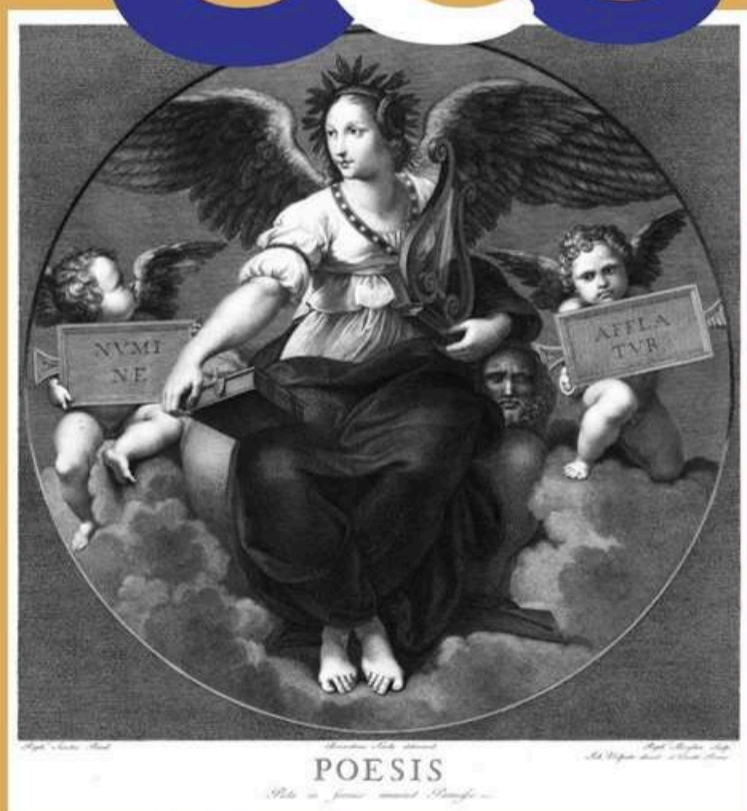


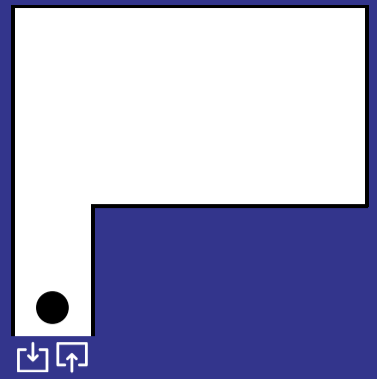
EXHIBITION CONTENT IN ENGLISH

entre MUSESES



gènesi d'un llegat universal

GENESIS of a universal legacy



Founded with a universalist vision of education and philanthropy, the Víctor Balaguer Library Museum was created with the aim of bringing together all branches of humanistic knowledge.

Returning to its origins allows us to understand the institution's evolution, which has made it a unique landmark in the country's cultural heritage.

THE PINNACLE OF A CAREER



Víctor Balaguer epitomised the progressive spirit of an era of profound change. His passion for history, the medieval world, monumental and landscape heritage, popular and traditional poetry, and the revival of Catalan language and identity shaped his career. He was a writer, poet, playwright, historian, liberal politician, Freemason and cultural advocate.

Among his various political roles, he served as a deputy in Parliament, three-time Minister of Overseas, Minister of Development and President of the Court of Audit.

In 1881, following the death of his wife, Manuela Carbonell, Balaguer decided to establish a library-museum in Vilanova i la Geltrú. Forever inspired by the motto, “Faith, Homeland and Love”, from the Jocs Florals [“Floral Games”, traditional literary competition in Catalonia, dating back to the 15th century, celebrating Catalan literature and poetry], he was driven by a desire to leave a legacy for future generations.

1 January 1882:

The foundation stone laid by Emília Samà i Torrents.

