

International Memory of the World Register

Llibre del Sindicat Remença (1448)

(Spain)

2012-03

1.0 Summary

The Llibre del Sindicat Remença (Peasant Syndicate Book) is a document handwritten in Latin between 1448 and 1449. It contains the proceedings of the meetings that took place between serfs (remences) in various Catalan dioceses in order to nominate their representatives, the syndics, who were entrusted with negotiating the abolition of serfdom with the monarchy due to seigniorial abuses (called mals usos, bad customs). It compiles the proceedings of the meetings of serfs in 912 parishes in the dioceses of Girona, Vic, Barcelona, Elna and Urgell, which took place between 13th October 1448 and 10th March 1449, and at which almost 10,500 men gathered. These assemblies, authorized by King Alfons IV, the Magnanimous, also served to collect the money needed to defray the costs of the process.

Similar petitions took place throughout Europe during the 15th century, though it is in Catalonia that serfdom was abolished officially for the first time, in 1486, through the Guadalupe Arbitral Ruling. The 1448 Peasant Syndicate is a precedent. Moreover, it expressed the will of the serfs from a wide area, which makes it exceptional. It is for this reason that we consider the document to have sufficient social significance to be included in the Memory of the World programme.

2.0 Nominator

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

Girona City Council (Document Management, Archive and Publications Services)

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

Owner

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

Joan Boadas i Raset

2.4 Contact details

Joan Boadas i Raset

Servei de Gestió Documental, Arxius
i Publicacions

Ajuntament de Girona

Placeta de l'Institut Vell, 1

17004 Girona

Spain

Telephone

00 34 972221545

Facsimile

00 34 972202694

Email

jboadas@ajgirona.cat

3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

Title:

Llibre del Sindicat Remença de 1448 (attributed title). Libro de los remensas, 1448 (original title, written on the spine).

Physical description:

Handwritten book on paper and parchment covers, measuring 31.5 x 25 cm and containing 237 pages. Written in Latin. Gothic script.

The book is in the care of the Girona Municipal Archive, registration number 24510.

Contents:

This volume contains the proceedings of the serfs' assemblies of the Catalan dioceses of Girona, Osona, Barcelona, Urgell and Elna, which took place between 13th October 1448 and 10th March 1449. These meetings brought together serfs from one or several parishes to choose their representatives, the syndics—those who had to defend their cause (the abolition of serfdom, in other words personal bondage), before the monarchy and the relevant institutions—as well as collecting the money needed to meet the costs of their emancipation.

These assemblies were authorized by King Alfons IV, the Magnanimous, who was receptive to the demands of the serfs. Hence on 1st July 1448, Alfons IV issued a royal writ (ACA, AR, R. 3148, f. 129) that allowed for the peasants to meet to talk about the abolition of the seigniorial abuses (individual serfdom), appoint syndics and collect enough money to defray the costs of the process. The royal writ specified that no more than 50 men could meet together at any one time, and an official or royal delegate had to be present at all the meetings. In addition, a notary would have to take down the minutes.

Since all the meetings dealt with the same issue, in the first pages of the book there is the act or common declaration that the serfs adhered to. This introduction is one of the most interesting and innovative elements of the document: it sets out the motives that led to the serfs coming together and organizing themselves in order to achieve the abolition of serfdom. It explains, for example, the origins of serfdom, which it places in the era of Islamic rule, and it denounces its injustice.

Following on from this are the proceedings of the different meetings, which consists of the date and place of each meeting, the system used for grouping the serfs together, the royal official and notary present at each meeting, and the names of the serfs of each parish.

There are a total of 553 proceedings recorded, some repeated, which include the meetings that took place in 912 different parishes and brought together a total of 10,425 men.

