

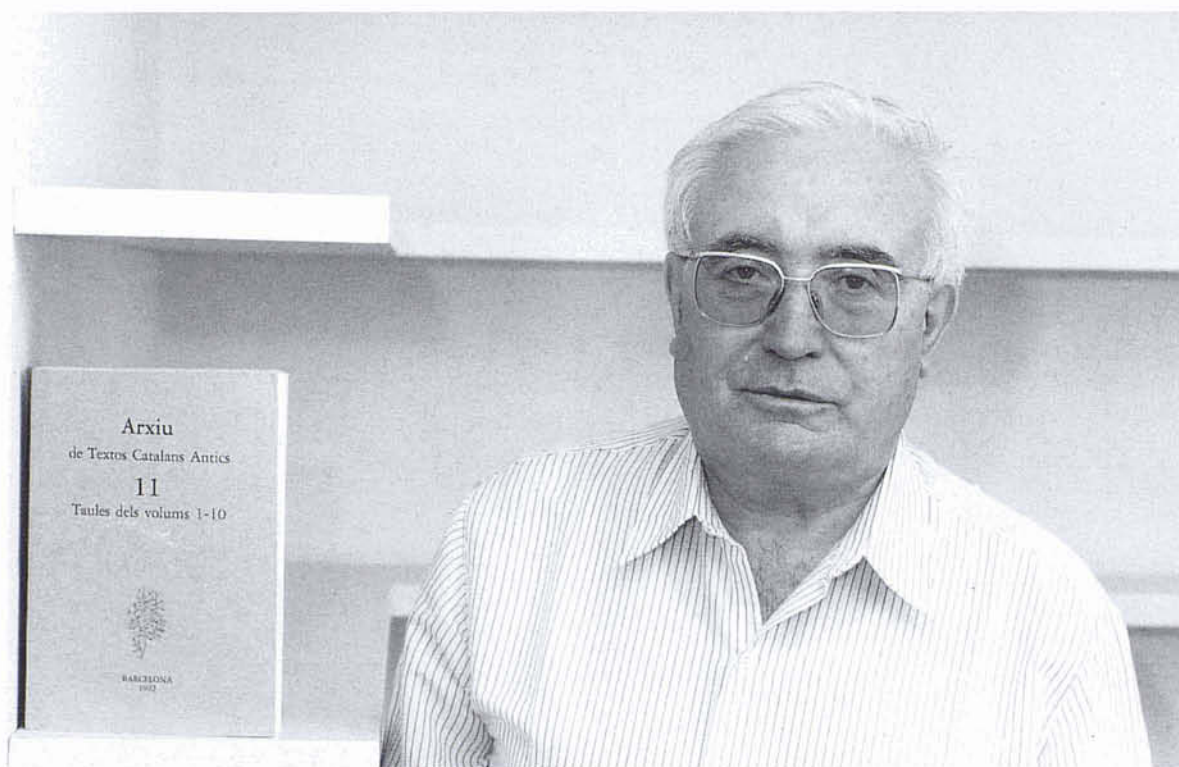


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## JOSEP PERARNAU

JOSEP PERARNAU I ESPELT (AVINYÓ, BAGES, 1928), THEOLOGIAN, PHILOSOPHER AND HISTORIAN, IS THE DIRECTOR OF THE SEMINARI DE TEOLOGIA DELS PAÏSOS CATALANS, AND FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE YEARBOOK "ARXIU DE TEXTOS CATALANS ANTICS", BEGUN IN 1981. HE WAS THEOLOGIAN TO THE II VATICAN COUNCIL, WHERE HE BEGAN A CRITICAL EDITION OF THE CONCILIAR DOCUMENTS IN CATALAN, CONSIDERED OF GREAT DOCUMENTARY WEALTH. AN EXPERT IN MEDIEVAL CATALAN THEOLOGY, HE HAS PUBLISHED A NUMBER OF WORKS RESULTING FROM HIS EXTENSIVE RESEARCH, AMONGST WHICH IS THE OUTSTANDING "ELS MANUSCRITS LUL·LIANS MEDIEVALS DE LA BAYERISCHE STAATSBIBLIOTHEK DE MUNICH".

