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THE PLACE AND THE LEGEND

Before Barcelona lies the sea, and behind it rises the Collserola range, reaching its highest point in mount Tibidabo presiding over the city. The Can Muntaner estate which industrialist and patron of the arts, Eusebi Güell, decided to acquire was situated on the outlying Muntanya Pelada or Bald Mountain. Güell's objective in doing so was to create a park that would be unique of its kind.

Formerly it was common practice for Catholics to be guided in their decisions by the communion of saints and their days. Thus it was that in 1899, Güell signed the contract to buy the estate on the 29th of June, Saint Martha's day. Martha (the sister of Mary and Lazarus) was famous for having given Jesus lodging at her house, and for that reason she was chosen in the Middle Ages to be patron of innkeepers, and Güell wanted to make this an hospitable spot. According to the legend, after Jesus' death, certain Jews put Martha and her brothers and sisters in a ship, and abandoned them to the mercy of wind and waves. But the ship bore them safely to the shores of Provence, where Martha was beset by a ferocious dragon. The saint subdued the beast and having tethered him with her girdle, led him to Tarascón. This too, suited Güell, since he had studied in Nîmes as a young man, where the city's coat of arms depicts a crocodile tethered to a palm tree^{2*}. What is more, he was fascinated by the Provence of the medieval troubadours who sung of love, a time and place which the poets and artists of the Catalan Renaixença regarded as the cradle of their Catalan lyricism.



NÎMES COAT-OF-ARMS

A park is an area of enclosed land intended for plants or game, adjoining a city or country house. And this is what Park Güell is: constructed between 1900 and 1914, with its great house

* The small numbers (2) refer to the bibliography at the back of the book



ENTRANCE PAVILIONS TO PARK GÜELL,
BETWEEN 1904 AND 1907

to one side and with its architecture and sculpture in the centre of mountainous enclosed land. But, on the other hand, it was intended to be a housing development as well as a park, and thus defies easy definition.

However, one thing we do know is that, as Gaudí himself said, the inspiration for the park came from certain English educational establishments which had the students' dwellings dotted here and there in a private, enclosed park, where each could live as they wished, while respecting certain norms that would safeguard their living in common and isolated¹². Although no one ever understood Gaudí's words in that way, they are clear and to the point and should be taken literally: an autonomous colony of scholars wishing to live as a community and yet isolated one from another. Based on these premises, Güell and Gaudí designed a park-cum-colony, which was as independent as possible. This conception of the park, as explained by Gaudí⁴ himself to a group of architects, provides the guidelines for the book which the reader has in his hands.

Güell had to acquire adjoining land to ensure that the whole formed a 7-sided figure, with seven gates like the Thebes of old, covering a total area of 15 hectares. He then set about dividing it into 60 equal triangular plots¹² (note the numbers, which are symbolic values recurring throughout the park). A house with a garden was to be built in the centre of each single or double plot, making a total of around forty houses for approximately four hundred people, at a time when well-to-do families had a large number of children and domestics. In addition to Can Muntaner – which became the Güell residence in the park, without the Güell family completely relinquishing the Gaudí-built mansion down by the Rambla – only two houses were completed, Gaudí's own house and that of the lawyer Trías, on a double plot in both cases.

Another basic characteristic of the park is that one of the sources of inspiration on which it was modelled was the Sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi^{12/17}, the archetype par excellence of the great sacred shrines of antiquity

Güell and Gaudí wished to keep the park as inaccessible as an island. The neighbourhood in which the park was situated (la Salut) came into being in 1864 built around a sanctuary, and soon became an upper class residential area, so that for example during the plague year of 1870 it was protected like a fortress with a cordon sanitaire. And here dwelt such personalities as Salvador Samà, Marquis de Marianao and Dr. Sanllehí – both were mayors of Barcelona at the beginning of the 20th century – and Eusebi Güell, who bought Can Muntaner from Samà. The writer Carles Soldevila recalled that this was a happy Arcadia with its back to the big city, beyond the reach of public transport²⁹. Güell and Gaudí continued to keep it beyond the reach of the new electric trams. Years later, Dr. Trías, the son of the lawyer, wrote with more than



PARC SAMÀ, CAMBRILS



THE SQUARE WITH ELEPHANTS

It is not usual for a residential housing development to be walled. But the fact is that in this park nothing is usual or normal. For a start there is Gaudí's great architectural contribution, but there is also its bid to be a utopia or initial essay in the design of a perfect, if limited, society.

