



AN ORIGINAL JOURNEY

A THOUSAND YEARS OF HISTORY PROVIDE MANY OPPORTUNITIES; THE SELECTION WILL BE A LIMITED ONE, OBVIOUSLY, AND ALSO SUBJECTIVE. THE IDEA IS NOT TO MAKE AN EXHAUSTIVE POLITICAL TRIP. WE CAN, HOWEVER, BRING TO LIFE SOME IMPORTANT EVENTS IN CATALAN HISTORY, ESPECIALLY THE MOST RECENT ONES.

ALBERT VILADOT JOURNALIST

There are tourist routes, cultural routes and also gastronomic routes. In the following lines we are going to describe a political, institutional and historical route. A thousand years of history provide many possibilities; the selection will be a limited one, obviously, and also subjective. The idea is not to make an exhaustive political trip. We can, however, bring to life some important events in Catalan history, especially the most recent ones.

The visit starts at the monument to Christopher Columbus, in Barcelona. It is still not known if he was Catalan or Genoese, though it is certain that one of his journeys to the Indies had as home port that of Barcelona, a hundred yards from the column. From here you can walk up to *La Rambla*, the city's central avenue. On your right, after about a hundred yards, you will see the *Palau Marc*, a beautiful palace which is now the seat of the *Conselleria de Cultura de la Generalitat de Catalunya* (the autonomous government's depart-

ment of culture). In 1934 this building belonged to the CADCI (shop-workers' trade union). On 6 October 1934, a handful of young nationalists locked themselves in in support of the proclamation of the Catalan state, which the autonomous government headed by Lluís Companys had made in answer to the authoritarian parties that had come into power in Madrid. The young nationalists were finally removed by the Spanish army's use of heavy artillery. Two dead and several injured was the result of the armed action.

If you continue up *La Rambla* and take *Ferran* street, on the right, you will come to the *Plaça de Sant Jaume*, also known as "the heart of Catalonia". On the "inland" side is the imposing Gothic building of the *Palau de la Generalitat*, considered one of the most important examples of this architectural style. On the "sea" side of the square is the City Hall, also a remarkable medieval building. If you stand right in the middle of the square

you can get the feeling of being in a place which plays an essential part in the life of a country. If you are lucky you might see one of the many demonstrations that take place there in demand of one thing or another. And you might also hear the echos of previous massive gatherings. On numerous occasions, thousands of people have gathered in the *Plaça de Sant Jaume* to demand amnesty and autonomy, to celebrate electoral victories, or even to greet Barcelona Football Club after a victory.

All the old part of Barcelona is full of places with historical or political echos. You can find political party offices, such as that of the PSUC in *Ciutat* street, or the employers' association, *Foment del Treball Nacional* in the *Via Laietana*. A bit further down this street you will find the seat of the old Franco trade unions, now in the hands of the democratic trade unions. A little way from this building is the *Passeig del Born* and the *Fossar de les Moreres*, burial ground of thousands of Cata-

lans who died on 11 September 1714 defending Barcelona against the Franco-Spanish troops of Phillip V. Every year on this day, the separatist groups gather here to demand full national sovereignty. Without moving far from the area, you can visit the *Passeig Companys* and see the courts. These buildings have no architectural interest, but we recommend them because hundreds of political and labour trials were held there against the opponents of the Franco regime.

You must visit the monument to Rafael Casanova, on the corner of *Ronda Sant Pere* and *Ali Bey* street. Casanova was the patriot in command of the troops that in 1714 opposed the foreign armies. As you look at the statue, erected at the beginning of this century, remember that from 1939 to 1977 it stood with its face to the wall in some dirty municipal store-room. In 1977 about a million people marched past it demanding autonomy. It was the biggest demonstration seen in Europe since the end of the Second World War.