The meetings were usually held at the parish church, though in other cases they were held at the town hall, the cemetery, the lord's castle, the sanctuary or private houses. The men were normally convened by the beating of drums, the ringing of bells, the sounding of horns or the cries of *viafora, ut, out!*"

Among the names of the principal notaries mentioned are Jaume Coma, Miquel Ombert, Bartomeu Munt, Bartomeu Salvador, Jaume Serrolí, Jordi Bosser, Pere de Puig and Antoni Romaguera. In fact the main notary is Jaume Coma, who was in charge of compiling all the

proceedings that the other scribes from the various dioceses sent him. These notaries were accompanied by royal delegates: gatekeeper, mayors or judicial officials. The royal delegates, according to the writ of Alfons IV were in charge of “observing, knowing and examining” the serfs that had to contribute to the collection and of appointing the syndics in each diocese.

Essentially it was they who travelled to cities, towns and villages and produced the lists of the serf census of 1448.

The serfs of Kingdom of Aragon were men and women who were tied by contract to a country house and its estate, and were obliged to pay a redemption fee to liberate themselves from this assignment to the land. This obligation to live on the estate was accompanied by other types of bondage—known as bad customs, “seigniorial abuses”—and obligations that the peasant owed to his master. The serfs were also known as homes propis, solius i afocats (belonging to the lord and tied to the land). The six seigniorial abuses were eixorquia and intestia, death duties, cugúcia, a fine paid for a wife’s adultery, àrsia, a fine paid in cases of fire, ferma d’espoli forçada, a fine to restrict mortgages, and remença, the redemption fee.

The origins of serfdom date back to the 10th and 11th centuries, and it became institutionalized in the 12th and 13th centuries, when there was a substantial increase in notarial contracts that set down the dependency links in writing, while conditions worsened during the feudal crisis of the 14th and 15th centuries. By the end of the 14th century, the first signs of peasant unrest appeared, and a discourse against the servitude of the peasants was articulated, based on serfdom.

The catalan monarchy was ambiguous and hesitated over the peasants’ petitions. Its first steps in favour of the abolition of the seigniorial abuses contrast with the strategies to avoid losing the favour of the important feudal lords. It was the House of Trastàmara with Alfons IV, and above all his wife, Queen Consort Mary, who took the most decisive steps in favour of the serfs.

It is in this context that Alfons IV issued his writ of 1st July 1448 that gave a legal foundation to the peasants’ demands. The convening and collection of the Peasant Syndicate of 1448 led to an interim ruling of 1455 in which serfdom was abolished, though pressure from the feudal regime (nobility, Church and the urban aristocracy) stopped its application.

These circumstances led to the Peasant’s Revolt of 1462, which along with other forms of social discontent, resulted in the War of the Remences from 1462 to 1472. This confrontation, despite resulting in the alliance of the peasantry and the monarchy, did not lead to the abolition of serfdom, but rather the annulment of the 1455 ruling and the re-establishment of all the seigniorial rights. All this led to a further uprising in 1482, resulting in the drafting of the Guadalupe Arbitral Ruling, decreed by Ferdinand II on 21st April 1486.

The Guadalupe Arbitral Ruling established the abolition of the seigniorial abuses, despite preserving the rights of lords over the peasants. It also stipulated compensation to the lords— for war damage—and a fine for the peasants that had revolted. In order for the peasants to collect the compensation money, the Great Peasant Syndicate of 1488-1508 was established, which has been studied by Jaume Vicens Vives.

Despite the result of the Arbitral Ruling being the strengthening of the feudal system, it implied a victory for the peasants in that it abolished serfdom and seigniorial abuses. In this sense, the War of the Remences was the first organized peasants’ revolt in Europe to be successful.

El Llibre del Sindicat Remença de 1448 is the first preserved register documenting the meetings of serfs authorized by King Alfons the Magnanimous, with the presence of a royal official, to collect funds for their redemption. Moreover, this serf census was used to draw up the Great Peasant Syndicate of 1488, through which the Guadalupe Arbitral Ruling was applied, this time leading to the emancipation of the serfs.