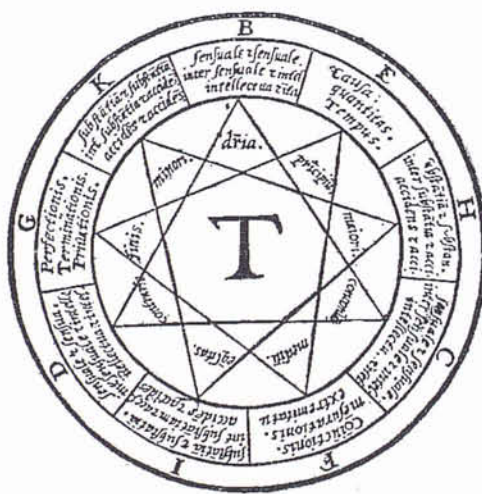
JAUME HUCH AUTHOR



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**I**n the lobby of the Faculty of Theology of Catalonia, I waited with some impatience for Dr Perarnau. Perhaps after reading his impressive curriculum I expected to find myself before someone more along the lines of the wordy canon than the country parson. But from the very first “Déu vos guard!” (God be with you), I realised that I was lucky enough to be interviewing someone who in spite of his vast labour of research in Europe’s finest archives was nevertheless serene and spontaneous, measured and direct, highly expressive. Not in vain had the priest in him trained at the Seminary of Solsona, a bishopric at the heart of Catalonia which last year commemorated the 400th anniversary of its foundation.

First of all, I ought to say that Dr Perarnau displays an enormous effusiveness. In spite of being an intellectual giant, he is physically small, and without being fat, his figure, rounded by the years, seems to suit his cheerful manner, one not devoid of elegance, nevertheless. A man of measured gestures and eloquent speech, he enjoys patiently spinning the thread of his memories. His lively expression contains the inevitable spark of wisdom attained. From his own childhood –going back to his birth in the town of Horta d’Avinyó, in

