch of the orange tree with the golden oranges that in the *L'Atlàntida* is explained that Heracles took from the garden of the Hesperides and then he transplanted in Iberian lands.

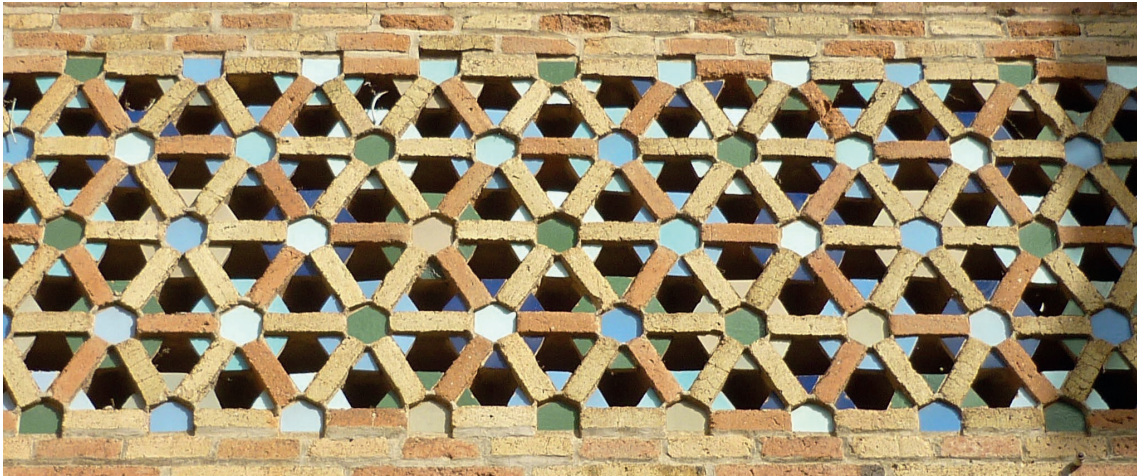
Secondly, we have explained that the aforementioned pillar acts as a jamb for the entrance for carriages, which consists of a grated door on which, made of wrought iron, there is a large dragon that is chained and writhing in pain. And this dragon means Ladon, the beast that on the "Island of the Blessed" guarded the orange tree, and that Heracles annihilated to take the branch with the golden oranges.

And thirdly, in different parts of the buildings some flowers are represented; more specifically: below the dragon of the grated door; in a stone medallion attached vertically to the mentioned pillar and where a large letter "G" is reproduced with flowers curled up; and on the exterior of several walls of the stable and the lunging ring, where the flowers appear painted red or white. And these flowers presumably are allusions to the "englantina", the rose that traditionally was given to the winner of the *Jocs Florals* prize and a copy of which Verdaguer received in 1877¹⁵ (Fig. 2).

¹⁵ This interpretation of the roses represented in the Güell Pavilions has been made by several authors. See, for example, Joan Bassegoda, *El Gran Gaudí* (Barcelona: Editorial AUSA, 1989), 271.



▪ Fig. 2. Antoni Gaudí. The pillar with the golden oranges, the grated door with the dragon Ladon, and one of the roses painted on the walls of the lunging ring, 1884-87. Photographs of the author.



▪ Fig. 3. Antoni Gaudí. Part of the balustrade. 1884-87. Photograph of the author.

In short, in the Güell Pavilions important elements of the poem *L'Atlàntida* of Verdaguer are plastically represented, and, in addition, located in key places and in a highly visible way. In a first interpretation we could say that, with these allusions, Gaudí wanted to mean that also in this place the orange tree of the golden oranges had been replanted, so that one can feel its effects... And this implies that probably also in Güell Pavilions, in some way, the idea of a *new mythology* is present. In fact, we know for sure that Antoni Gaudí, as a young student, attended some lectures of Manuel Milà i Fontanals and other important figures of the Catalan *Renaixença*¹⁶. So, Gaudí could have been familiarized himself with this idea not only through his friend Verdaguer.

However, in my opinion, in the Güell Pavilions the allusions to *L'Atlàntida* are something more than mere references introduced sporadically in some decorative elements, but rather expressions of a more essential factor that somehow structures the whole work. Next, we will now go to try to prove how this also implies a peculiar way of making present the idea of a *new mythology*.

¹⁶ See: Joan Matamala, *Antoni Gaudí. Mi itinerario con el arquitecto* (Barcelona: Editorial Claret, 1999), 29; and Gijs van Hensbergen, *Antoni Gaudí* (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés Editores, 2001), 85.

AESTHETIC GEOMETRY IN GÜELL PAVILIONS

To understand how *L'Atlàntida* and the idea of a *new mythology* are present in the Güell Pavilions, we must consider a factor that so far has only been mentioned in passing: the presence of geometry.