In the Carrer Olot stands the main gateway to the Park Güell. But before passing through, it is worthwhile taking note of the words ALABA / POR ("praise for") inscribed on the walls just to one's left. Given Gaudí's love of the ciphered message, we might well suspect this to be an anagram: LABOR PAA contains the same letters, and a masonic manual dating from 1871²⁵, written in Spanish, explains that P\A\A means *casa de hospedaje*, that is "hostelry" or "lodge", the latter of course being the English term for Spanish *logia*, the workshop or temple where the masonic brethren gather to carry out their labours. And thus, the Park – thanks to Saint Martha and the poem *Garraf* – was to be the rooming House of Work.

The walls of the park are decorated with white and red friezes, the colours of the ancient Phoenician navy², indicating in this way that the park is an island or ship, like Thomas More's famous island of Utopia, reached only by sea. The 14 medallions set on the wall, with the words "Park" and "Güell", suggest that this is a park in the English style; on the other hand, the five-pointed star in the P of the word Park is inverted like a horned devil suggesting the



MERLON OF A PAVILION

DRAWING BY JOAN MATAMALA OF THE PORTAL THAT WAS NEVER MADE

THE CURRENT GRILLE OF THE ENTRANCE, WHICH COMES FROM THE CASA VICENS

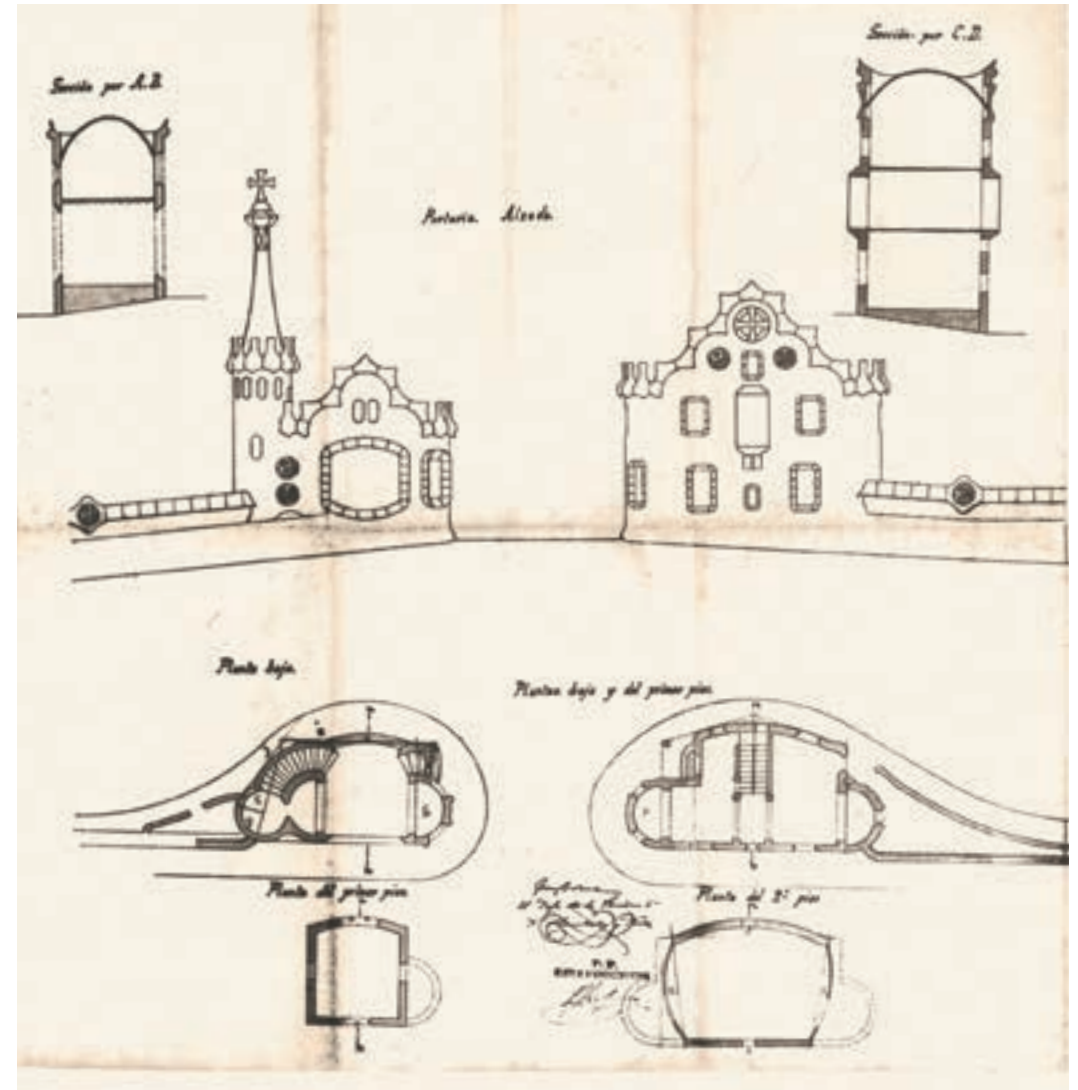
PLAN SHOWING THE PAVILIONS LIKE OPPOSING SNAKES' HEADS



esoteric nature of the place, and the axe alongside it symbolised Work, Labour. By having acacia trees planted in this street, before the entrance, Gaudí was making reference to the famous secret brotherhood.

Park Güell is, then, brimming with symbolism. Of the 7 gateways intended for the Park, only 3 were ever built, with strong grilles, two at either end of the ornamental wall, and one at the top end of the enclosure; but the one intended for the main entrance, the largest and most spectacular of them all, in keeping with the wall, was never actually built. Furthermore, Gaudí planned to put an iron deer next to the gate, which would disappear as if by magic when the mechanism was activated by someone touching the railings¹⁸. This was a reminder of Solomon's *Song of Songs*, where the woman says: "My beloved is like a roe. Behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth in secret!". The splendid railing that is there now was taken from the Casa Vicens, Gaudí's first great work.

On either side of the entrance are pavilions of a most curious sort, since the outer wall encloses them both – a feature which can be seen more clearly from the plan – forming two