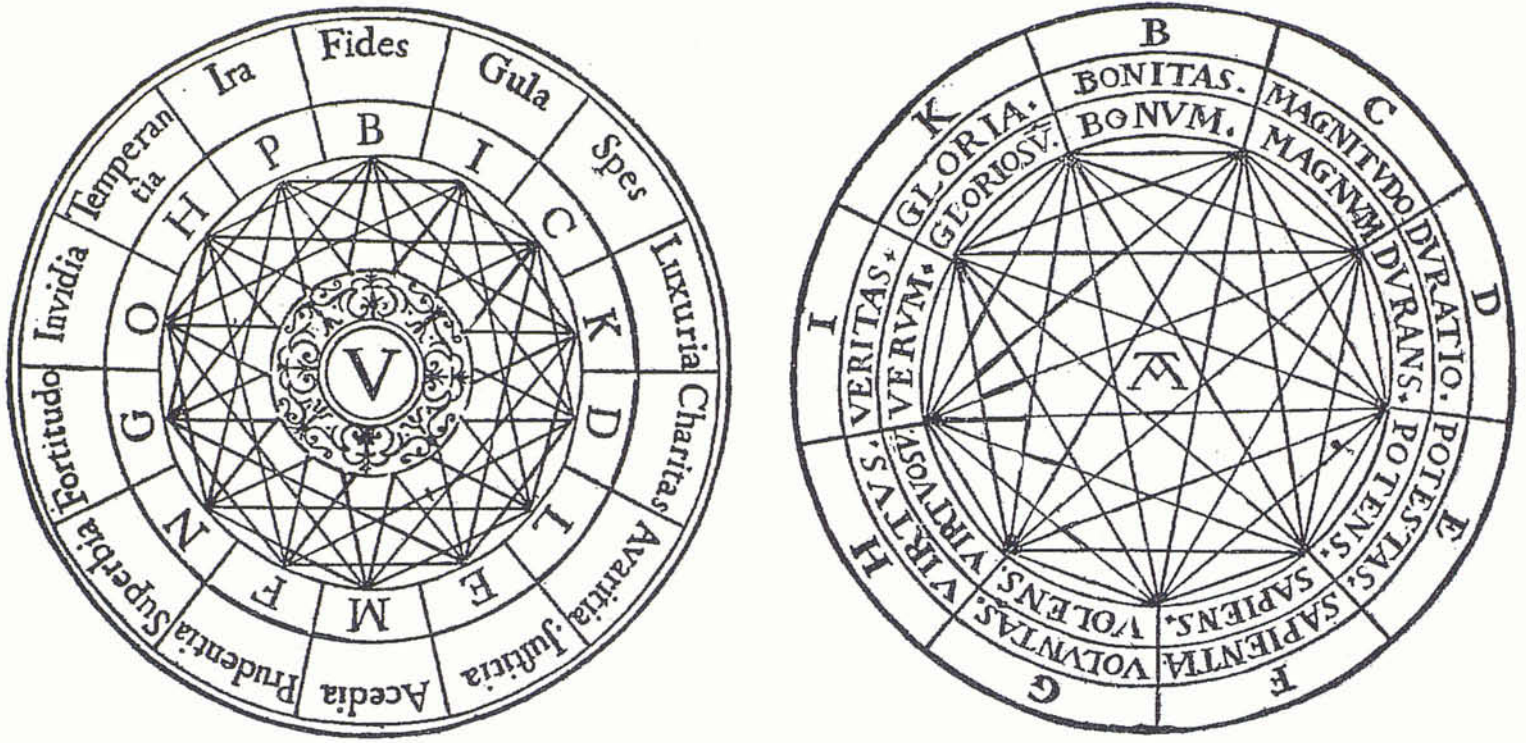


RAMON LLULL. ARS GENERALIS

central Catalonia—, he keeps alive the wound left by the war that took his father from him and snatched away his innocence. Before long, the adolescent was in Solsona, studying for the priesthood. He remembers the absolute misery of those difficult years. At the Seminary, though, in spite of the tough life, “the companionship was so good that it was really a lost paradise”. At the same time, Solsona could be said to have been a bastion of Catalanness. And he mentions that just after the war, in spite of the dreadful re-

pression Catalonia suffered under Franco, “on 30 September 1939 the term started in Catalan with absolute normality”.

Dr Perarnau, who as well as working with the majority of European languages also uses Latin as an indispensable tool, still confesses that everything he knows he learnt at the seminary. Between 1946 and 1952 he studied philosophy and theology at Solsona. He was ordained a priest during the International Eucharistic Congress in Barcelona, on 31 May 1952, held at the Olympic Stadium on Montjuïc. “As well as crowning his religious life”, this special event was the occasion during those difficult years of the dictatorship for the first important influx to our country of people from abroad. After that he moved to Salamanca, where he continued his theological studies, and to the Gregorian University in Rome, where he graduated in 1957. Following this, he studied for his doctorate at the University of Munich. From 1962 to 1965 he was theologian to the II Vatican Council, where he began a critical edition of the conciliar documents in Catalan, considered of great documentary wealth. His doctoral thesis was the first to be read at the Faculty of Theology of Catalonia, in 1972. Combining his teaching and research work, he went on to



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graduate in philosophy in 1976, and in history, with a special award, in 1980, at Barcelona University.

—Dr Perarnau, your academic background is quite impressive... Looking over your work one observes a certain interdisciplinary vocation.

*I think that comes a little bit from inside. I've always had this feeling—which I've never been able to satisfy—that people ought to study in situations that are enriching not unilaterally but plurilaterally. For example: there are two cities in Europe in which one can also study both philosophy and theology and which I think are at the meeting-point of two great cultures. One is Strasbourg—German by extraction and French by nationality—and the other is Fribourg, in Switzerland, which also straddles the French and German worlds. So I always had this feeling of wanting to study in one of these universities, as well as the idea of not shutting myself away in a purely mental world. The fact is that I then went to Munich and in the Faculty of Theology I joined the Grabmann-Institut, an institution devoted to research in the history of theology, especially medieval theology. And that's where I really found myself.*

–If you had to define yourself now, do you think it would be right to describe you as

an expert in medieval theology?