Thus, to begin with, we can say that on the outside of these buildings one can perceive the following elements with forms of regular geometry:

- The pillar that supports the branch with the golden oranges has a square base, continues with a long section made of bricks that has the shape of a Greek cross, and in the part of the pedestal it has several smaller squares. In addition, the medallion that is attached vertically is octagonal (Fig. 2).
- The flowers that appear in different surfaces are framed with a square shape, in whose inside there are several concentric circles, the central one representing the rose (Fig. 2).
- Delimiting the roofs of the stables and the gatekeeper's lodge, there is a balustrade that is made of bricks



▪ Fig. 4. Antoni Gaudí. Floor of the lunging ring. 1884-87. Photograph of the author.

and ceramics arranged forming equilateral triangles and hexagons (Fig. 3).

- The chimneys and the dome configure regular volumes.

Moreover, when entering the buildings, this regular geometry is also perceived, especially in two of its spaces:

- In the lunging ring, which is square on the outside but whose interior walls form an octagonal space, and its floor is made up of bricks laid like sardines (in Catalan, *a sardinell*), forming concentric circles in the shape of a funnel, some of which having the same diameter as the circles that configure the roof and the dome (Fig. 4).
- In the gatekeeper's lodge, where the central space is octagonal, and

the two modules that flank it are square.

However, when seeing these geometric forms and the places where they are, and above all after having discovered in other works of Gaudí the presence of a type of geometry called "aesthetic geometry", one becomes aware that probably also in these pavilions this geometry is present¹⁷. In order to

¹⁷ I discovered the presence of this geometry in the work of Gaudí, studying Casa Bellesguard, and after the Park Güell. At the moment, we still do not know when exactly Antoni Gaudí discovered the work of Peter Lenz, the artist that reconstructed this geometry. In this writing, however, I will pass over this issue, and I will focus on analysing how this type of geometry is present in Güell Pavilions. The main writings I have published on these other works of Gaudí are the following ones: Carles Rius Santamaria, *Gaudí i la quinta potència. La filosofia d'un art* (Barcelona, University of Barcelona, 2011); Carles Rius Santamaria, *Antoni Gaudí: Casa Bellesguard as the Key to His Symbolism* (Barcelona,

show this, I will begin by summarizing how the main figures of this geometry can be organized in a geometric process made up of four sections that are as the following ones:

1. A sequence of concentric squares, one placed inversely in relation to the previous one, which represents a movement of contraction.
2. A series of expansive hexagrams, all situated in the same position, which reproduces a movement of expansion.
3. A series of concentric hexagrams, one inverted with respect to the previous one, which represents a second contractive action.
4. And the inference of a series of five-pointed stars one located inversely in relation to the previous one, which follow the relationships of the golden section or the so-called *divine proportion*, and which means a second expansive movement¹⁸.

In my opinion, the figures that compose this geometric process can be identified in the three main spaces that constitute the Güell Pavilions, that is: the pillar, the lunging ring, and the gatekeeper's lodge. Thus, at first glance we can say that:

- The pillar has a square base, but the following shape of a Greek cross determines the four angles of an inverted square inside it, an inverted square that in the form of the pedestal appears more explicitly. Likewise, the octagonal figure of the medallion attached to it can be considered a variation of a regular eight-pointed star or two concentric

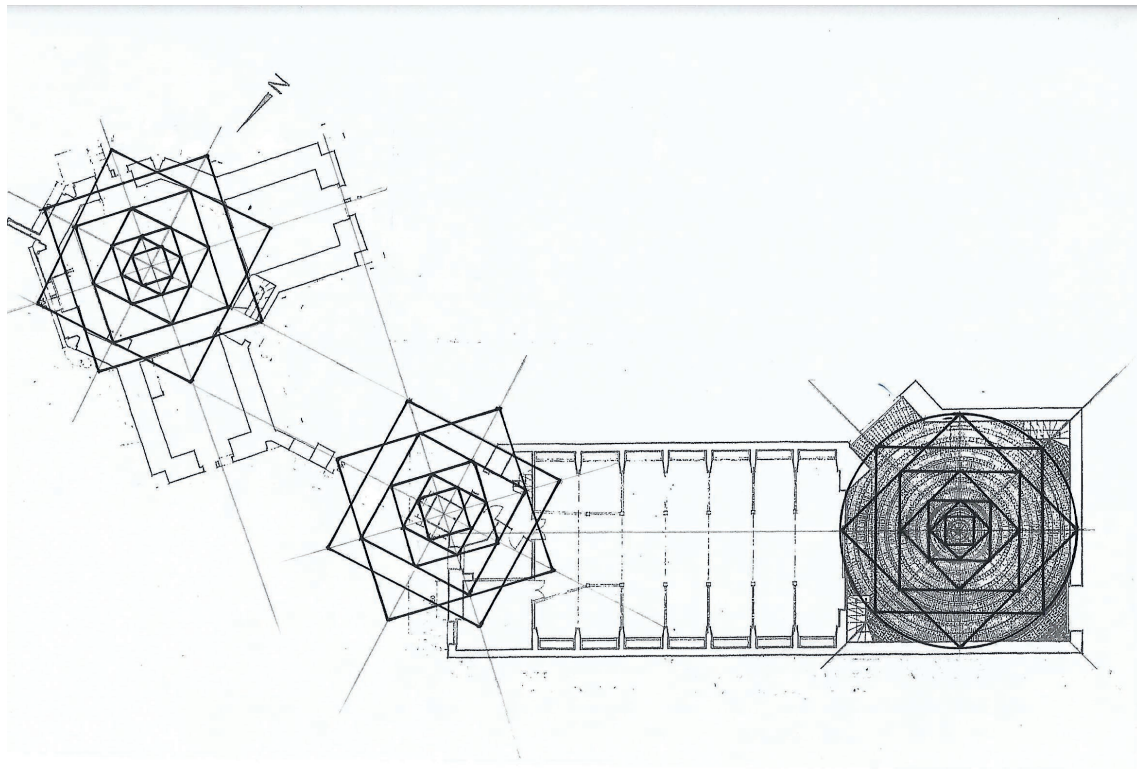
squares, one inverted in relation to the previous one. And all these figures are typical of the first section of the geometric process presented above.