Information taken from:

- J. Vives Vives, *Historia de los remensas (en el siglo XV)*. Barcelona: Edicions Vicens-Vives, 1978.
- “Remences”, *Diccionari d'Història de Catalunya*. Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1992.
- M. M. Homs i Brugarolas, *El sindicat remença de l'any 1448*. Barcelona: Fundació Noguera – Ajuntament de Girona, 2005.

3.2 Catalogue or registration details

The application is accompanied by a copy of the publication of the catalogue and a transcription of the *Llibre del Sindicat Remença de 1448*, edited by the Document Management, Archive and Publications Service of Girona City Council. The complete reference is:

M. Mercè Homs i Brugarolas, *El sindicat remença de l'any 1448*. Barcelona-Girona: Fundació Noguera – Ajuntament de Girona, 2005. Col·lecció Documents de l'Arxiu Municipal, 11. ISBN: 84-8496-001-3.

3.4 History/provenance

There is no record of the date on which this document was deposited in the Girona Municipal Archive. It is included in an inventory of books and parchments in the Municipal Archive in 1864. In 1888, Julián de Chía, the municipal archivist, referred to and analyzed it in his work *Bandos y bandoleros en Gerona. Apuntes históricos desde el siglo XIV hasta mediados del XVII*, v. II, pp. 48-49, 67-70, edited in Girona in 1888 by the printer's Pacià Torres. This is the first historic analysis that has been made of it.

The book is made up of the register, compilation or copy of the proceedings of the meetings in the form of the notes taken by the delegate notaries that attended the assemblies and wrote the minutes. All the notaries were, in fact, substitutes or delegates of Jaume Coma, a notary from Barcelona who was the official scribe. This collection of proceedings makes up this single legal document, the Peasant Syndicate of the Catalan Dioceses.

We are unaware of the vicissitudes of history that led to the book being in the Girona Municipal Archive: whether it was an acquisition by the municipal authorities or it comes from a former notary or royal official of the city, whose archive has been lost. In fact, the documentary archives of Girona City Council have been in the custody of the Girona Municipal Archive since the Medieval period, which it dates back to.

This is an unpublished work that is still not well known. As we have seen, Chía mentions it in 1888. In 1954, Jaume Vicens Vives, in his study on the Great Peasant Syndicate of 1488, refers to the existence of a document based on the documentation related to the 1488 Syndicate that he had studied. He stated the importance of finding it and analyzing it, though he was unaware of the Girona manuscript.

It was Paul Freedman who linked Chía's manuscript with what Vicens Vives was looking for and was the first to place it and confer on it the value it deserved in 1991. 2005 saw the publication of the transcription and an introductory study and, little by little, it is being incorporated—or ought to be—in the studies on serfdom in the Middle Ages in Catalonia and throughout Europe.

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name Girona City Council. Municipal Archive

Address Placeta de l'Institut Vell 1, 17004 GIRONA (Spain)

Telephone	Facsimile	Email
0034 972221545	00 34 972202694	jboadas@aigirona.org ; arxiunicipal@aigirona.cat

4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

Name	Address	
Telephone	Facsimile	Email

4.3 Legal status

Provide details of legal and administrative responsibility for the preservation of the documentary heritage

The Llibre del Sindicat Remença de 1448 is the property of Girona City Council. The book, along with the rest of the historical documentation of the Council, is housed in the Girona Municipal Archive. The Archive forms part of the Document Management, Archive and Publications Service of Girona City Council.

The Municipal Archive houses and manages documents (mainly from the 14th century onwards) that, having previously been evaluated and selected, have been conserved to leave a record of municipal business. It also conserves the archives and documentary collections of individuals, organizations and bodies linked to the city of Girona.

4.4 Accessibility

Describe how the item(s) / collection may be accessed

All access restrictions should be explicitly stated below:

El Llibre del Sindicat Remença de 1448 is written in Latin in Gothic script.