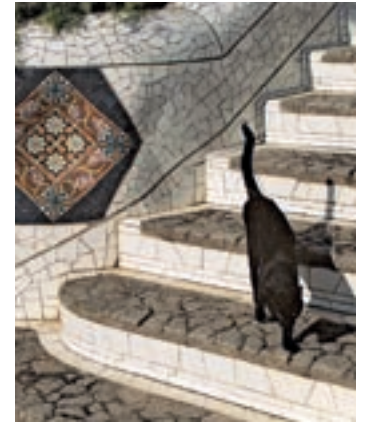




THE WARLOCKS ON THE STEPS

Eusebi Güell, the son of a manufacturer and politician, studied in Nîmes in the south of France, where he read social sciences, politics and physics. Married to Isabel López, the daughter of the Marqués de Comillas, one of the most powerful men in Spain, he became extraordinarily rich, thanks to industry and finances. He lived a very intense life involved with the Spanish monarchy, conservative politics, the nascent Catalanist movement, and the patronage of cultural initiatives. He himself was a painter, linguist and, let it be noted, an architect and medical theorist. He aspired, then, to encyclopedic knowledge, and travelled widely throughout Europe, including Russia, the Holy Land and North Africa. He enjoyed great prestige for his generosity, tact and moderation, although when the riots of the *Setmana Tràgica* (Tragic Week) broke out in 1909, this reputation did not stop angry revolutionaries from wanting to attack his mansion and the Comillas home for their fervent defence of the Vatican.

On the 26th October 1904, Güell and Gaudí presented their plans for a park to the City Council, and applied for building permission. The choice of day to do this is rather strange, amusing even, dedicated as it is to Saint Lucian and Saint Marcian, who had been magicians. It was as if Güell and Gaudí aspired to be magicians themselves. What is more, the medieval legend of these two patron saints of Vic had been turned into a poem by their friend Jacint Verdaguer, when he was 18 years old – a notable religious epic poem. Here is the plot: to put an end to Christianity, the Praetor of the town orders his henchmen to corrupt the population, and tells Lucian and



FRONT VIEW OF THE STEPS, WITH VARIED AND SYMMETRICAL SHAPES



Marcian, who are very young and given to astrology and black magic, to rob the maidens of Vic of their innocence. Vices are rife everywhere, and one after another the hapless maidens succumb to the attractions of the handsome and insatiable lads. Only one virgin escapes their snares, the charming and vivacious Aurelia, who is under the protection of the Virgin Mary, as they are of Venus. And when one night they fly into her room and find her asleep, the radiance of the cross on her breast hurls them to the floor, and they realise there is a power greater than their own. They are converted to Christianity and with the enthusiastic help of the young woman, preach the faith of Christ, but the Praetor has them summarily burned at the stake, and rejects Aurelia as a madwoman.