—Actually, what I'm saying is an attempt not to fall into definitions. That's why when I was in Munich I asked to be allowed to carry on my philosophy studies at the same time. I didn't want to get stuck in just one thing. The fact is, though, that within a certain specialization in the medieval field, after joining the Faculty of Theology of Catalonia I accepted the mission to cultivate the history of theology in our country. Which is why we're now in the Seminary of Theology of the Països Catalans. And that explains how this work led to the "Arxiu de Textos Catalans Antics". More than anything, as an enormous percentage of our authors' writings are unpublished the great challenge is to help in the publication of these ancient records.

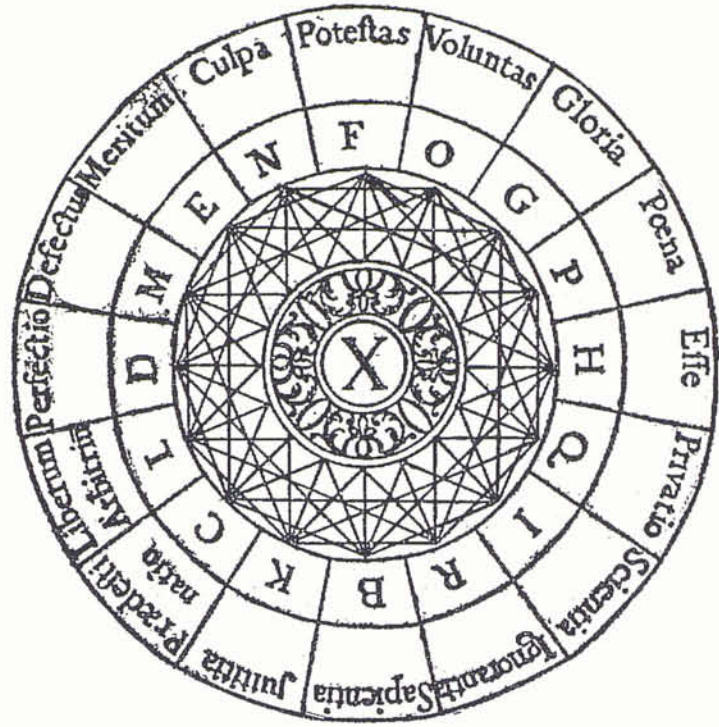
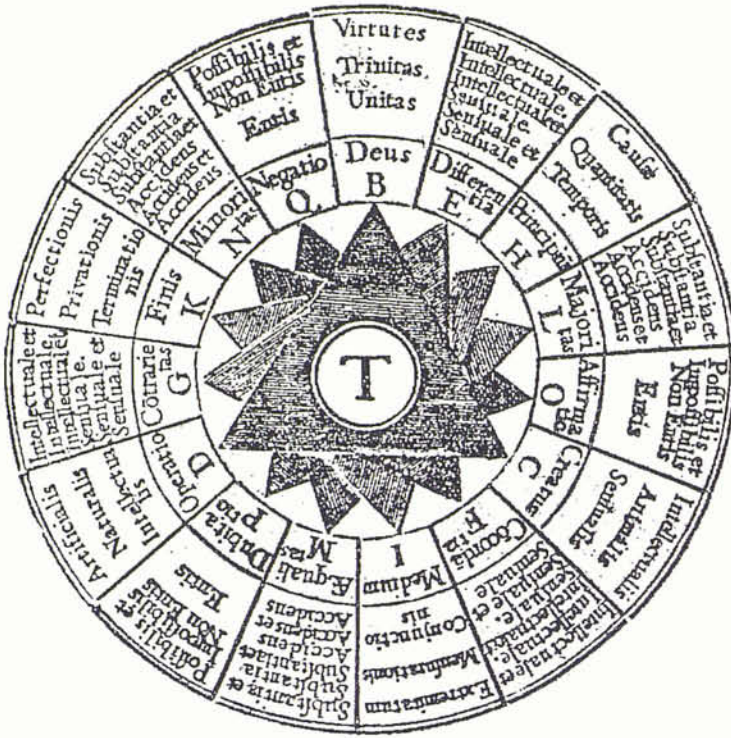
—To be exact, the publication of this work, known as the “Arxiu de Textos Catalans Antics”, started in 1981, following an extraordinary job of research.