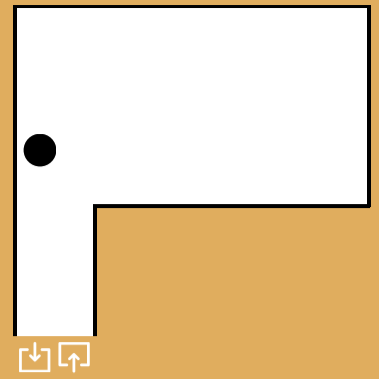


The arrival of the railway in Vilanova i la Geltrú in 1881 was the result of an initiative by Francesc Gumà i Ferran (Vilanova i la Geltrú, 1833-1912), who had returned from Cuba with his family ten years earlier. Spain’s first railway was built in the Cuban province in 1837, followed by the inauguration of the first line on the Iberian Peninsula, between Barcelona and Mataró, in 1848.

Balaguer played a crucial role in securing the Garraf railway concession. Next to the Vilanova train station, he commissioned the master builder Jeroni Granell i Mundet (Barcelona, 1834-1889) to construct a new building for the library-museum that would bear his name, which opened to the public on **26 October 1884.**

entre Muses ses

gènesi d'un llegat universal



The reverence for Beauty presides over the space dedicated to the muses.

Poetry, personified and “breathed upon by the divine” (NUMINE AFFLATUR), inspires and connects words and things; knowledge and sensory experience, both readable and visible, and the contemplation of wonders.

“Even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom, for the myth is composed of wonders”

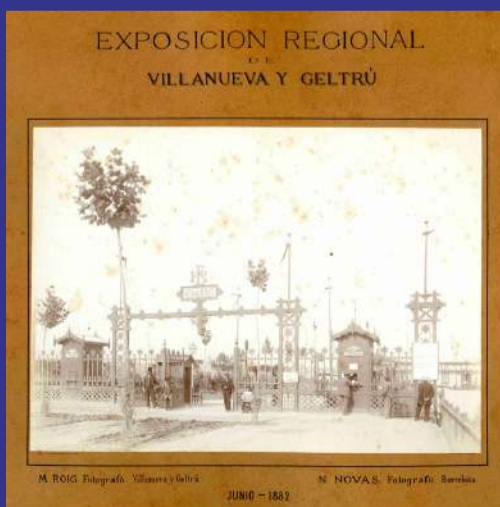
Aristotle

OPENING

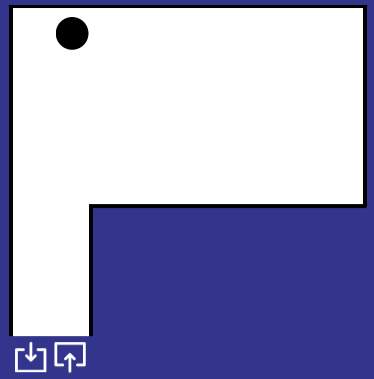
The **library** opens to the public with a collection of 22,000 volumes covering a wide range of subjects: encyclopaedias; literature; philosophy; exact, physical and natural sciences; fine arts; mechanical arts; agriculture; religion; law and legislation; history; geography; travel; archaeology; philology; and more.

The **museum** features a diverse array of objects, organised into various sections: Art gallery (including old and modern paintings from both East and West), engravings, photographs, sculptures, decorative and luxury arts, a collection of fingerprints, ceramics, glassware, costumes, jewellery, weapons, archaeology, numismatics, medals and curiosities.

Víctor Balaguer Library-Museum Bulletin
[26 October 1884]



On **28 May 1882**, the Vilanova i la Geltrú Regional Exhibition opened, featuring the first paintings from Madrid (on deposit from the Prado).



Joan Oliva i Milà (Sant Pere de Ribes, 1859 – Vilanova i la Geltrú, 1911), a printer and librarian, was one of Balaguer's most significant collaborators.