- In the lunging ring, its square perimeter and the octagonal shape of the interior walls allow to configure the series of concentric squares that constitute the first section of the geometric process; and this with the help of the concentric circles that form the floor. In addition, in the center of this floor there is a round slab of stone on which the letter "G" is engraved, and in whose perimeter, there are twelve equidistant holes that act as drains; a number repeated in the windows of the dome situated just above through which the light enters. And these twelve elements allude to the points of the equilateral triangles that make up the second and third sections of the geometric process that can be drawn in this space.
- On the balustrade that surrounds the roofs of the stables and the gatekeeper's lodge, the triangular and hexagonal shapes that make it up are arranged also following the order of the figures of the second and third sections of the geometric process.
- And there is also a place where one can see the figure that characterizes the fourth and last stage of this process, if only as a decorative motif: in some flowers of five petals that are sculpted on the stone that serves as the cross of the pedestrian gate, above which there is the bell.

So far, we have identified loose figures of the geometric process in various elements of the pavilions. However, there are sufficient indications to think that the whole process is present in each of the three main spaces of this work: the pillar, the lunging

University of Barcelona, 2014); and Carles Rius Santamaria, "Park Güell: Reconstructing the Temple of Jerusalem through Light and Aesthetic Geometry", *Matèria. Revista Internacional d'Art*, nº 16-17 (2020), 171-198.

¹⁸ One can find a more detailed exposition of this geometric process in Rius Santamaria, *Antoni Gaudí: Casa Bellesguard...*, 126-128.



- Fig. 5. Antoni Gaudí. Horizontal section of the Güell Pavilions, with the application of the figures of the first section of the geometric process. 1884-87. Drawing of the author.

ring, and the gatekeeper's lodge. In this sense, I now present an image where one can see how the figures of the first section of this process can be traced in the pavilions as a whole (Fig. 5).