—Yes, but after two years of preparation. At that time my life was divided between here, the university and research in archives and libraries of Barcelona. One day, without my knowing why, I had a visit from Jordi Porta, the director of the Jaume Bofill Foundation. I remember he told me that at that moment —1979—, having

*left behind the situation in which the country had been living, they were prepared to take on a more consistent cultural task –I seem to remember he used the word ‘exquisite’. And what emerged was this project which from the very first moment was thought of as the tip of the iceberg. Because underneath there was the great question of the works, the authors, the country’s cultural heritage, which was scattered over Europe, over Russia even... At these moments also over North America and Canada, and perhaps even as far as Japan. First, then, the great task was how to collect and then gradually publish our authors’ works, which until then had been sleeping, even those not written in Catalan, the sleep of ages.*

—We might say, then, that the recovery of these unpublished texts is one of the central objects of your research.

—That would be the objective once the bibliographic part was complete—that is, the information on the work on the Catalan cultural heritage done in libraries or archives. So there's a collected bibliography of the work done on the country's cultural or documentary heritage, published after 1979 and covering a field of study reaching up to 1 January 1801. When we speak of ancient texts we mean anything from Iberian inscriptions to the



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beginning of the *Diari de Barcelona* at the end of the eighteenth century.

—With the publication of *Els manuscrits lul·lians medievals de la Bayerische Staatsbibliothek de Munic*, you brought to light some important manuscripts by Ramon Llull, a central figure. In this two-volume edition you've put the Catalan and Latin texts together. What does this work contribute to our knowledge of Ramon Llull?

—It contributes a detailed understanding of a collection whose existence we knew of but whose exact contents we didn't know. From this collection you'll see, if you take the first volume, that the first text published is a Catalan text by Ramon Llull that was unknown before then.

—Ramon Llull is considered the first prose writer in the Catalan language. A writer of such quality that, according to Martí de Riquer, he hasn't been equalled yet.

—Llull was the first prose writer who didn't write for amusement. In this sense it was he who created the literary language or language simply as communication of thought. I would say that the richness of Llull's language has never been equalled. Even more, as you read, what you find is that this isn't the language that was spoken in Mallorca, but a creation of Ca-

talan—that is, the creation of a literary Catalan that can serve as a standard for anyone wanting to write in Catalan. I would stress that he was the creator of the standard Catalan language, and with an extraordinarily rich vocabulary. Amongst other reasons, because three very rich streams come together in Llull: the Catalan stream, a language that around the year 1000 had already overtaken Latin as the spoken language, that for centuries had undergone a process of perfection and that had now reached the stage of an adult language; then there was Provençal—there's an echo of Provençal—and then there was Latin, underneath. Out of all these elements, Llull created Catalan.

—What's the current state of research on Llull around the world?

—This is a great moment in that there are more and more people who are studying him seriously. For example, in 1990 the *Catalan Review* devoted a special volume to studies of Llull done mainly in North America. And recently, in 1992, the "Institut Oriental" in Naples also devoted a large volume to Ramon Llull.

—Within Catalan medieval culture, it's considered that the most international figures are Ramon Llull, in Mallorca, Sant Ramon de Penyafort, in Catalonia, and

Arnau de Vilanova, in Valencia. What degree of influence did they have as thinkers of the Catalan world at the time of the Mediterranean expansion?

