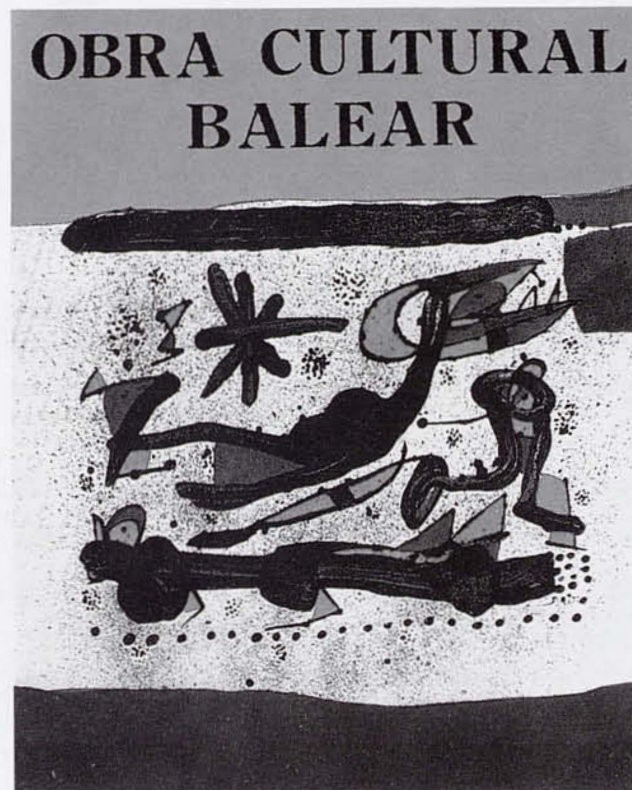


THE "OBRA CULTURAL BALEAR"



THE OCB'S PRIME AIM IS TO "DEFEND AND PROMOTE
THE CATALAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AND THE NATIONAL
IDENTITY OF THE PEOPLES OF THE BALEARIC ISLANDS".

IGNASI RIBAS PRESIDENT OF THE OBRA CULTURAL BALEAR

The *Obra Cultural Balear* was founded on 21 December 1962, after an idea by the famous philologist Francesc de B. Moll. The first president was Miquel Forteza, who was succeeded, after his death, by Climent Garau, at a time when the organization was growing considerably. The writer Josep M. Llopart headed the association during the difficult period of the transition to democracy. The present chairman of the board is Ignasi Ribas. These four chairmanships mark different stages in the history of the OCB, but they have a common denominator in the founders' initial idea: the defence of Catalan language and culture in the Balearics.

The OCB's current statutes, approved at the end of last year, make it clear that its prime aim is to "defend and promote the Catalan language and culture and the national identity of the peoples of the Balearic Islands" (art. 1). In fact, our association has completed a leading and unique role over the 25 years we commemorate in 1987. Both under the Franco regime—during which time the OCB was a focus of resistance to the dictatorship—as well as during the transition period and the present democracy, the object of defending our linguistic and cultural identity has never lost validity. Unfortunately, the OCB is still needed to fight the substitution that threatens us. For this very reason, we feel that the defence of the Catalan language, the only one natural to the Balearic Islands and the principal sign of our national identity, along with its normalization in all areas of social life (administration, teaching, the media, commercial and scientific exchanges, etc.), is the fundamental point on which we must work at present. We know we can only achieve our objective by constantly demanding our rights and defending our personality as a people within the totality of the *Països Catalans*. For this reason also, the OCB considers itself a sister-organization to other, similar entities (Òmnium Cultural, Acció Cultural del País Valencià...) in the rest of the country, with which it maintains cooperative links. We also feel it is necessary to promote, as a living and open culture, communication and exchange between the nations of the international community and the incorporation of universal culture in the Catalan culture. Since its foundation, the OCB has grown

considerably. From the thirty-one founding members, the association has gone on to a membership of over two thousand, a figure which we hope to increase soon with the campaign being carried out this year. The structure and activities have also adapted themselves to the present times. A fundamental aspect of this fact has been the OCB's local delegations. At present we have delegations working in thirteen Majorcan towns (Algaida, Lluçmajor, S'Arenal, la Pobla, Binissalem, Ses Salines, Búger, Sant Joan, Vilafranca, Pollença, Alcúdia, Inca and Campanet), many of which produce their own publications. In Minorca, the *Obra Cultural Balear* publishes the *Enciclopèdia de Menorca*.

The teaching of Catalan was one of the first projects carried out by the entity's first board of directors. Today, it has become a complex service which, through an agreement with Palma city council, makes it possible to organize courses in the city suburbs and which, through other agreements signed recently with the autonomous community and the Calvià town hall, will be extended to other official bodies and other towns. But the teaching of Catalan is not the only normalization work of the OCB in education: the *Comissió per l'Ensenyament i Normalització del Català* (CENC), an independent organization made up of teachers from all levels, has, in the last few years, been one of the most effective forces in the struggle to extend a movement which promotes teaching in Catalan in Majorca. Similarly, the OCB collaborates in other educational activities promoted at national level by other organizations (the "Catalan Summer University", the "The Nation at School" campaign, etc.) and undertakes other activities of its own of a more reduced scope.

The work in the field of linguistic normalization has led us to pay special attention to the media. So, to be able to receive TV3 in the Balearics, VOLTOR was founded, as a sister organization of the OCB, which has also undertaken other campaigns in support of a mass media in our language. Without a doubt, this has been one of the most ambitious undertakings of recent years, and the one with the widest popular acclaim. Apart from this, the OCB has published a good number of reports and documents over its twenty-five

years of existence. As from 1968, it became responsible for the publication *Lluc*, until then the bulletin of a religious congregation. This year, *Lluc* has returned to its owners and the OCB has been publishing *El Mirall* fortnightly since January.

There is no doubt that linguistic normalization is still the central axis of the organization's work. Through numerous public awareness campaigns promoted by the OCB, we have achieved recognition of Catalan as the natural language of the Balearics on the part of all the democratic political forces in our society, an extremely important point in the introduction of the language's official status in the statute of autonomy and the approval of our community's linguistic normalization law. We would hardly have achieved the present situation in the islands without the work of our association. Nevertheless, the OCB now watches over the application of the *Llei de Normalització Lingüística* and its effective observance, not only by private individuals but also on the part of the authorities themselves. At the same time, other normalization proposals are encouraged and promoted, with special attention to those that aim at increasing the public's linguistic awareness or extending the use of the language to all daily activities. The achievement of a communicative space in Catalan is the objective that could bring about this normalization. But, as well as creating new media in Catalan, it is important to consolidate those we already have and to promote their expansion to all parts of our national territory.

The present situation, which reasons of space only allow me to sketch very briefly, places us before the question as to the future of the OCB. To be able to attain this future, we shall have to reinforce the association's structure, adapt it to the complexity of tomorrow's needs, and open it up to new forms of active participation on the part of the younger generations. The political situation that is to shape the coming years will decide the path the organization has to follow. Unfortunately, in spite of all we have achieved, the prospects of normality that the island society glimpses are still not sufficiently clear to allow hope of a full popular awareness of the Catalan linguistic and national reality. ●