

# Preface

While strolling around the streets and squares of the city we come across names, monuments, embossments, images and a variety of elements which remind us of characters of the past. Seldom do we pay attention, but they are there, virtually always ignored. Former owners, prominent people who lived there or professional groups frequent the gazetteer and streets of the old part of town, packed with memories. Almost always, however, they refer to men, whereas women, active and essential at all times, remain hidden and forgotten. This is a price that is paid due to an unfair conception of society, perpetuated over the centuries, according to which men and women used to represent completely opposing roles.

This may seem too obvious to say but it should be remembered that, although they have been erased by memory, women filled markets, shops, manufacturing areas, streets and the houses of this city, played a key role in the Catalan economy and children's education, although, apart from a few exceptional cases, they themselves tended to be excluded from both. Girls received the most basic education necessary to fulfil the tasks expected of them. Mothers and grandmothers passed on practical knowledge to the following generations and in this way, their role in society was perpetuated.

However, some women did manage to overcome anonymity. Craftswomen, factory bosses, shop owners and business-

women who came to prominence when their husbands died, and also scholars, humanists and entrepreneurs who, despite all the setbacks caused by the fact that they were women, built their own lives and their own identity. It should be of no surprise that many opted for a religious vocation, one of the few possibilities of remaining single without raising suspicion or prompting ridicule.

In this book our aim has been to put together a few stories of some of these women of past centuries. We have included real and imaginary ones, with personal or collective stories, all connected with tradition. In life, women made themselves heard and made their presence felt. They were neither as invisible nor as silent as they may seem to us now and it is for this reason that we make a stand for them, with all their diversity. In this collection you will find women who are fun, loving, cruel, passionate, intelligent, cultured, excessive, fair, naive, treacherous, reckless, married, widows, nuns, damsels, countesses, saints, market sellers, lovers, wet maids, midwives, servants, production workers, factory workers, washerwomen, businesswomen, printers, writers and craftswomen... Each plays a leading role in this book and they all paint an original picture of the city.

Organised as routes around the old part, the intention of this book is to reveal women's stories, related to recognisable urban areas. A different view of the city's past, with women at the forefront.

It is time to bring their stories and their voices back from oblivion!

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