—Sant Ramon de Penyafort had an unquestionable influence amongst the merchant classes. It was he who solved their problems of conscience, if they had any, even if it was only because they led to problems in their relations with power. The merchants were one wing of the expansion—and it's a shame they weren't the only one, because the military wing was a disaster—and of course Sant Ramon de Penyafort had an enormous influence there. Ramon Llull had a little influence on the nucleuses that appreciated him, but normally he wasn't appreciated. It's now that he's appreciated.

—Was Italy perhaps an exception?

—Well, Italy was a special case. The Italians have a sixth sense. Whereas no-one else got beneath the surface of the writing, they looked for the secret mechanism by which to discover the reasons, how things are done. It's a fact that Llull's logic, the mechanism of his art, was elaborated more in Italy than anywhere else. Even in the fourteenth century books on Llull's logic were being published that were by Italian authors. Even so, his influence was always restricted to small nucleuses.



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*There was a case around 1440 of a Franciscan from Valencia whose name was Joan Ros –there's a copy of his manuscript in Munich– and who taught courses in Padua on subjects concerned with Llull, normally philosophy, grammar, logic, etc. But I don't think we can speak of an influence through university colleges. On the other hand, there have been Ramon Llull schools –in Barcelona, for example–, very specific nucleuses of initiates.*

*–Could these figures exert any influence in the political terrain?*

*–Arnau de Vilanova had a political doctrine that had a certain influence in Sicily. One thing, though, that I think I can say, thanks to the understanding of that age that has rubbed off on me during my research, is that the Middle Ages consisted of two overlapping worlds that hardly ever came into contact: one was the official level –confessional, Christian– and the other was the real-life level where anything went. And regardless of the excommunications and laws there were on the higher plane, I'm not sure to what extent people paid attention or obeyed. So then what influence did Arnau de Vilanova's immaculate projects have, even if they were sometimes proclaimed officially? It's rather like the question I ask myself now about the fifth centenary of*

*America. The laws of the Indies, in relation to the Indians, were never applied. The King of Castile could dictate the laws he wanted, but... You see? There we have the two levels.*

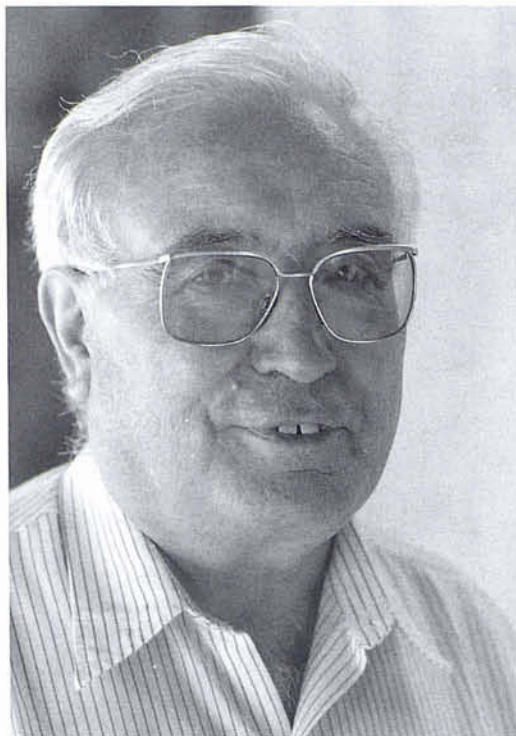
*–Some people today argue that in some ways we're living a new Middle Ages. What's your judgement on this idea?*

*–First we'd have to make it quite clear what we mean by a new Middle Ages. The Middle Ages have certain absolute characteristics that make them unrepeatable, thank God. That is, our Middle Ages, in the whole of Europe, in the West and in the East, and especially in the East, covers a period of ten centuries –afterwards it was to last even longer– which officially is what we call the Christian period. What does that mean? That means a period of symbiosis and of confusion between the two camps, the Christian and the profane. The religious camp occupies everything, because everything had to be Christian. And the profane camp also occupies everything because it happens that at that time people used the Church for political ends. That was the case, for example, at the end of the Middle Ages, of the question of the discovery of America. Discovery is one thing, but conquest is another. What did the so-called evangelization depend on? Here we have an ins-*