In order to make it more accessible to interested parties, the document has been transcribed and published. Moreover, the transcription is accompanied by an exhaustive index of people and places, which allows us to identify 10,425 people's names and their geographical origin. This group includes, besides the serfs, notaries, royal delegates and witnesses that were present at the serf assemblies, with their corresponding offices and occupations. We believe that the publication of the transcription and its accompanying indexes have greatly improved access to the document and benefited its diffusion.

The document has also been restored and digitalized.

Shortly the digitalization and transcription of the book will be hung on the website of the Document Management, Archive and Publications Service of Girona City Council (www.girona.cat/sgdap). Hence interested parties will be able to make open searches or searches using the indexes on the 553 serf assemblies, and the results obtained will be linked to the digital image; in other words they will be able to consult a scanned image of the original document and the transcription of the proceedings at the same time.

There are no restrictions to access.

4.5 Copyright status

Describe the copyright status of the item(s) / collection

The document is in public domain.

5.1 Authenticity.

The Llibre del Sindicat Remença de 1448 is an original document. It is a manuscript in italic gothic script, with the characteristic features of Catalan notarial writing of the mid-15th century, written on paper. According to the study by M. Mercè Homs i Brugarolas, the watermarks are characteristic of the 15th century and are catalogued in C. M. Briquet's Dictionary of Watermarks.

The book contains the constitution of the Peasant Syndicate of 1448. This was founded on the basis of the meetings of serfs in Catalan dioceses that took place between 1448 and 1449. In these meetings, the serfs of each parish empowered a series of chosen syndics or representatives. These syndics acted on behalf of the serfs vis-à-vis the authorities, in other words they were entrusted with the power to negotiate, enter into agreements, collect the necessary money, take out loans and carry out everything they deemed necessary to achieve the emancipation of serfdom and the abolition of the seigniorial abuses. To witness and give legal validity to these meetings and the decisions taken at them (in other words adhesion to the Syndicate or delegation of powers to the syndic or the passing of financial compensation for the abolition of servitude) delegate notaries or royal officials attended, as ordered by Alfons IV's writ. The notaries took down the proceedings in the minutes or outline and send them to Jaume Coma, the royal notary coordinating the syndicate, and who was responsible for them being copied and registered in the Llibre del Sindicat. Hence at the beginning of the book there is the notarial act that served as a model for each and every one of the meetings. Following on are the proceedings of each meeting.

This document is already mentioned in the documentation related to the Peasant Syndicate of 1488, another serf census produced to obtain the money to compensate the feudal lords for the abolition of

servitude deriving from the application of the Guadalupe Arbitral Ruling. In fact, the 1448 census served as a basis for the drafting of the 1488 one, as Jaume Vicens Vives showed.

The documentation on the 1488 Syndicate is housed in the Archive of the Crown of Aragon and its drafting can be followed in the registry of the Chancellery, which bring together all the documentation emanating from the monarchy and its notaries and scribes.

5.2 World significance

The Syndicate of 1448 can be placed within the serf movement demanding rights for bonded peasants before the monarchy with regard to their lords. And despite the ambiguous attitude of Catalan kings to serfdom from the end of the 14th century and throughout the 15th, the Syndicate represented King Alfons IV the Magnanimous' first clear support for the peasantry.

Nevertheless, its application was suspended, one of the reasons for the peasants' revolt that led to the outbreak of the War of the Remences between 1462 and 1472, and the revolt between 1482 and 1485. In this sense it can be understood as a precedent for the Guadalupe Arbitral Ruling, decreed by Ferdinand II.

This ruling was the first time that peasant servitude had been abolished legally and officially in Europe. As Paul Freedman notes in his report, in other areas such as England serfdom would gradually disappear, though without being legally abolished. And, in fact, the Syndicate itself, rooted in the authorization that the monarch—Alfons IV the Magnanimous—gave to the peasants to meet and organize themselves in defence of their freedoms. This authorization is also the first official recognition of the serfs as a collective that is willing and able to stand up for its rights.