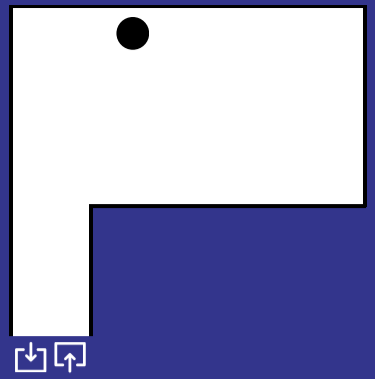


In 1899, the building was expanded to house collections of decorative arts, Egyptian artefacts and numismatics, in what was then called the Isabel Room (now the temporary exhibitions room).

The art of collecting is a way of creating a kind of magical encyclopaedia of far-off lands through objects.

The photographic sequence displays Japanese samurais alongside Egyptian and pre-Columbian objects in the museum's galleries.

BALA GUE RIANA



With this, I bequeath to you all my fortune, everything I have; but I bequeath you much more than just my wealth: I bequeath these books, which I found far harder to part with than my material possessions [...]. I also bequeath these museum objects, which evoke memories of desires not always fulfilled, treasures sought with longing, and arduous journeys undertaken to acquire them, as well as jewels passed down to me as a blood debt or from a kindred spirit [...].

I bequeath you all of this, and with it, something even greater and more significant: I bequeath you my soul.

Excerpts from Víctor Balaguer's speech at the inauguration of the Víctor Balaguer Library Museum, translated from Spanish.

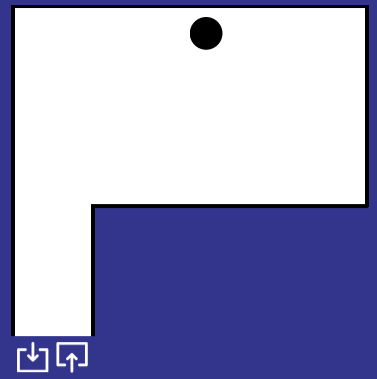


“Hail Víctor! The esteemed figure who sows the seeds of civilisation in this grateful land”

Josep de Letamendi i Manjarrés (Barcelona, 1828 – Madrid, 1897), a friend and physician of Balaguer, composed this anthem for the inauguration of the Víctor Balaguer Library Museum.

“Many thanks to you for your gracious words addressed to the donor of the Dante statues (...) which have arrived just in time, as they are exactly what we needed most. They will be promptly placed on the appropriate pedestal”.

Letter from Creus to Balaguer
[17 January 1883]



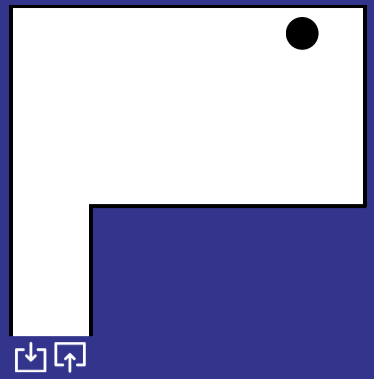
a miscellany of donations

A wide range of donors contributed extraordinary items and collections, including books, documents, maps, manuscripts, photographs and artworks. These include pieces from the Museo del Prado and gifts from the artists themselves, alongside objects from far-off and exotic places.



Lluís Rigalt i Farriols (Barcelona, 1814-1894), esteemed professor at the Barcelona School of Fine Arts, donated “Notebook XXI from the Collection of Sketches and Original Drawings by Luis Rigalt. This oblong folio album contains two hundred and ten compositions.”

Víctor Balaguer Library-Museum Bulletin
[26 May 1889]



FINE ARTS AND DECORATIVE ARTS

The Balaguer Museum's art collection features a range of creative expressions in the fine arts, including painting, drawing and sculpture, as well as in the decorative arts, such as ceramics, furniture and small ornamental objects.