*trumentalization of religion. Who could go to America as a missionary? Only those who supported their king, no others would do. Christianity as such wouldn't do. It had to be Castilian Christianity, or Portuguese or French. There was this confusion, and I think today we've managed to avoid the confusion between these two orders. And that's what defines the Middle Ages. There are also a lot of other things. After the invasion of the barbarians, and later of the Muslims, the country was a desert. It took centuries to recover again from this situation.*

*–How would you say the change of era took place?*

*–One of the things that mark the end of the Middle Ages, the change of era, and which no-one normally mentions, is the discovery of Aristotle. Take, for example, On the Generation of Animals or On the Heavens. How could anyone have achieved such an enormous fund of knowledge centuries before the Christian era? Well, when everything had been a desert and they had started to recover, the day they rediscovered this it turned out to be a greater discovery than the discovery of America; it was the discovery of the world. So it was a return to science based on observation, not based on entelechies and a priori*



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*concepts. This was the great change. We don't get this change today; at this moment our science isn't based on a priori concepts.*

*—What would you recommend to a foreigner who wanted to get to know Catalan culture?*

*—What I would really recommend is for him or her to come here, which when all's said and done is Llull's way. The only way to come to any degree of harmony and peace is by getting to know each other. There's so much ignorance regarding our culture that the only way to change this is by coming here and seeing that the ideas people have been given, for whatever reason, at school have no bearing on the reality of the country.*

*—How do you feel about Catalonia today?*

*—Well, you might say there was a certain similarity with the Middle Ages. The country had come to be such a desert, with all its exceptions and all my respects. It had been so thoroughly steam-rolled that at this moment it's quite something that it should be beginning to recover. It would be quite something if it had a real and sincere wish to recover.*

*—In recent years, have you noticed a greater appreciation of Catalan culture*

*from abroad? Is the state of Catalan affairs in Europe better today than ten years ago?*

*—So far as I can see, yes, it is. Undoubtedly, because of the existence of magazines, for example, which means there are beginning to be important university nucleuses. The case of Italy is somewhat paradigmatic. Today, you can introduce yourself in Catalan and people will take notice of you. They say you can publish in Catalan, and that's a landmark. We're recognized precisely by those whose recognition means most, and that's more significant.*

*—What do you think of the process of the future National Archive of Catalonia?*

*—From the outside, I think it's an enormous task that's being done and that's being recognized. Many great families who have their own patrimonial archives take them to the National Archive of Catalonia and the inventories of these archives are published. There have been cases of stately homes and nobility that have donated them, even eighteenth century industries, and the Archive has published a catalogue of them. It's constantly being enriched by very important new collections of private documents. On the other hand, as regards archives, there's the problem that Madrid still refuses to hand them over to us: the Sala-*

*manca archive of the Generalitat de Catalunya, the archives of the Generalitat de Catalunya in the Archive of the Crown of Aragon; this is the problem. At the inauguration of the new building housing the royal archive of Barcelona, which they call the archive of the Crown of Aragon, but which is the archive of the Barcelona dynasty—that is, the archive of Catalonia—the President of the Generalitat pointed out that the Spanish state is still withholding important documents on Catalonia that we want. They've got to return them.*

At present, Dr Perarnau is working on the twelfth volume of the *Arxiu de Textos Catalans Antics*, in the hope that the work can continue for a long time to come, "that when I die it'll still go on". Before parting, while lamenting the limited response to the yearbook, he reminds me that the first subscriber to this work was the Vatican Library, which keeps it in a prominent position in the reading room: "it's always on hand; you don't even have to ask for it". And all the main libraries of Europe receive it. At the present moment, this wise and affable man from central Catalonia is preparing a new trip to Germany. Backwards and forwards, untiringly continuing his research. Hopefully, for many years to come. ■