
Where have all the cannons gone?

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WHERE HAVE ALL THE CANNONS GONE?... FROM THE BARCELONA'S NAUTICAL SCHOOL....

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View of the Barcelona School of Nautical Studies, Barcelona SOJ / FNB

At the end of the eighteenth century the states promoted naval trade itineraries to have more income. They needed, therefore, to have a professional navy for trade, and also for the navy. From this need for pilots, several nautical schools were born.

In 1769 the Nautical School of Barcelona was created. It is the first nautical school in Spain. Free of charge, it was initially installed in an apartment in Barceloneta. The studies included a practical part of navigating America and northern Europe. Today, affiliated to the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC), the Faculty of Nautical Studies is still active in a majestic neoclassical building dating from 1932 designed by the architects Adolf Florensa and Josep Vilaseca, which is well worth knowing.

"There is virtually no unemployment among those leaving the Faculty of Nautical. Both those who embark and those who work in the maritime port business sector find work," says Captain Agustí Martín, dean of the Barcelona School of Nautical Studies and ambassador of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the UN's most important arm in the maritime field.

We are on the ground floor of the building of the Faculty of Nautical, under a large skylight, where the star piece is located: the ship San Carlos, a model of warship that was commissioned by Sinibald Mas, a seaman, from Torredembarra, who was already sailing at the age of 14, and founder of this School of Nautical. now Faculty of Nautical. This boat was made for a purely educational purpose: for students to learn the names of the parts of the ship and how the maneuvers are made. "It has 74 guns and a length of 3.7 meters", Juan Antonio Moreno, vice-dean for institutional relations and promotion of this faculty, who also accompanies me, tells me.

Cannons at home?

"Some guns are missing!" I tell them. "Yes, years ago there was a tradition that whoever finished their degree would take home a cannon; only a few did...", Juan Antonio replies. "A lousy tradition," I do. "Replicas have been made in the Faculty's workshop, but they are still missing," says Agustí. The originals were made of bronze, and now they are all made of wood," he adds. I can understand that in a moment of euphoria one takes a cannon home – or you know where – but I would choose to appeal to return them without any warning.

We go up to the first floor by a majestic staircase. When Juan Antonio was a student at this centre, he never walked in, due to this staircase, which was reserved for teachers: students went up and down a small side staircase.

I stop halfway up the staircase: on the wall, like an exterior window, there is a splendid leaded stained glass window depicting a rowing and sailing barn, which lets in a beautiful afternoon light, which acquires the colors of the stained

glass window. Just in front of the stained glass window hangs an immense lamp representing the caravel Santa Maria, by Christopher Columbus.

On the first floor I look out into a classroom. It says "Room 11, Room 11, Classroom 11". When Catalan and Spanish are identical, should it be repeated? I think not. I see two girls among about thirty boys. "What percentage of girls are there among the students?" I ask Juan Antonio. "9%." Then Juan Antonio invites me to enter the planetarium – an essential element in any nautical school. The front door is to the north. So when you go in, you're already oriented. Ah! And the planetarium entry reads: "Planetarium, Planetarium, Planetarium". Had?

We are now in the Dean's office. Under two octants there is a microwave, a sign that Agustí spends long days there and does not have time to go out to eat. Dean reminds me of some of the good times he's had as a sailor. He has enjoyed as a child through seas and oceans. "When I first embarked in the late seventies, the criminal and disciplinary law on the merchant marine was still in force. We weren't military but we were subject to the same regulations, extremely harsh," he says. It also reminds me of how important the captain has been. Some of its functions are gone. "Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the captain was a commercial agent, who bought and sold the cargo of the ship. Some Catalan captains played an important role in the slave trade during the second half of the nineteenth century." What has not changed is that, in case of difficulties at sea or shipwreck, the captain must be the last to abandon the ship.

THE THREE GREAT NAUTICAL SCHOOLS. Catalonia had three major nautical schools: Barcelona, Arenys de Mar and Mataró, and smaller schools in El Masnou, Vilassar, Tarragona... Thanks to these schools, Catalonia has had high-level pilots.

BRING YOUR HOME SHEETS FOR EXAMS. The School of Nautical Studies went through difficult times, of great hardship. Thus, some years of the Franco regime, students had to bring the sheets from home to take the exams: the School did not have money to provide them. In addition, teachers had rationed chalk to write on the board (one bar per class)