The Gathering of the Dead

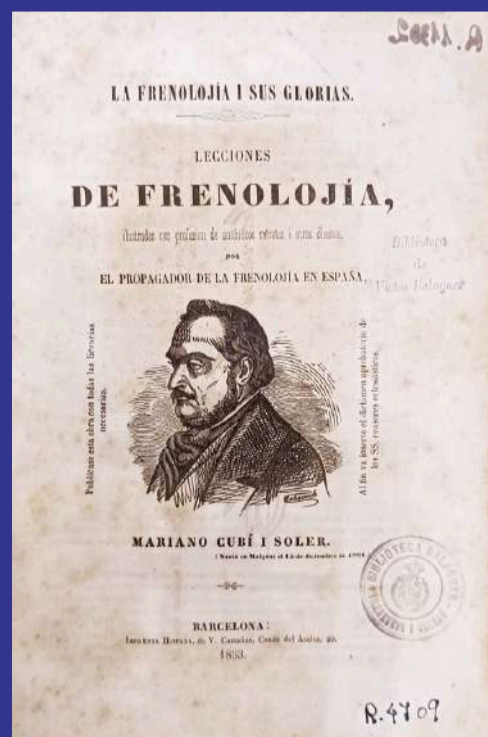
...it was the time and the mysterious hour of the gathering of the departed [...]. There, my wandering soul discovered the gathering of the dead, and there I listened to the last troubadour of those mountains, singing his final lament.

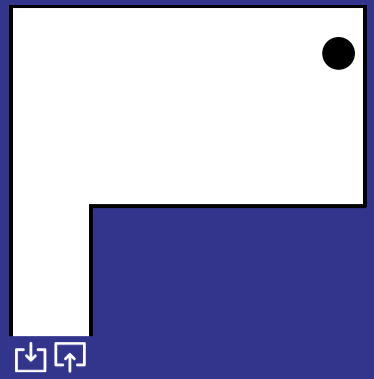
Víctor Balaguer, *Lo romiatge de mon ànima*
[The Pilgrimage of My Soul]

PHRENOLOGY

In the 19th century, physiologists believed that the shape of the head could reveal distinctive personality traits. Phrenology, or the doctrine of the brain, developed by Franz Joseph Gall, gained popularity across various countries. Phrenological diagrams were particularly influential in the study of psychiatry at the time.

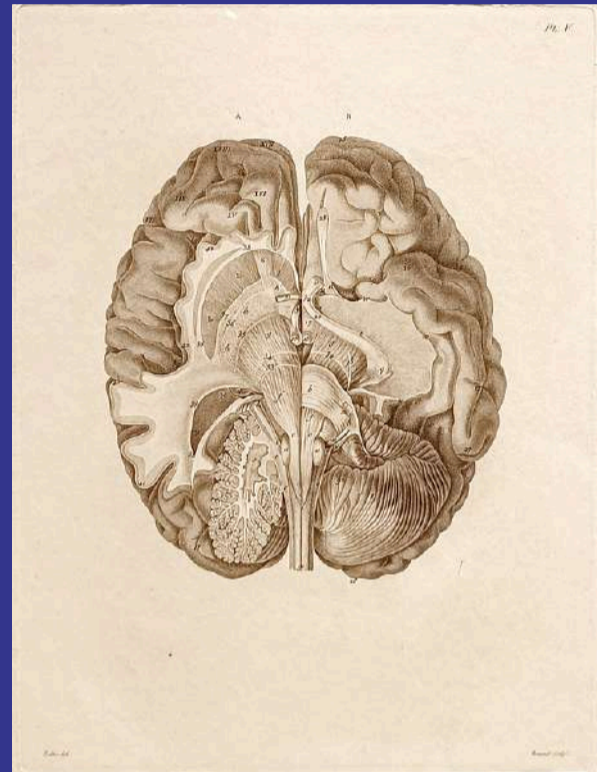
In Catalonia, the main proponent was Marià Cubí, followed by liberal doctors like Pere Mata and Felip Monlau. Between 1852 and 1854, the *Revista Frenològica* [Phrenology Journal] was published in Vilanova i la Geltrú, edited by Magí Pers i Ramona, and is preserved at the Víctor Balaguer Library Museum.





