

The Arab Baths of Girona

English



Historical facts

The origin of the Arabic baths of Girona is unknown. The first documented evidence dates from the year 1194, when King **Alphonse I** (nicknamed the Chaste) gave 250 sous (currency at the time) of the income gained from the baths to the service of an institution linked to the cathedral. It seems that the baths were damaged by the troops of the King of France in 1285, during the siege of the city and the destruction of the hamlets that surrounded the outside of the wall. This could be the reason why, in March 1294, **King James II** put **Ramon Taialà**, judge of the Royal Court of Girona, in charge of the reconstruction of the baths, with the intention of obtaining income for himself and his descendants. It was at that time the baths adopted their current appearance.

In 1342, they belonged to **Arnau Sarriera**, physician to Peter IV of Aragon, also called Peter IV the Ceremonious. In 1416, **Pere Terrades** sold half of the baths and the other adjacent houses to **Antoni Quintana**, rector of the Almoina of Girona. It seems that their role as baths was abandoned at the end of the 14th century, when they became part of a private residence.

This set of Arabic baths is a replica of a North African model which was imitated in many other areas of the Mediterranean region, with clear origins set in Arabic tradition (hence its name). During the Middle Ages the baths were mainly used by Christians in the city, even though in the 13th and 14th centuries the Jews from the city of Girona had a special room where they established a mikveh or ritual bath.

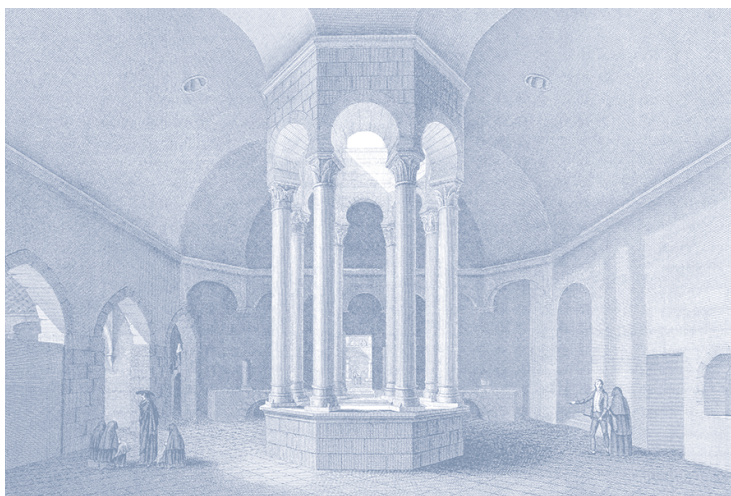
The Capuchin nuns from the Monastery of the Annunciation acquired the baths in 1618 and since then they formed part of the enclosed convent. From the beginning of the 19th century (1806) they became known throughout Europe thanks to the engravings published by **Alexandre de Laborde**. The interest that was aroused meant that eventually, in 1929, the part containing the baths was disentailed from the convent and acquired by the Council of Girona. At that time a restoration process began which was led by architects **Rafael Masó**, **Jeroni Martorell** and **Emili Blanch**, and ended in 1931. The baths opened to the public during the following year.