This story captures to perfection the essential symbolism in the life of Güell and Gaudí, and manifest in the Park, in the art, structures and statues etc. which have not only a Catholic and masonic meaning, but an alchemic significance. Alchemy is suggested as soon as the entrance is reached, since what seem to be elephants from the outside are the Alchemist's House on the inside (the pavilion on the right) and an oven with its egg-shaped dome and chimney (the

pavilion on the left). And above all, good smoke and bad issues through the mushroom-shaped chimneys. In all these things, then, there are positive aspects, relating to white magic and negative aspects, relating to black magic, in keeping with the honest spirit of the Catholicism and freemasonry of the early 20th century.

The staircase, flanked by crenelated walls, has a central group of basins or pools with cascading water. In the first of these there are stone tablets and strange figures including, on the right, a compass and protractor and, on the left, a thick circle from which two sticks project upwards and three downwards (to see it well it's best viewed from a distance). Here Gaudí and Güell are presented as builders and architects, with the symbolic tools of their trade, which are in fact the same as those utilised by the masons. Mason after all means builder, and the ideal figure characterising masonry is God as the Great Architect describing the circle of the world with his compass. As for the lines that issue from the circle, the 2 and the 3 make 5, which is the most essential number in nature (for example the five fingers of the hands) and in the Park. In the pool itself there are coral formations. These are symbols of stone in the rough,



as we have already seen with the Sun, and the lions' heads on the outside of the enclosure are in this case, emblems of the art of Hermes, or the secret knowledge.

At the far end of the hall of columns there was a spring of water with traces of magnesium, compared by some to the Castalian spring in the sanctuary at Delphi, because of the analogy they saw between the two places, and this too drained into the cistern. Güell put this water on sale and called it *Sarva*, as can be seen from the labels on the bottles, with an anchor and two letters of the *devanagari* script traditionally used for Sanskrit. Sar and Va are the two initial letters of Siva and Vishnu, the gods that represent the totality when united, like Alpha and Omega, beginning and end, referring to God². But *Sarva* appears in the Bible as a widow, the mother of Jeroboam, commander-in-chief of Solomon's fortifications. And there are famous widows, the greatest of whom was the Egyptian goddess Isis, the widow of Osiris, and for that reason the masons call themselves "sons of the widow". This is the name Güell chose to call the medicinal water which he wanted people to have in their homes, in his disinterested philanthropic campaign in favour of public health.

Among the lions' heads, there are groups of drops about to fall which are directly above the storm drains from the bench, so that a direct (if strange) link is set up between the modernity and colour of the bench above, and the ancient, colourless, hieratic nature of the colonnade. Gaudí said on repeated occasions that the temples of classical times were painted in bright colours, and felt that a lack of colour is synonymous with a lack of life³. The colonnade is a great construction, rich in symbolism and occultism, but it is also a typical sample of the architecture of its time, drained of colour and substance.



THE THEATRE VIRUS

Directly above the colonnade is the colony's main square, referred to as the Greek Theatre since the earliest days. The square is bounded on the lower side by the great undulating bench, and on the upper side by the palm tree avenue, where some of the trees are real, and some others are made of stone. The latter have a rustic stone rail around them so that there is a certain formal similarity with the wavy bench and its tight curves forming "theatre boxes" where groups of people can gather.

The back rest of the bench

Scarcely resting against the outside columns of the Temple, the bench is a marvel of engineering, poised in the air, almost without visible support¹⁰. Even before reaching the square by way of the steps, one sees, at eye-level, the outer part of the bench, decorated with five-branched palm trees as in the acroters which crowned the classical temples. Thus the acroters (scroll-shaped pedestals) and bench form a whole, as does the triad formed by the cistern, temple and square.

Notice however that the acroters in the central part of the bench show the palm fronds evolving, transforming through a series of designs into a sort of spider, and then vice versa, becoming a little palm tree again. But the most fascinating thing is that the more one looks at these designs the more one seems to see a metamorphosing crab with powerful claws in different positions – including frontal, with piercing eyes and formidable pincers – and this actually has you doubting wheth-