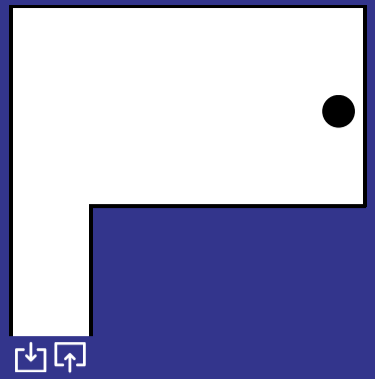
“This collection of brain anatomy plates was used by Dr. Gall to teach phrenology in Paris. He gave them to his friend Dr. Fossati, who then presented them to me in 1851, after my return from London, as a memento from the founder of phrenology. I would like my children to preserve them”.

Magí Pers, 6 July 1851



Funerary masks are faithful replicas of a deceased person’s face, preserving a lasting physical memory. While their origins lie with the Romans and Egyptians, creating masks of prominent figures became especially common during the 18th and 19th centuries.

over seas

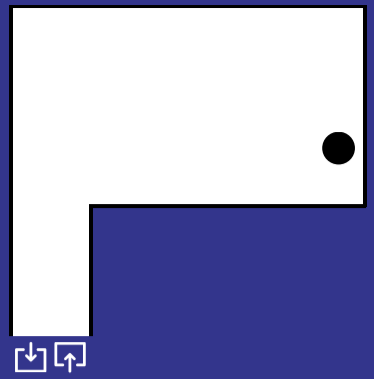


The term *overseas* has been used since ancient times and evokes ideas of distance, conquest, empire, colonialism and expansion *over the seas*.

In 1863, Spain established the Ministry of Overseas, which ceased operations following Cuba's independence in 1898.

The Víctor Balaguer Library Museum preserves remnants of material culture from the colonial territories of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and especially the Philippines. These items serve as a social representation of the history and memory – both institutional and symbolic – of Spain's colonial past.



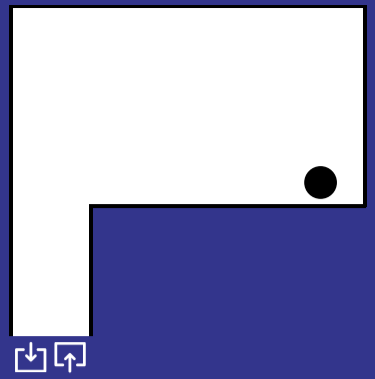


PHILIPPINE COLLECTION

The Ministry of Overseas commissioned Filipino painter Juan Luna Novicio (Badoc, 1857 – Hong Kong, 1899) to create an allegory depicting *Spain guiding the Philippines to glory*. This artwork, featuring hierarchical and triumphant imagery, portrays Spain personified as a lady leading an indigenous figure towards a bright and promising future.

In 1887, much of the Philippine collection now housed at the Víctor Balaguer Library Museum was acquired from the General Exhibition of the Philippines held in Madrid, at Balaguer's request. The collection includes items from the mountain communities of northern Luzón, primarily religious artefacts, as well as everyday objects, weapons and military equipment such as spears, shields and knives.





EASTERN COLLECTION

Notable donors of art and documents to the Eastern Asia collection include Eduard Toda i Güell (Reus, 1855 – Poblet, 1941) and Juan Mencarini Pierotti (Alexandria, 1860 – Manila, 1939).

The collection features books, paintings, coins from various Chinese dynasties, ceramics and objects from China and Japan.



Donated in August 1887 as part of a collection of Japanese plates gifted by the botanist Sebastià Vidal: “The esteemed Catalan engineer, Mr. Sebastián Vidal, who has made significant contributions in the Philippines and who is distinguished for leading one of the sections at the Exposition of products from that country, has honoured us by sending several Japanese plates to our MUSEUM. These plates are both rare and fascinating.”