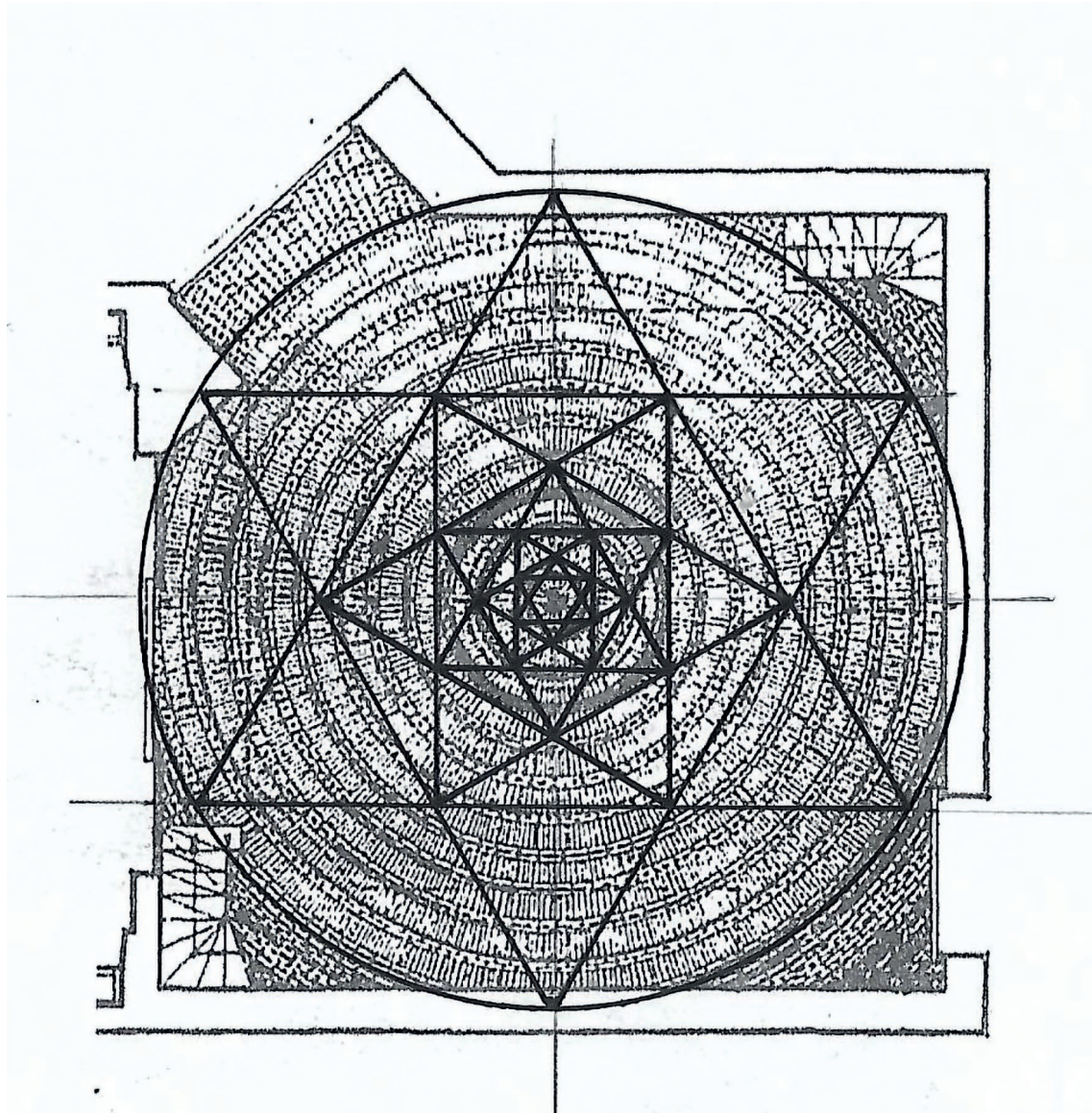
In this image, one can see that the squares formed from existing elements in the three main spaces are proportional to each other, so that: the largest squares explain the dimensions of the lunging ring and the gatekeeper's lodge; and the smaller square that forms the base of the pillar that supports the orange tree branch matches the dimensions of the smaller square located in the centre of the lunging ring, as well as the one located in the centre of the main room of the gatekeeper's lodge.

All in all, of the three main spaces of the pavilions, the lunging ring is the one where the work done by the architect allows us to glimpse better how the other sections of the

geometric process can be inferred. And what I will do next is to show how the two most difficult sections, the third and fourth, exist there (Fig. 6, and Fig. 7).

In the drawing of next page (Fig. 6), we can see how, starting from the large circle in the lunging ring in which we have traced the first section of the geometric process, there we can draw the concentric triangles of the third section, so that the fifth concentric hexagram is inserted in the first circle formed by the floor bricks, starting from the slab of stone in the centre.

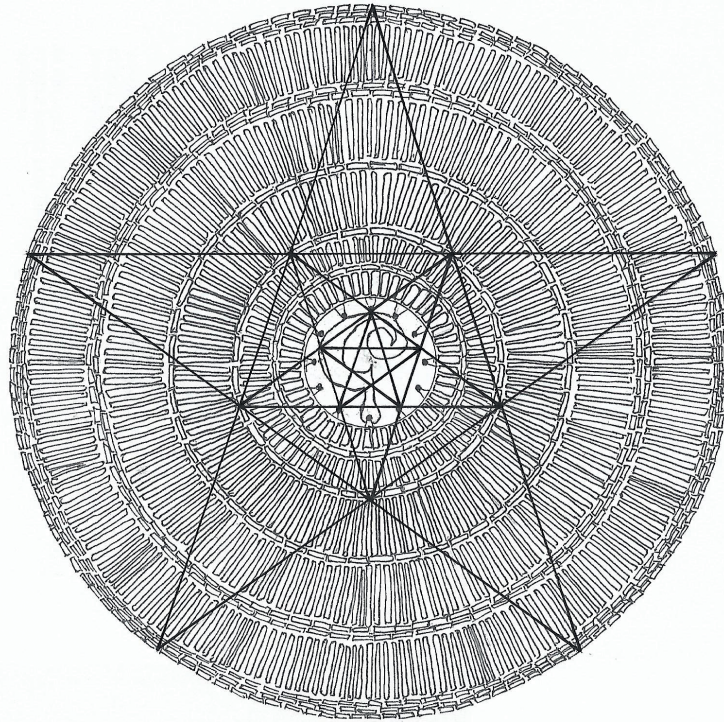
Regarding the fourth and last section of the geometric process, the starting point is precisely the perimeter of this central slab, in whose interior there would be the first pentagram. And from there, two more pentagrams could be drawn, one reversed in relation to the previous one, achieving the result of Fig. 7.