Including the Llibre del Sindicat Remença in the Memory of the World register would serve to give it wider dissemination and place it at the disposal of academics around the world that wish to study peasant movements in the late Middle Ages. These studies have up to now made scant use of the Catalan example, which contrasts with the wealth of documents from the Medieval era in Catalan archives, and to which this document is a testament.

5.3 Comparative criteria:

Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them.)

1 Time

The relevance of the Llibre del Sindicat Remença as a precedent of the first legal text—the Guadalupe Arbitral Ruling—that abolished peasant servitude should be highlighted. Moreover, the Syndicate of 1448 is the result of the royal authorization of Alfons IV that allowed serfs to meet together and organize themselves to press for their freedom. In this sense, it is one of the first signs of political recognition of a non-privileged group: for the first time the negotiating power of bonded peasants was recognized.

2 Place

The Llibre del Sindicat Remença contains lists of names and the provenance of all the serfs in the dioceses of Girona, Osona, Barcelona, Urgell and Elna, in practice the majority of Catalan dioceses in which serfs lived. It offers a complete portrait of a specific social group, the serfs, in a particular region, the Principality of Catalonia (which included part of modern-day France). In this sense it goes beyond other compilations, in other words lists of people belonging to the same group, that have been conserved in other cities and towns throughout Europe, since these lists tend to refer to a more limited geographical range.

Nevertheless, despite the regional dimension of the document, it has universal significance and importance as it is the first document that sets out the aspirations and claims of a group, bonded peasants.

3 People

As already noted, the *Llibre del Sindicat Remença* offers a census, in the form of lists, of the serfs that organized themselves (they met together to choose syndics and collect financial compensation) to claim their rights, in this case the abolition of serfdom.

As a census, it offers us a complete list of the serfs, bonded peasants, of most of Catalonia in the Late Middle Ages: specifically, there are a total of 10,425 men in 912 parishes. As a list of names of specific members of a group, the document is not exceptional. The novelty of the 1448 Syndicate, differentiating it from other European compilations drawn up for tax purposes by the authorities, is that it is a series of lists whose origins lie in the desire of the serfs to demand their rights.

However, before it could be drafted, a group of serfs had to define themselves as a group; servile, though a group nonetheless. In this sense the intervention of the Catalan monarchy is fundamental, since it granted them the capacity to meet together as a group with the right to claim and negotiate their freedom. Based on this, the group of serfs exercised their organizational capacity.

It is for this reason, despite the distance between them, that the 1448 Peasant Syndicate can be considered a forerunner of modern trade unions, in that it is an expression of horizontal solidarity between members of the same social group that meets together to claim their rights. The difference is that in the case of this Medieval syndicate, those who had signed it had to raise a certain amount of money to buy their freedom.

The 1448 Syndicate is also exceptional as early evidence of the demands of the common people, in this case bonded peasants claiming the abolition of serfdom. Moreover, it allows us to know their names and where they lived. They are the same ones who several years later were involved in the peasants' revolt that, despite leading to substantial losses, was also a victory in the sense that it brought about the abolition of serfdom.

The way that the peasants formulated their claims was also innovative, since it contrasted their vision of servitude with that of academic jurists. The latter justified the origins of servitude in the Christians that did not collaborate with the Carolingian troops to expel the Moors. The Catalan serfs, on the other hand, attributed the origin of their bondage to an act of injustice: that of not allowing the Muslims that converted to Christianity to cease being slaves and hence perpetuating slavery in those Christians that had, as they understood it, just as much right to be free.

In this sense the 1448 Peasant Syndicate also represents a historic milestone in the struggle for human rights: while during this period rights were only recognized for Christians, it is claiming everybody's right to freedom.

4 Subject and theme

As Professor Paul Freedman points out, the 1448 Peasant Syndicate anticipates, to some extent, trade unions in the contemporary age. In both cases they involve the association of people of the same group or social status who come together to claim and defend their rights. These are associations based on horizontal solidarity, which contrasts with the hierarchical relationships that characterized Medieval society (lord-vassal); notwithstanding the fact that in the case of the Peasant Syndicate, it also had to raise a certain amount of money to pay for the recognition of these rights.