Víctor Balaguer Library-Museum Bulletin
[26 August 1887]

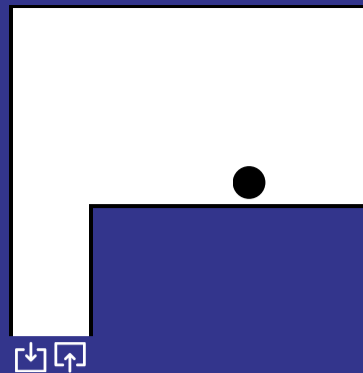
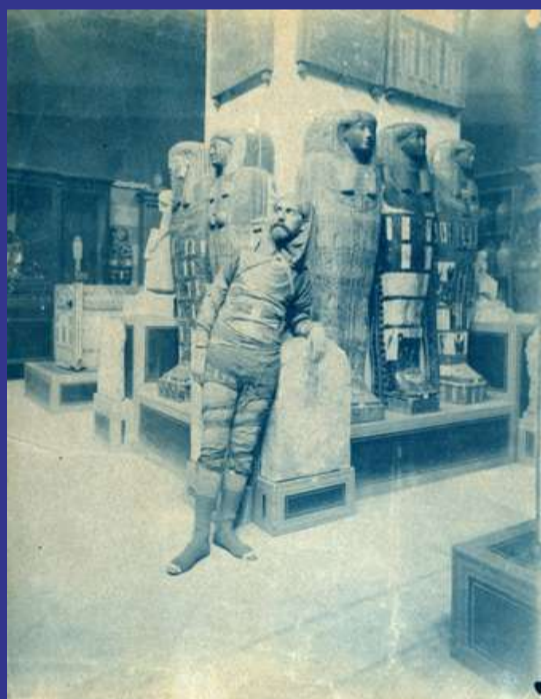
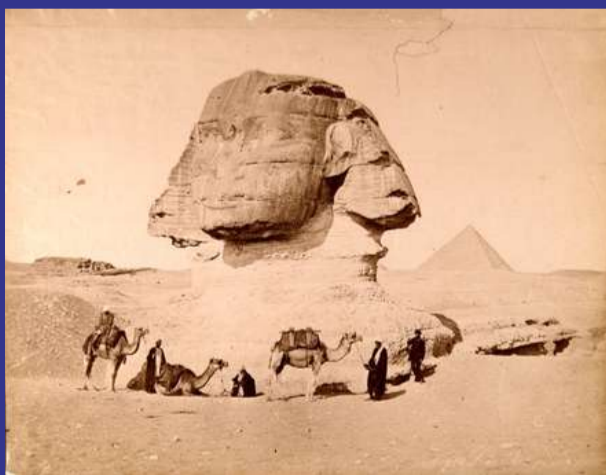
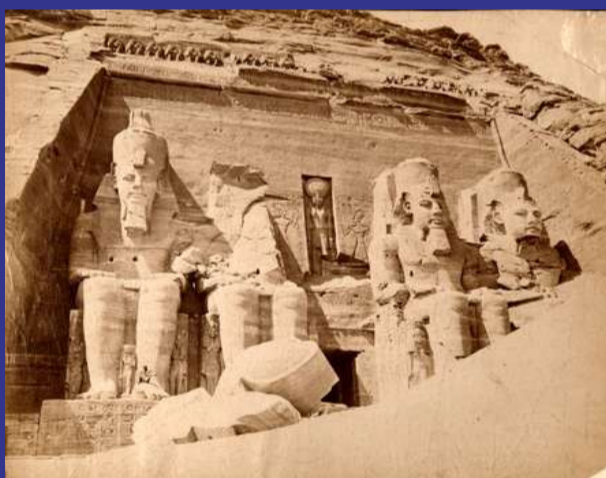
EDUARD TODA I GÜELL

REUS, 1855 - POBLET, 1941

Catalonia's first Egyptologist

Patron, bibliophile, collector, Egyptologist, writer and philanthropist, Toda studied at the Escoles Pies in Reus with Antoni Gaudí, with whom he remained lifelong friends.