▪ Fig. 6. Antoni Gaudí. Horizontal section of the lunging ring, with the figures of the third section of the geometric process. 1884-87. Drawing of the author.

About Fig. 7, I would like to comment the following: the angles of the pentagon that forms the smallest pentagram are inside the perimeter of the slab of stone, which measures 66 cm in diameter; the angles of the second pentagon meet the outline of the second important circle formed with the bricks, which has a diameter of 132 cm; and something similar happens with the angles of the third pentagon, which in this case agrees with the fifth circle of the floor, and has a diameter of 365 cm.

Certainly, one could plot more eccentric pentagrams, but I think that the three we have drawn are the most important ones because of two reasons I explain below. First of all, because the diameter of the second circle mentioned, the one that circumscribes the second pentagon and that is 132 cm, measures exactly the same as the sides of the square that forms the base of the pillar that supports the branch of the orange tree, and also the same as the sides of the smallest



▪ Fig. 7. Antoni Gaudí. Central part of the floor of the lunging ring, with the three eccentric pentagrams, one located inversely in relation to the previous one. 1884-87. Drawing of the author.

square than in Fig. 5 we have drawn in the centre of the gatekeeper's lodge. This implies that also in these two spaces there is implicit the golden section or divine proportion, something that from a symbolic viewpoint is particularly important in the case of the pillar because this is the construction that the artist erected to transplant the branch with fruits that, according to *L'Atlàntida*, provide immortality.

And the second reason to think that these three pentagrams drawn in the centre of the lunging ring are the most important ones, is that the diameter of the third circle, the one that circumscribes the third pentagram and which is 365 cm, measures the same as the diameter of the circumference that in the roof indicates where the dome begins to form. But to be aware of the importance of this coincidence, we must consider a very special acoustic phenomenon that occurs in the lunging ring, which, as far

as I know, has not still been sufficiently explained.

THE VOICE OF SELF-AWARENESS

If one visits the lunging ring of the Güell Pavilions, stands right in the centre, that is, above the round slab with the letter "G", and speaks loudly, one will hear his words a few thousandths of a second after having pronounced them. It is not an echo like the usual ones, given that this resonance is quite immediate and dry, resulting in the fact that one perceives better one's own voice.

To this, however, it is necessary to add an even more surprising phenomenon that only few people know: when this person that has placed in the centre of the lunging ring speaks, those who are on the periphery do not perceive him with the aforementioned echo, but they hear him – and themselves – in the usual way. That is to say: that only the



▪ Fig. 8. Antoni Gaudí. Dome of the lunging ring seen from inside. 1884-87. Photograph of the author.

person that stands in the centre hears better his own voice.

Actually, to be more precise about where and how this phenomenon happens, we should add that this is not only experienced by the person who is right on top of the round slab, but also by the person who moves near it, so that the more one moves away from the central point, the less one hears the resonance mentioned, until disappearing completely when one crosses the line that forms the fifth circle indicated above. With this in mind, we can already guess that this acoustic phenomenon is related to the presence of geometry, and more specifically of the golden section or divine proportion that we have just inferred on the floor and also in the dome, through which, as we said, the light enters (Fig. 8).

This shows us that the lunging ring, although apparently has only a functional

meaning, in fact it is a relevant space from an architectural viewpoint, and also from a symbolical one. Thus, now we can guess that the importance of this room is also alluded in the roses that are painted in different parts of the building (Fig. 2), since they can be understood as representations of the horizontal section of the lunging ring, so that the square means its perimeter, the large circle the largest circle formed with the floor bricks, and the flower the central circle of the floor where we have inferred the three pentagrams of the golden section.

Having reached this point, I would like to give an interpretation of why the artist created a space that produces the acoustic phenomenon described, and what meaning it may have. Thus, from the outset there must be an intention linked to the function of this space, that is, to tame horses. From this viewpoint, we can imagine that the tam-

er, placed at the centre, held with a rope the horse that galloped around the periphery; until the animal lost his fear, relaxed his trot, and approached the tamer, this being the point when the horse neighed and could better perceived his own voice. In this sense, we can state that the artist created a space where the moment in which the animal impulses are tamed coincides with the moment when one finds oneself.