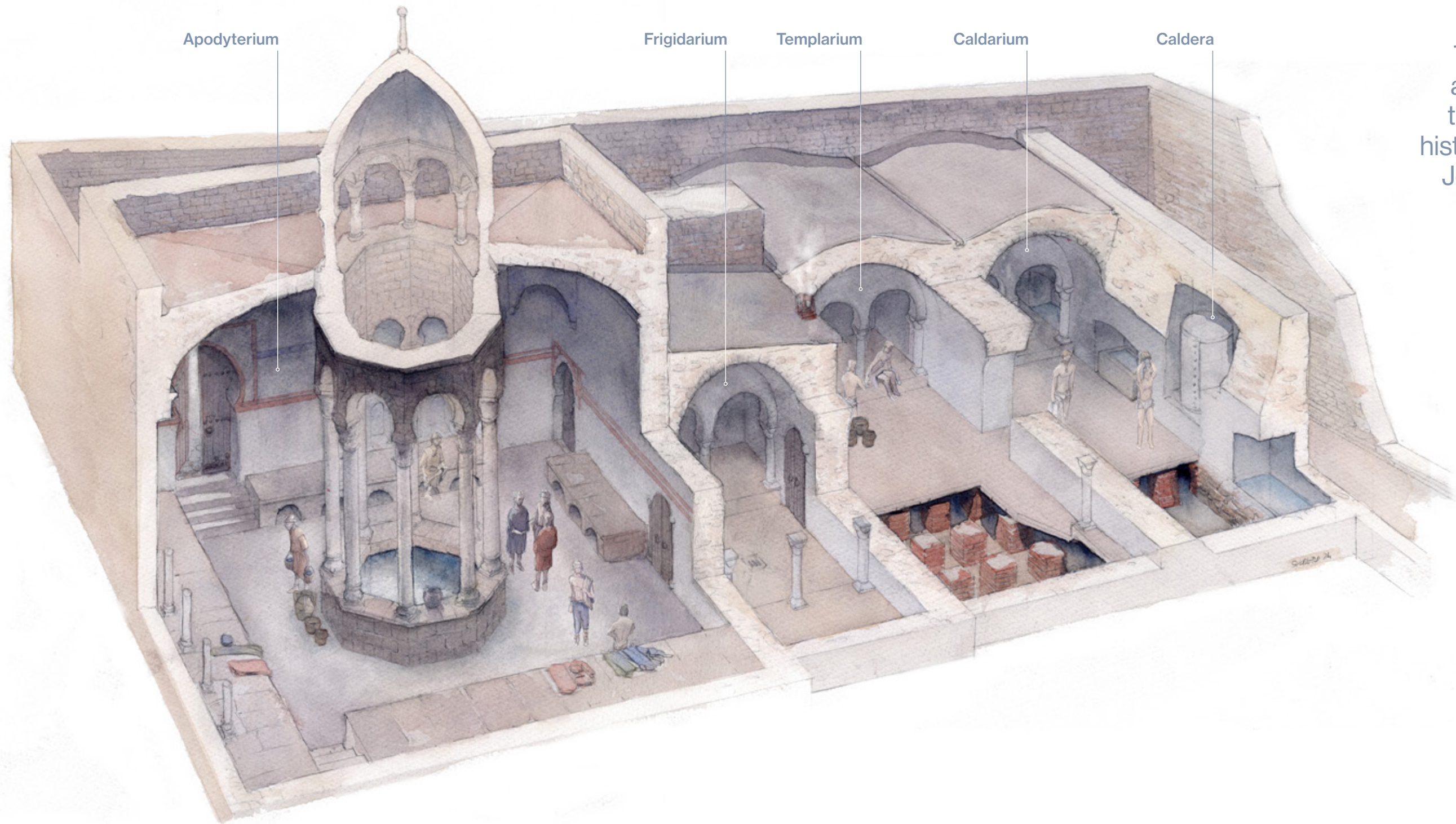
The functioning of the Arab Baths

Users of the baths would do a tour of the four rooms, each of them with a different function. The locker room or **apodyterium** is the most characteristic room of the whole set of baths. The central floor and the small octagonal pool surrounded by columns topped with large-sized capitals and a lantern with a dome are particularly noteworthy. The capitals are abound with a nature and animal themed design related to the allegories of the Garden of Eden and zoomorphic icons of Christian symbology.

The cold room or **frigidarium** was the first area on the visit and meant the start of the bath's wet area. It was accessed by double doors with two swings that closed due to the force of gravity and turned the room into a practically watertight area, meaning that its temperature remained low. In the warm room or **tepidarium**, users would recover from the intense cold of the frigidarium in it and would prepare themselves for the extreme heat of the **caldarium**, which was the next room.

The heat came from the oven via an underground source known as the **hypocaust** and it was distributed throughout the room using a glazed canal built into the wall. This system also heated a shallow pool. The **caldarium** was the warmest area in the whole set of baths and could exceed 40-50°C in temperature, with a large amount of steam.





There is no better preserved architectural example which, through its shape and human history, encompasses the Arab, Jewish and Christian cultures that coexist with different nuances at the same time.



Information

OPENING TIMES

Monday-Saturday: 10 a.m. - 18 p.m.

Sundays and bank holidays:

10 a.m. - 14 p.m.

Closed on 1 and 6 January
and 25 and 26 December

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