After studying Law in Madrid, where he met Balaguer, he began a diplomatic career. He served as vice-consul in China from 1876 to 1882 and in Egypt in 1884. Toda is considered a pioneer of Egyptology in Catalonia. He resigned from his consular career in 1901.



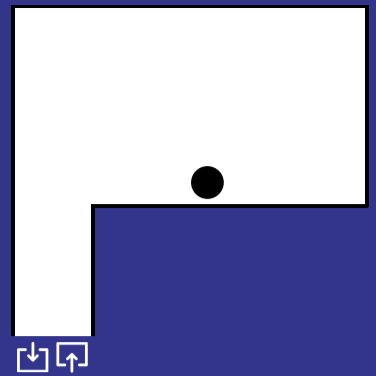
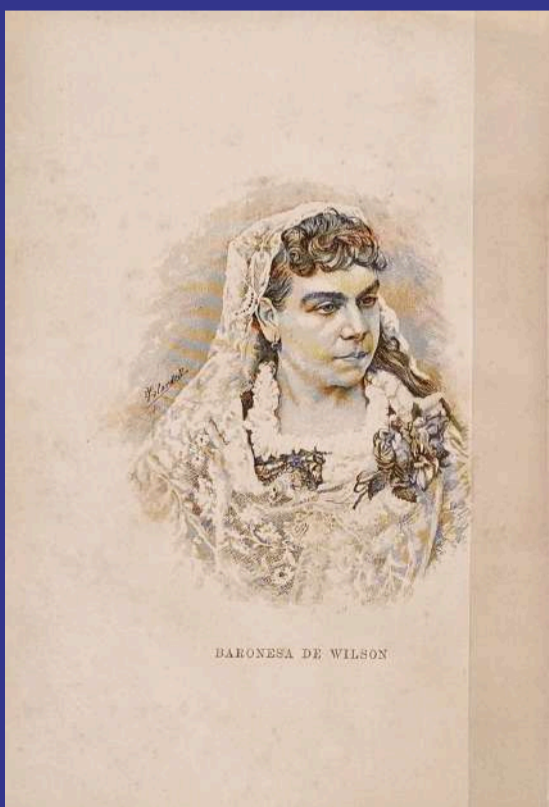
EMILIA SERRANO GARCÍA

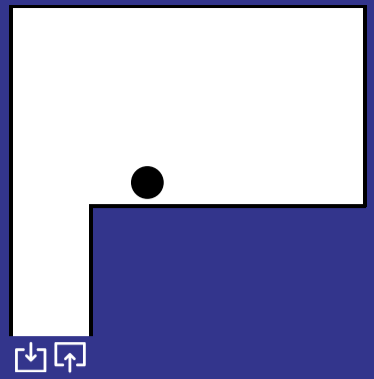
GRANADA, 1834 - BARCELONA, 1922

Baroness of Wilson and “Singer of the Americas”

A tireless traveller, writer and advocate for transatlantic relations between Spain and its former colonies, she built a network of emotional and literary connections among women.

As a cultural explorer, she gathered ancestral relics into a kind of travelling museum. Discovering American treasures in pre-Columbian sites, she created a personal collection which she donated with the aim of ensuring its lasting impact for the enjoyment and education of future generations.





14 Balaguer,
January a man of the 19th century,
1901 marks the end
of the “liberal garden”



In a symbolist painting framed with the motto of the Jocs Florals [“Floral Games”], artist Ramon Padró captured the moment of the death of the renowned poet-politician. The scene reflects the sorrow of his departure. Balaguer’s coffin, draped in the Catalan flag with its four bars, is accompanied by the personification of Poetry, who holds Orpheus’s lyre. The personification of Barcelona kisses him and bestows him with glory. In the background, the Angel of Death, with a cross and chalice, fades into the scene, while the Virgin of Montserrat illuminates his face from above.