THE SPIDER, A STAGE IN THE METAMORPHOSIS OF CANCER THE CRAB, GAUDÍ'S ASTROLOGICAL SIGN



er the plant-like appearances of the preceding designs were real or not. But the crab is the sign of the zodiac for Cancer, the house where the sun reaches its plenitude before daylight hours begin to decrease again. The crab's way of walking backwards and the contradiction in the way the sun recedes as it advances is represented by the symbol for Cancer with two circles, the top of the lower circle joined to the lowest point of the upper circle, so one is in the opposite position to the other. The plafonds decorated with the salamander that we mentioned earlier, designed by the young Gaudí, precisely combine the motif of the waves returning back on themselves in a dynamic circle, in the manner of the stereotyped architectural frieze but richer and more vital – and something comparable happens with the leaves. The same pattern appears at various places on the outside of the bench, above all in the figures between one acroter and the next: large separated blobs each inverted in relation to the next, but united by their dark colouring in pairs. But Cancer was Gaudí's sign. He was born in Reus at 9.30 in the morning on 25th June, the summer solstice of the year 1852. That this sign takes up the centre underlines the need that this (otherwise very modest) architect had for self-affirmation. and

for playing the star role. Furthermore, at the top of the backrest can be seen pairs of red rhomboids and deltoids which relate to the sign of Cancer, indicating as they do the feminine: the door or vulva through which souls enter the earthly life at the time of incarnation. The lunar feminine element is very evident in Cancer, and Gaudí wanted to underline this fact. In the great zodiac on the main façade of the church of the Sagrada Família, relating precisely to the Annunciation or Incarnation, the sign of the crab occupies the top position in the circle of signs. It is placed there because this is its correct place, but also because of its ability to attract your gaze.

To one side of the metamorphosis of the crab there are other signs, such as the horns of Capricorn, the bow of Sagittarius flanked by coloured arrows, and the horns of Aries, while on the other there are the two Pisces fish facing one another. And on the inner side of the bench, there are Libra, Virgo, etc., such that all the signs of the zodiac are represented. At the far ends on the outside there are more patterns to be seen, this time freer and more informal, full of fantasy.

The undulating bench

In creating the bench, Gaudí studied what the most comfortable version would be for users, and had a young workman sitting for him. Jujol, in turn, painted and prepared the ceramic pieces for their firing in final form. At the same time, some modules or segments of the bench were made a metre and a half long; these were joined together, with due adaptations for the curves, since these are not all the same, and then the ceramic pieces were stuck on them, striking them with a mallet to break them up and adapt them to the shape of the module¹². Once again the concept, structure, materials, content and ideas were from Gaudí – assisted by certain craftsmen – while Jujol entered fully into the matching of the colours, shapes and combinations of both. And, as with the pavilion roofs, but in a more varied and complex way, Jujol used pieces of all sorts, including from his own dinner service (with cherubs) or from the Trías family china to achieve more striking effects.

The bench, wavy like the sea itself, might well have had for Gaudí and Jujol a close link with plates in their memories of fishing in the sea off the plain of Tarragona. In talking of the Tarragona resort of Cambrils in his book *Catalunya des del mar* (Catalunya from the sea) Carlos Barral writes: “It was the custom, formerly, to throw pieces of white china, broken plates and the like, to the fishes as ground bait. These fragments were put aside for this purpose instead of being thrown out. The small tuna fish, excited by the shiny pieces of crockery, would frolic about on the surface giving the impression that the water was boiling”.

The bench is a marvel, unequalled of its kind, in its shape, colour, luminosity, imagination and contrasts, a blend of low and high art seldom achieved in other works of abstract art or collages¹⁵. Unfortunately, the freedom that users now have to approach this work and admire it in all its variations and detail is to a considerable extent negated by the tremendous loss of large parts, destroyed and replaced with white ceramics, made worse by the fact that the avalanche of visitors means some can furtively break off a chunk or commit other acts of vandalism.



SERPENTINE PATHS

Not just the bench is sinuous. All the paths in the Park – fully three kilometres of them – are snake-like too, as are the viaducts and porticoes. To make them it proved necessary to remove several rocky areas at great cost in money and effort, employing 14 builders and their assistants. Gaudí declared: The idea is to increase and ease communication between the different places in the Park using only materials taken from the land itself³.