From here you can go on to the *Plaça de Catalunya*, renamed for a few months in 1939 "Spanish Army Square". When you see the pigeons eating there, imagine that maybe their grandparents saw the revolutionary days that followed 19 July 1936, when, in the middle of the square, hiding behind any available protection, the workers of the CNT and the POUM stopped the soldiers who had rebelled against the Republic. They were images that went around the world and that symbolized the spirit of resistance of the Catalan people. But one year later, in May 1937, those same pigeons might have seen the Stalinists of the PSUC and the anarchosyndicalists of the CNT shooting at each other, in a rearguard battle for political control in the Republican camp. During this part of the visit we recommend that you read the pages of George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* as you go.

If you carry on along the *Ronda*, you will come to the university, one of the main forums of political and ideological debate until 1975. Many past students or lecturers are now important public figures. The university is in the *Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes*. After 1939 this avenue was renamed after José Antonio Primo de Rivera, founder of *Falange Española* and ideologue related to the Nazism and Fascism of the thirties. On this avenue there



are two bullrings, the *Monumental* and the *Les Arenes*. At election time it is not difficult to find the Spanish president, Felipe González, or the Catalan president, Jordi Pujol, holding their end-of-campaign meetings there in front of thousands of followers.

Before leaving Barcelona, you should make an obituary visit. In the cemetery on Montjuïc you can visit the graves of thousands of people, many of them unknown, who were shot in the aftermath of the Civil War; or you can visit the grave of the first president of Catalonia in the twentieth century, Francesc Macià, or that of his successor, Lluís Companys, who was shot in Montjuïc castle in 1940, after the Nazis handed him over to Franco's police when he was in exile in France. Don't leave the cemetery without visiting the grave of the young anarchist Salvador Puig Antich, garrotted in 1974. This was the last political death in Catalonia, and the event stirred up Catalan society as few others have been able to do. You can find all these graves by asking the cemetery employees.

And to finish off we suggest a few excursions outside of Barcelona. First, to the mountain of Montserrat, where there has been a Benedictine monastery for centuries. Montserrat is one of the spiritual symbols of Catalonia, but it is also a patriotic symbol. Many people hid there from the police, and after living with the silence of

the monks managed to escape to France. There were also hundreds of meetings held there. Amongst the most famous was that of December 1970, when three hundred Catalan intellectuals (including Joan Miró and Antoni Tàpies) held an assembly to protest against the death sentences hanging over six members of ETA. They were surrounded by the police for three days. The final outcome was a few fines and minor reprisals. Political parties were also formed at Montserrat, as, for example, the one at present in power in Catalonia, *Convergència Democràtica*, a nationalist party.

Another excursion could be to the *Pla de Campllong*, a plane near the town of Berga. There you can see a huge pine with three large branches. Popular mythology (and so said the poet Cinto Verdaguer) saw it as a representation of the three countries in which Catalan is spoken. A third excursion could be to Figueres. In a castle there belonging to the army, the former lieutenant-colonel of the Guardia Civil, Antonio Tejero Molina, is imprisoned for his leading role in the attempted right-wing *coup d'état* of 23 February 1981. Tejero is the man who, with his moustache and with a gun in his right hand, got as far as the speaker's platform of the Madrid parliament.

If you go back to Barcelona and want to see some examples of religious art for a change, we suggest three churches. The first is that of Saint Augustin, in the square named after the same saint. The *Assemblea de Catalunya*, a unitary organization which brought together thousands of people in the struggle for democracy, was founded here in November 1971. The second church is that of *Santa Maria Mitjancera*, in *Entença* street, where 113 leaders of the *Assamblea de Catalunya* were arrested in September 1973. If you have time, just across the road you will see another living monument to political history: the *Model* prison, where thousands of people lived in frightful conditions. And the third church is a convent of Franciscan friars: the Capuchins of Sarrià. In this convent, more than four hundred students, teachers and intellectuals were besieged by the police for three days while wanting to found a democratic student union. The political trip need not end here, but for the moment there is enough of interest to be going on with. *Bon voyage!* ●