Even though during the Medieval period there were other organizations based on horizontal links (such as urban guilds), what makes the 1448 Peasant Syndicate unusual and worthy of consideration is that it grouped together lower-class, bonded men.

Hence we understand that this document could be considered, despite the differences, the first European trade union.

5 Form and style

The *Llibre del Sindicat Remença*, on a formal level, has all the characteristic features of a Catalan notarial document of the Late Middle Ages.

It is a handwritten book on paper with a parchment cover and bound with fine string. It measures 31.5 x 25 cm. It is made up of various pages that are sown and tied together. The paper is rather coarse and thick and contains various watermarks that are characteristic of the period, which have been catalogued by C. M. Briquet in the book *Les filigranes. Dictionnaire historique des marques du papier dès leurs apparition vers jusqu'en 1600* (Paris, 1907). The sepia coloured ink that has been used for the writing is of high quality since it has not substantially degraded over time.

The document is numbered with roman numerals, though there are several jumps or mistakes in the numbering. The only title of the work can be found on the spine, on which is written *Libra de los remensas, 1448*. Generally speaking, the look of the book is neat and free from mistakes, which fits in with the fact that it was drawn up using pre-established templates, in other words copying or writing up the notes taken by the assistant notaries at the serf assemblies.

Like most of the notarial documents of the era, it is written in Latin. This is a Latin that has many set formulas, as well as certain terms borrowed from Catalan. The writing is italic gothic script, though there are various forms of handwriting, and hence various scribes involved in its compilation. The features of the letters are characteristic of Catalan notarial writing of the mid-15th century.

6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:

It should be noted that to date, since it is an unpublished document, the *Llibre del Sindicat Remença* has not received the attention it deserves. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the social importance of the peasants' revolt and its achievements, it ought to be accorded greater importance.

For the struggle of the serfs in Catalonia in the Late Middle Ages was a historic achievement in many ways: it is considered as such by the people living there, recognized by Catalan academics, and in recent years appreciated by specialists from around the world.

The serfs organized themselves to demand their rights, and their political capacity to do so was recognized by the monarchy, with which they negotiated their demands peacefully. When peaceful negotiations failed, the serfs took up arms. Their revolt, despite being taken advantage of by the monarchy and leading to the strengthening of the feudal system, was successful, which was exceptional in the European context: serfdom was abolished for the first time.

The serf question has a key place in the Catalan popular imagination, and the leading characters in the struggle have received numerous tributes and had squares and streets named after them.

Placing the *Llibre del Sindicat Remença* in the Memory of the World register and giving it greater diffusion will surely lead to academics from around the world becoming aware not only of this book, but the rest of the documentation referring to the struggle of the Catalan serfs, allowing it to be studied in detail in comparison with other similar movements of the time. And hence contribute, with expanded, fresh data, to the study of social movements and economic and political organizations in the Middle Ages.

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

The *Llibre del Sindicat Remença* de 1448 is exceptional since:

- It is an early example of the organization of bonded peasants who demanded their freedom and whose political capacity to organize themselves in order to defend their rights was recognized. It can be considered the forerunner

of trade unions in the contemporary era.

- It expresses the voice and will of nearly 10,500 serfs from a specific region, setting out their names and where they lived.
- It sets a precedent for the Guadalupe Arbitral Ruling, which officially abolished serfdom for the first time.
- It implies a remarkable achievement in the defence of human rights in that it professes the people's right to freedom.

6.2 Integrity

The document is preserved in its entirety and there is nothing missing. The jumps in page numbers are the result of numbering errors since there is no text missing. In the introductory text, after the model of the notarial act that has to serve as a reference for all the meetings,

and before noting the fifteen chosen syndics, there is a blank space left for copying Alfons IV's writ that authorized the serf assemblies.