

EXHIBITION

THE TIME OF MEMORY

TREASURES OF THE MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY OF CATALONIA - GIRONA

The Girona branch of the Museum of Archaeology of Catalonia houses the finds from the archaeological excavations at different sites around the Girona area. They were originally exhibited in the region's earliest museum, the Provincial Museum of Antiquities and Fine Arts, which was established in 1845 by the Provincial Monuments Commission. Since 1857, the collection has been installed in the monastery of Sant Pere de Galligants.

On the occasion of the 175th anniversary of its founding, the exhibition presents some of the most important objects in the museum's collections. Of great aesthetic quality, the pieces on display are not only exciting archaeological treasures, but are also exceptional for the historical condition they conceal. As material culture from the past, they tell us stories and bear witness to the historical memory of life and death. They take us on a journey based on the biological and psychological constants of human nature. Each and every one of these treasures conceals and provides a history and a background, with anecdotes, traditions, particularities and peculiarities. They are lighthouses of memory, the moulding clay of identities, fragments of humanity. They bring us closer to the past and show us how important museums are for life to continue.

THE TIME OF LIFE

Where do we come from, where are we going?

As human beings we consider the origin of life from various perspectives. At first these were of a particularly mythical and religious nature, but the advent of philosophy led us on to more scientific explanations. On the other hand, the human species has always demonstrated a great capacity for adaptation, for synthesis, for creation, for awareness and for communication through language. This has brought us to a level of technicality capable

of reaching unimaginable goals. Intelligence has allowed us a new form of adaptation through culture, which moves much faster than biological adaptation. Different societies and cultures have followed different paths in creating a story about the organisation of existence and its relationship with its surroundings.

BIRTH

As soon as we are born we learn to observe, to recognise and identify the characteristics of the physical and social environment around us. We learn from everything and we do so globally, while relating to others –adults and children– and assimilating the culture and habits of our environment, an environment that watches over our development. As children grow and advance in their learning, they progress towards integrating into the community as adults. The stages of this process are marked by rites of passage that are well known to anthropologists and sometimes leave traces in the archaeological record in the form of objects.

Throughout history, games have contributed to children's physical and mental development, activating their strategic ability, creative spirit and competitiveness, either individually or in groups. Through play, children discover their environment, imitate the behaviour of adults and interact with other children. When just months old, infants play with rattles or small pottery figures. Later, role-playing games lead girls to play with dolls and boys with swords, horses and carts.

EATING

Food is life; without food there is no life. From the earliest communities, the economy was based on managing natural resources through gathering, hunting and fishing. Men and women created artifacts that made it easier for them to obtain these resources, and to prepare and consume them. Seven thousand years ago, the birth of agriculture and stockbreeding brought human control over consumer goods, the ability to produce and store surpluses and to trade. At the same time, eating habits and traditions were formed, often through religion, that became characteristic of various communities.

From the dawn of humanity, tools were fashioned from materials such as stone, bone, wood, shell, etc., modifying their shape without altering their internal structure. Agriculture and stockbreeding, as well as sedentary lifestyles, led to the transformation and combination of materials to create artificial substances such as pottery and metal.

As an extension of the hand, knives represent the day-to-day gestures of human beings. Since the Palaeolithic they have been used for punching and cutting. Their diverse types of handle and the different shapes of their blades illustrate a multitude of practical uses, whether in the fields, in the kitchen or at the table.

PRODUCTION

The discovery of pottery, glass and metallurgy made it possible to expand and diversify the production of increasingly varied and efficient tools and utensils: containers for cooking and storing food and tools for cultivation, hunting, fishing and other activities designed to transform nature. Technological knowledge facilitated the incorporation of decorative elements of great aesthetic and symbolic value into some of these objects of daily life, turning them into items of prestige, of social differentiation, small treasures that archaeology has allowed us to rediscover.

Vessels, more than simple containers, are an essential testament to cultural evolution. With technological ability and knowledge of new materials, they were fashioned and perfected to achieve aesthetically refined forms more akin to their function. Behind all of them lies an action and an instant in which they were crafted and used. An instant of life.

Containers, especially those made of pottery, have always been one of the most useful study tools for archaeologists, due to their abundance and variety in the archaeological record. From the very beginning, they formed the basis of chronological sequences. Today, with new research techniques, they inform us of details of everyday life that are fundamental to our understanding of the communities that manufactured and used them.

ENJOY

Beyond their basic subsistence needs, human beings have always wanted to own objects that satisfy their most intimate and personal aspects, as well as to have moments for relaxation and leisure. Sedentarisation in the Neolithic, and above all the production of surpluses in the Greek and Roman cultures, allowed them to have sufficient resources to manufacture, buy and import consumer goods. Many of these were considered luxuries, both for the valuable materials with which they were made, that were not generally available, and for the work and

specialised techniques of those who made them. A very different area was that of play, an activity as old as the human species itself and an integral part of its socialisation and leisure, which saw a remarkable development in ancient societies.

Objects intended for hygiene and personal care, as well as medical and surgical instruments. Objects that facilitated trade, such as weights, measures and coins, as well as writing materials and instruments. The last of these allowed the transmission and establishment of ideas and knowledge that, until the advent of writing, could only be transmitted orally. Thus began an explosion in the possibilities and abilities to communicate all types of content that continues to this day. Welfare and leisure, physical pleasure and spiritual and intellectual enjoyment.