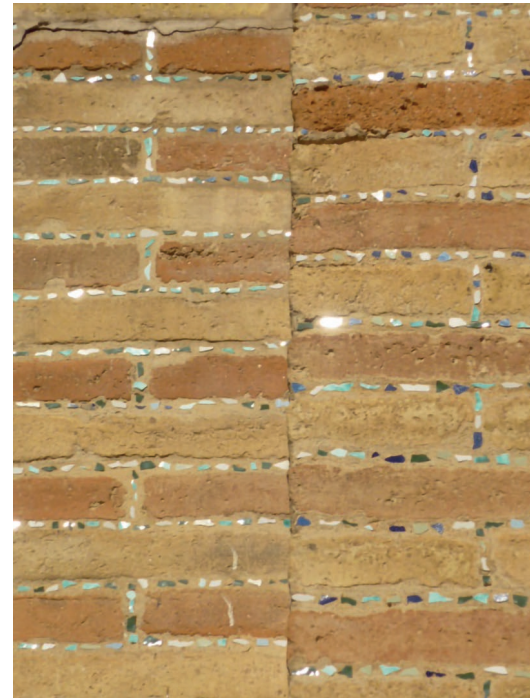
Certainly, in this process the horse needs the human being. But the human being, who also has an animal part, can do this process for himself, at the end of which he reaches what we mean by “self-awareness”. Therefore, the echo heard by the person who is at the centre of the lunging ring and which only he hears, can be considered “the voice of self-awareness”. And since this is a phenomenon that is created through the “divine proportion”, we can also attribute to it a religious dimension: the artistic reproduction of something similar to the process of Creation, the act in which God, the one in whom awareness is always self-awareness, when speaking, creates¹⁹.

With this we have found a religious meaning in a space where at first nothing suggested that there could be. But, on the one hand, the Bible explains that animals are also part of Creation²⁰, and precisely the authors of early Romanticism mentioned above were the ones that studied in depth the transition from the wildest nature to the most elevated spiritual world²¹. On the other hand, in this work of Gaudí we have already detected a religious sense: in the pillar that holds the branch of the orange tree, which, according to the myth, came from a kind of paradise and produced fruits that provided immortality. Well, next I would like to go deeper into the religious dimension of this

¹⁹ Genesis 1, 1-31.

²⁰ Genesis 1, 20-27.

²¹ For instance, this kind of thought goes through all the stages in Schelling’s work: from his early Philosophy of Nature, to his Philosophy of Revelation.



▪ Fig. 9. Antoni Gaudí. Part of the wall with bricks and *trencadís* in the joints. 1884-87. Photograph of the author.

work, mentioning some elements that until now have gone unnoticed.

TWO POINTED DIRECTIONS

One of the particularities of the Güell Pavilions is a specific use of *trencadís*: small pieces of ceramic placed in the joints of the bricks that make up the pillar and the walls where the two access doors are held (Fig. 9).

At first glance, one might think that this is a mere decorative detail. But if one looks at these walls when the sun’s rays hit them directly, one will observe a sparkle that looks not so much the resulting reflection of an external light, but the manifestation of a light that circulates in the interior of the wall and that exudes through the joints.

Some readers will probably think that what I have just said is a raving. But what I have said is completely consistent with the body of work that the artist left us, and it even makes more sense, given that: on the

one hand, the branch of the orange tree with the golden oranges has to produce effects in the place where it is transplanted, vivifying effects that Verdaguier already promoted in his poem by putting them at the service of the Catalan *Renaixença*, but that in an architectural work it is appropriate that it has a visual expression; and on the other hand, in *L'Atlàntida* Verdaguier explains that Heracles killed the dragon and took the branch from the orange tree, but in the Pavilions the dragon appears alive, chained and writhing in pain, and if something is restraining the strength of this dark beast, this must be something of opposite sign, a light energy such as the one inferred, that circulating through these walls and passing through the gate, paralyzes and tames the dragon.

Now, since the Pavilions are a work of plastic arts, could not be there something else, in addition to the reproduction of the orange tree, which amplifies this energy as in fact we are experiencing it? So far, we have discovered that in the centre of the lunging ring there is the so-called "divine proportion", which is linked to the acoustic phenomenon described, and also to the light that enters through the twelve windows of the dome, which descending through the ceiling produces a gradient. In the studies carried out on other works of Gaudí, one has verified that the artist used the relationship between sunlight and matter to suggest a spiritual light that only gets to experience the subject-interpreter after having studied the work in depth to the point of inferring the divine proportion. In part, this has already been perceived in the lunging ring. But based on what we have said, it should also be possible to experience it in the other two spaces of the Pavilions where the whole geometric process can be inferred, and especially in the pillar that supports the branch of the orange tree, due to the important symbolic meaning of this item.

If in the pillar we now want to infer the fourth section of the geometric process, we can do it in the following way. In the analysis of the lunging ring carried out above, we

have seen that from the central round slab of the floor three eccentric pentagrams can be traced. Already then it was explained that the second circle has a diameter of 132 cm, which is the same as the sides of the square that forms the base of the pillar that we are now dealing with. With this, we can now infer where in the pillar are the proportions of the first two pentagrams of the fourth section of the process: the largest, in a circle that has points of contact with the square of the pillar; and the smallest at the confluence of the four arms of the Greek cross made of bricks. Therefore, it will be precisely in the centre of this cross where the divine proportion will be inferred.

