

History, present and future Barretina



Only six minutes

It is very possible that the origin of the "barretina" lies on the conical hat used by ancient cultures in Asia Minor, specially in the area named Phrygia in the present Turkey, where there was Greek influence.

"Barretina" is the hat in the shape of a bag with a semicircular end used to cover the head. Its size and color vary according to places and times. It is made using a very thick knit work lined or not, and sometimes turned and with a tassel.

The usage of the "barretina" was common in all Mediterranean harbors. In the bas-reliefs depicting the victories of Ramses I (1430-1380 BC), slaves and prisoners wore the "barretina" of the Mediterranean sailors.

Coins found in the Fenician necropolis of Malaga show figures with the Phrygian hat.

It is probable that the "barretina" was introduced in Catalonia before the Greek colonization, specially by the Phoenicians. However, it is also very possible that the Greeks also introduced it through the colonization of the coast of the Empordà area and from there, following the course of the Fluvià river, towards the valleys in the Pyrenees and to the rest of Catalonia. It is interesting to mention that the main centre for production of "barretines" is Olot, which lies on a high valley of the Fluvià river.

The Romans gave the Phrygian hat the name of pileus, a name also given to other hats. In Catalonia, the "barretina" had also been called "pilotxa", a rather derogatory name that was given when the cloth became shaggy. Today, the "barretina" is called "piluja" or "barreta" in Sardinia.

The Romans established the tradition of giving a Phrygian hat to slaves when they were freed becoming a symbol of freedom. Later and for this reason, it was adopted by the fighters of the French revolution.

The first known graphic document of the "barretina" comes from the cartographer from Mallorca Jafuda Cresques, a converted Jew who took the Christian name of Joan Ribes. The document is a chart with the boat of Jaume Ferrer where the sailors wear the "barretina" (1375-1377).



In the gothic altarpiece depicting the Coronation of Saint Peter (1411), by Lluís Borrassà in the church of Saint Peter in Terrassa, there are fishermen that wear the "barretina". From the same painter, there is also the altarpiece of the Calvary on the altar of Saint Clara in Vic, where there is the figure of a Jew with a "barretina" that is falling backwards.

The King Ferran I (1380-1416) issued laws making it compulsory for Jews to wear a sort of "barretina". It must be said that in those times in the Kingdom of Aragó, there were Jews only in Mallorca. It is possible that, for this reason, people from Mallorca stopped wearing the "barretina" in order not to be confounded as Jews. It is possible that this is the reason why there are no remaining signs of the "barretina" in Mallorca. However, it was still used in Menorca and Eivissa.

The oldest documented citation of the "barretina" –more or less as it is known today- is during the Festivities of the Queen of Catai, a sort of Carnival celebrated in El Born in 1647 where a person appears wearing the "barretina".

according to the profession and social class. Just before the Spanish Civil War, the "barretina" was associated in Barcelona with porters and dockers. In the 1950's, still in Les Guilleries, the purple "barretina" was a sign of a landlord or boss and the red one of servant. Several varieties of "barretina" are known: the long one - up to 9 hand-spans used in the Pallars and Ripollès at the end of the 19th century and beginning of 20th century; or those shorter -that looked more elegant-, red and common in the coastal areas. The latter, in the area of Barcelona lost their intense red colour to become more purple and were named "barretina brisa" with a length of around 3 hand-spans. It was more common in Barcelona during the 19th century. Inland, it became shorter down to around 2 hand-spans.

The elderly people used to wear purple "barretina" in Pallars ("gorra musca") mainly in big ceremonies and parties while younger people wore it red ("gorra roja"). They were worn folded forwards or sideways according to the age and wishes of each person as the way to wear it was usually an indication of the psychological traits of the person.

In Garrotxa and vall de Camprodon, the purple "barretina" was worn only for mourning, and the red one – in Garrotxa- was identified with poor farmers. In Ribagorça the "barretina" was common either stained purple or with the wool's natural color. The "barretina" was very common amongst sailors, fishermen and fishmongers, dockers, carters, farmers, masons, etc. In many of these trades it was required to wear a long "barretina", which apart from protecting from the cold, it also protected when wide open the neck, back and head as



required, especially when the person had to stow away the heavy loads during the times where there were no other means to transport them.

Nevertheless, the different types of "barretina" have been worn for several reasons during times. It has been recorded the usage of the long and very long and purple "barretina", folded flat in Barcelona in 1854. Also, long "barretines" in the same city ended with a tassel (1820). In the valley of Benasc, people use to wear a variety of "barretina" named "gorra llarga", homemade from wool from their own flocks of sheep and of natural colour or stained lilac for daily usage, alternating it with a black hat of wide wings worn in parties and ceremonies. In Girona, during the 19th century, the usual "barretina" was long and red. During the 18th century in Eivissa, it was common to wear the "barretina" with a tassel on top. In the Ponent area during 1840 it is known that in Guissona, long, purple and round "barretines" were worn folded sideways or backwards. In Lleida during the same year, there is a document citing a groom wearing during the marriage celebrations, a purple "barretina" not too big and folded forwards like those worn in Tarragona at the end of the 18th century. The shorter and more modern "barretina" was worn by young people in the shape of a crest while those with a tendency towards more fun worn it in the shape of a nest.

The usage of the "barretina" was widespread in Catalonia during the 18th and 19th centuries but it disappeared from the countryside and valleys in the Pyrenees during the first half of the 20th century, except in certain few places where it disappeared during the second half of the 20th century.

We can say that nowadays, the "barretina" is still alive although it has been mostly relegated to a testimonial and folkloric roles. It is used during the "caramelles", the "3 tombs", life nativities -without forgetting the "Tió" during the Christmas celebrations-, during "sardanes", pilgrimages, demonstrations, sporting events, and by football supporters.

The "Confraria Barretinaire" promotes the usage of the "barretina" during more day-to-day activities such as during weekly cycling events in Barcelona or walking activities as well as during other cultural events. All this is carried out always with the fair play that characterizes the "Confraria Barretinaire" encouraging people to wear it and to accept that it is not unusual that people in Catalonia wear the "barretina". The contribution from the "Confraria Barretinaire" towards the "barretina" allows a brighter future for the "barretina", something that for centuries has become an identity symbol of Catalonia. Perhaps it is the most simple and likeable symbol of all those we have in Catalonia and therefore, the "Confraria Barretinaire" promotes a respectful and responsible use of the "barretina".