Daily body hygiene habits have changed significantly over time. In the classical world (Greek and Roman), bathing became a social and leisure expression, as well as therapy and a part of everyday life. Women and men devoted part of their time to hygiene and body care.

Since prehistoric times, humans have burned fragrant woods and resins to give off pleasant aromas and smells, especially in places of worship, at shrines and in funeral rituals, as well as in daily life and on personal attire. The containers they used, of various shapes and origins, held scented oils that were distributed through trade as exotic and prestigious items.

Play is a form of socialisation inherent in humanity. Free time, without activity, led to the birth of hundreds of games that we still enjoy today. In ancient times, adult games occupied long hours of leisure, especially board games and games of chance.

The desire to adorn significant parts of the body has been documented since the Palaeolithic and could also have been a way of differentiating notable members of the group. Necks, fingers, wrists, ears, heads and ankles would be adorned with items found in nature. The extraction of metals, the transformation of minerals and the application of gems to create these small luxury items would have involved a unique manufacturing specialisation.

The display of jewellery, however, corresponded to need for social presentation and status indication that exceeded the temporal limits of life itself. For this reason, earrings, necklaces, bracelets, rings, pendants, brooches or buckles are often found in tombs, as a funeral accompaniment to those who had worn them during their lives.

As soon as humanity was able to generate surpluses, there was trade and commerce. Even before the advent of currency, exchange was the means of obtaining certain goods in return for others. River or sea navigation was the main route of communication, transport and trade. Trade in ancient times was a structured activity, with well-defined routes and vessels and ports adapted to that task.

FIGHTING

Violence has been a constant in the history of mankind, to the point that, in the fourth century BC, the Greek philosopher Plato considered the concept of peace as an exceptional circumstance in the violent normality. This violence embraced all aspects of society and daily life, eventually manifesting itself in serious disputes and even war. There was also violence linked to rites and beliefs that was manifested in the form of human sacrifices. In addition to weapons, the archaeological record has preserved abundant evidence of violent acts, including complete bodies, body parts and skeletons of victims with obvious traces of wounds and injuries.

War has been one of the great technological driving forces over time. Weapons are among the most common items found at archaeological sites, although it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish a weapon of war from a hunting implement or a simple prestige symbol.

CREATE

Since prehistory, material evidence linked to religious practices or doctrines has conveyed the relationship between humans and higher beings or deities. In the classical world, acts associated with public religion, which also required the commitment of citizens to participate in civic ceremonies, were carried out in public spaces intended for that purpose, such as sanctuaries or temples which, at the same time, were defining elements of the collective identity.

We have evidence of other practices relating to the more personal and family spheres and the moral and ethical values through which society sought to achieve individual well-being. Both aspects, public and private, were linked to deeper concepts and yearnings for fullness and self-improvement related to art and artistic expression.

Mythology, religion and superstition: seeking explanations for the great mysteries of life and death; public and private expression of beliefs; propitiation of good luck to confront the most intimate and personal fears.

The creative process responds to the human need to express an emotion or an idea, based on its capacity for abstraction and its formal or material representation. Through different artistic expressions (painting, sculpture, pottery, etc.), humans have left evidence of the features of the various cultures they have moulded.

TIME OF FAREWELL

The awareness that life has a beginning and an end has always been present in human beings, and this fact has conditioned the relationship they have established with their environment. Heaven, earth, mountains, rivers, seas, animals and plants have been recreated and assigned to a set of more or less complex rituals, beliefs and deities.

The way in which we deal with death and especially what happens next has been one of the key elements addressed by all religious forms. In this way, while responding to fears and essential questions, it unites the community and strengthens its spiritual needs. In addition, the belief in the afterlife, in life after death and the worship of the dead have often been used as a powerful tool of control at the service of the power.

DEATH

Cemeteries and tombs, as physical places of rest, define a funerary landscape and become a place of collective and individual memory and remembrance, as well as of social differentiation, legitimation and visualisation of the elites. These spaces have taken many material forms over the centuries, from simple graves to large funerary monuments, from mass graves to unique or reusable tombs. Rituals, offerings, grave goods, clothing, etc. denote care for the deceased as well as their position in the community. On the other hand, not being entitled to funeral practices implies exclusion from a social group.

The bodies of the dead are not just abandoned anywhere; they have their own space. Since the Neanderthals, 40,000 years ago, humans have been combining burial and cremation to care for their dead. Inhumation is burial in a pit, niche or container, usually in a designated area known as a necropolis or cemetery. Cremation refers to the burning of the body to turn it into ashes.

Epilogue

The present-day Museum of Archaeology of Catalonia - Girona, heir to the old Sant Pere de Galligants Museum, houses the most important archaeological collections from the Girona region. The objects displayed in the exhibition take us on a journey from the origins of life to the moment of death, from the Palaeolithic to the Visigothic, through some forty archaeological sites in this region. It is a unique tour, not only for the shared experience, but also for the excitement of discovering the most important places in Girona's archaeology (both on land and underwater). They invite you to stroll through them and enjoy the places as a source of knowledge about our historical past.