Moreover, it is at this moment when the subject-interpreter can experience how from the depths of this work the following representation comes up: a Greek cross with dazzling diagonals emerging from its centre. I think we can determine that this is the source from which goes out the luminous force that flows through the pillar and exudes the joints, which immobilizes the dragon, and which helps that the bell has a joyful sound that seems to announce great expectations. That this representation that just now has been revealed is the best kept secret of this work, this can be seen by the fact that at the base of the pillar, and also of the cross shape where the bell is, there are sculpted four animal heads that, looking out, seem to be defending something especially valuable²².

Having reached this point, one may ask: this light energy that arises from the centre of the cross that is at the heart of this work and that travels along the line formed by the pillar, the entrance doors, and the wall with the bell, does it stay here or goes on...? From Fig. 10, we can see that the straight line

²² We can find a similar representation of beasts defending a very precious treasure, in other works of Gaudí: in Casa Bellesguard, at the base of a boundary cross, where there are four lions showing their claws; and in Park Güell, on the cornice that surrounds the Doric Temple, where there are heads of roaring lion.



▪ Fig. 10. Antoni Gaudí. Line drawn from the pillar of Güell Pavilions, which crosses Barcelona until arriving at the old Hospital de la Santa Creu, more specifically at an octagonal dome that is located at the centre of its chapel. Drawing of the author.

formed by these elements crosses diagonally one of the two modules of the gatekeeper's lodge, passes through its octagonal central room, and then further away from the Pavilions. With this, we can understand that the detected energy also affects the house where the keeper's family of Finca Güell lived. But now we may also ask: did Antoni Gaudí with this line want to point towards a place outside the Pavilions? And if this is so, where...?

If we take a map of Barcelona and draw the continuation of this line, we will see that it crosses the neighbourhoods of Les Corts and Esquerra de l'Eixample, and that it enters Ciutat Vella passing through Plaça d'Emili Vendrell, without so far passing through any place that apparently might be of our interest. But after this square, the line passes through another place that I do think

may be relevant to what we are working on: the old Hospital de la Santa Creu (Fig. 10).

To support this hypothesis, I will present four arguments. Firstly, in the church of this old hospital there is a chapel whose roof has ribs that configure several concentric squares similar to those of the geometric process we have inferred in the Güell Pavilions. Secondly, this hospital began to be built in 1401, under the reign of King Martí l'Humà; and we know that Antoni Gaudí particularly admired this figure, so that from 1900 to 1909 the architect built a house, Casa Bellesguard, on the land where this king had had a castle²³. Thirdly, the Hospital de la Sant Creu (Hospital of the Holy Cross) has a Greek cross as an emblem, the same form

²³ See Rius Santamaria, *Gaudí i la quinta potencia...*, 38-39.



▪ Fig. 11. Antoni Gaudí. Sculpture with a face embedded in a wall of the stable. 1884-87. Photograph of the author.

we have glimpse at the Güell Pavilions. And fourthly, we know that Gaudí was devoted to Holy Cross, and that he particularly loved this hospital, the known as “the hospital for the poor”²⁴.

Therefore, I think it is very likely that in the Güell Pavilions, Antoni Gaudí – in coordination with Eusebi Güell – placed the pillar with the branch of the orange tree, the door with the dragon, and the wall with the pedestrian gate and the bell, forming a straight line that points to the old Hospital de la Sant Creu, so that the representation of the Greek cross housed in the pillar of the Pavilions is connected to another place where there is the same representation, as well as the same geometry, which, in addition, is a fundamental site in the history of this symbol. On the other hand, this procedure that consists in linking by means of straight lines that express a kind of “spiritual magnetism”, works far from each other but where this symbol dwells, this is something that Gaudí would do again in later works²⁵.

²⁴ On Gaudí’s links with the Hospital de la Santa Creu, see, for instance: Matamala, *Antoni Gaudí...*, 122, and 359.

²⁵ See: Rius Santamaria, *Gaudí i la quinta potencia...*, 58-60; Rius Santamaria, *Antoni Gaudí: Casa Bellesguard...*, 27-29; and Rius Santamaria, “Park Güell: Reconstructing the Temple of Jerusalem...”, 186-191.

Hitherto, we have discovered that from the Güell Pavilions another work is pointed out that allows us to understand better its meaning. However, in my opinion, there is another direction aimed at from these pavilions, in this case suggested with an element that until now remains another puzzle of this work pending to be solved, and which I present below. Thus, in the dividing wall between the stable and the longing ring, and specifically in the part located further north, there is an embedded sculpture where one can identify the face of a person: with the nose, the mouth, and the eyes wide open looking attentively ahead (Fig. 11).

It seems that this sculpture does not intend to portray any particular person, since we cannot even be sure if it is a woman or a man. The enigma that surrounds this figure rather refers to the following questions: who put it there, when did he do it, and why. Regarding these issues, I have asked some specialist if it was Antoni Gaudí who put it up there, receiving always a feeble response. And the fact is that the years pass and the mask is still there, as if no one dares to remove it...

However, after what we have just discovered in this work, I think that what is relevant about this sculpture is: where it is looking at, and why. In this sense, if from this face we trace a straight line that follows the direction of his gaze, we will see that it crosses the stable and an adjacent room, without coinciding with any architectural or decorative element that seems relevant, leaving after the Pavilions in a north-east direction.

If we continue this line further, we will notice that it crosses the neighbourhoods of Sant Gervasi and Gràcia, without there seeming to be anything that might interest us either. However, a little further on, it reaches a point that I consider important: precisely the main entrance of the new Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau, which is located in what today is the Guinardó neighbourhood (Fig. 12).



▪ Fig. 12. Antoni Gaudí. Line drawn from where the embedded sculpture is situated in Güell Pavilions, which crosses north Barcelona until arriving at the main entrance of the new Hospital de la Santa Creu. Drawing of the author.

Then, in my opinion, the sculpture of the face in the stable may be looking towards the new Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau. Moreover, I consider that probably it was Antoni Gaudí himself, or someone close to him, who put this sculpture there. And when did they do it...? To answer this question, we must try to reconstruct the order of events. Thus, in my view:

- In 1884, Antoni Gaudí began to build the Güell Pavilions, placing a series of elements (the pillar, the entrance doors and the adjacent walls) forming a straight line that pointed to the old Hospital de la Santa Creu.
- It seems that at that time Antoni Gaudí and Eusebi Güell could not know where the new Hospital de la Santa Creu would be built, since

until now the only thing we know for sure is that the Administration of the Hospital de la Santa Creu bought the land to build the new hospital on 7th May 1890²⁶.

- In 1902, the first stone of the new Hospital de la Santa Creu was laid, a work that would be directed by Lluís Domènech i Montaner, who had been a teacher of Antoni Gaudí.
- And probably it was from 1912, when the most important part of this new hospital was already built, that Antoni Gaudí or someone close to him would have put in

²⁶ This is what is recorded in the files of the Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau, as it is reflected in the following website: <https://desantacreuasantpau.blogspot.com/2013/01/el-llegat-de-pau-gil-1892-1913-iv.html>

the Güell Pavilions the sculpture of the face looking towards the place where the modernist complex of the new Hospital de la Santa Creu was located.

In this way, we have discovered that from the Güell Pavilions two places are pointed out: the old Hospital de la Santa Creu, and the new Hospital de la Santa Creu; two places where there are buildings made with the same type of geometry as the one we have found in the Pavilions, and which give historical and religious meaning to the main symbol that exists in this construction: the luminous Greek cross²⁷.

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, in the Güell Pavilions, Antoni Gaudí certainly created a work with elements that had several functions: a door to enter the estate, a house for the gatekeeper and his family, some stables for horses, and a lunging ring for taming the horses.

Moreover, the artist placed some allusions to *L'Atlàntida*, the poem with which a few years earlier his friend Jacint Verdaguer had won the *Jocs Florals* prize, and which met the requirements of the *new mythology*, an idea that the thinkers of the early Romanticism had theorized, and that the poet knew how to put at the service of the Catalan *Renaixença*.

But in addition, Gaudí expressed these poetical references with a kind of geometry, and linking his work with two other buildings where the same geometry had been used, so that the result was an amplification of the aesthetic experience of the artwork, and of the political and religious meaning of its symbolism, related to the Catalan *Renaixença*.

In this way, we can say that the Güell Pavilions is a good example of the idea of a *new mythology* but applied to the plastic arts. It is true that before other artists had tried to do something similar²⁸. But what is extraordinary in Gaudí's work is that, more than a century afterwards, it manages to produce in the visitor effects that determine an ordered sequence between the experience of the outer space and the experience of the inner space. However, to discover this sequence, one has to be attentive to one's own representations, and also to be prepared to reflect on them, two things that, in fact, are important elements of any aesthetic experience.

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²⁷ The thesis that in the new Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau there is this kind of geometry, has been presented in Rius Santamaria, "Park Güell: Reconstructing the Temple of Jerusalem...", 188.

²⁸ See: Carles Rius Santamaria, "El pensamiento de la *Bildung*: de la mística medieval a Philipp Otto Runge", *Convivium. Revista de filosofía*, nº 23 (2010), 64-72; and Rius Santamaria, *Antoni Gaudí: Casa Bellesguard...*, 112-125.

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