On the left of the Theatre square there is easy access to three successive porticoes. In the first, which runs behind the Güell House (now a state school) all the pillars are different, and on one of them especially is a figure known as la Lavandera (the washerwoman) who at one time held a stick in her hand, so the story goes, to beat the washing. The feast day of the washerwomen is, like that of the innkeepers and victuallers, Saint Martha's day, on the 29th of July. But, given Gaudí's particular world view and the penchant he had in mixing the Catholic with the esoteric, it is likely that this figure is the Hermana Masona (Sister Mason). Granted, some tendencies within the Order excluded women, others admitted them as "Accepted Masons"²⁵. In the photographs and drawings from the years around the turn of the century, lodges can be seen with women Masons of the second or third degree, wearing the same garb as the figure in the portico: the hair gathered, a broad ribbon on the breast from which hangs a jewel, the sleeves rolled up to work, the apron with a rounded hem and, in their hands the steel plasterer's trowel with handle³². In the ceremony of admission of the Perfect Woman Mason, which is what is portrayed here, the inductor acts out the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden, persuading her to bite the apple of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This is why she carries a basket of apples (stones) on her head, and why, after trying one of them the fury of God makes the Earth

tremble and stones rain down all around her. That is the story told by this expressive work. This version, then, is very

"IN THE PARK GÜELL WE GO INTO
THE GROTTOS THROUGH OX-LIVER-SHAPED
GATES." SALVADOR DALÍ, 1933

PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE PORTICO
LA LAVANDERA PORTICO, SHAPED LIKE
A LONG CURLING WAVE; THE SORT
PERFECT FOR SURFERS, BUT IN MASONIC
IMAGERY SUGGESTING THE FAMOUS
BIBLICAL CROSSING OF THE RED SEA



different from the Catholic equivalent, as happens with other stories from the Bible, but Güell and his associates knew how to harmonise them.

The Portico itself is a structure of rare originality. The outside columns are inclined inwards to withstand the stresses generated by the sloping land, forming a wide stone arch, curling surprisingly over the walkway. Some have taken this to be a wave, and indeed it is. But it is the type of wave that shielded and protected the Children of Israel, forming a tunnel when they were pursued by Pharaoh's army, in the famous crossing of the Red Sea^{25/32}. This miracle is represented, ritualistically, in precisely the ceremony of admission of the Perfect Woman Mason, with the men's swords and the women's wands making the tunnel, as the extended hand of Moses suggests in the Bible³². This is one more example, a very plain one, of the very profound relationship between symbolism and architecture in Gaudí's work.

At the end of this Portico the second one begins without any break, formed by a semi-circle of columns, with a spiral pattern inscribed on them in the direction of natural growth (clockwise) as in some trees. They look like fine wine glasses, and that is exactly what they





MARIAN DECORATION OF THE VESTIBULE
OF THE GAUDÍ MUSEUM

PINK HOUSE WHERE GAUDÍ LIVED
FOR 20 YEARS, NOW THE GAUDÍ MUSEUM

The Gaudí house

What is now the House-Museum Gaudí was formerly Gaudí's house in the Park, and was originally built (1903-1904) as a show house for prospective customers to view. As it apparently still had not been sold in early 1906, Gaudí bought it. It is a typical modernist detached house, next to the main avenue, built by Francesc Berenguer, Gaudí's assistant, on steep land, with a terraced garden. It has a basement and cellar with a meat safe, and three floors, a tower in three parts, with spire, cross and wind rose. The second floor features a fine iron balcony, as well as very Gaudian chimneys, which remind one of morel mushrooms. Several different features, the pergola for instance, show Gaudí's hand in the work.

The house is named *Torre Rosa*, very aptly so because Gaudí was from Reus, where there is a rose in the city's coat of arms, and where many women were called Rosa, including Gaudí's sister and niece. There is also the *Verge del Roser* and *del Rosari*, to whom Gaudí was especially devoted. Just as decisive was the fact that besides being Catholic, Gaudí had other, less orthodox beliefs, not least Rosicrucianism, Gnosticism and alchemy, as his initiator in these subjects, Eduardo Rojo, has shown.





NEWEST ATLANTIS

Utopia

Influenced by utopian socialism, which also had followers in Reus, the adolescent Gaudí dreamed up a project with two friends for the then abandoned abbey of Poblet, and as a young man was a member of the *Cooperativa de Mataró*, a socialist organisation and the first of its kind in Spain. Güell, less radical, created the workers' housing scheme for the Güell factory as a social-humanist experiment. It is hardly to be wondered, then, that both were interested by works such as Plato's *Republic*, Aristophanes' comedy *The Assembly of Women* on what is effectively a communist utopia, the works of Saint John Chrysostom, quoted by Gaudí, and in all probability those of Campanella and Andreae. Nor is it a coincidence that More's *Utopia* should be translated into the Catalan language by Pin i Soler, Güell's secretary. According to Miquel d'Esplugues, Güell's chaplain, the latter's ambition was to create a "patriotic utopia out of the philanthropic works he undertook in his life".

But the book *New Atlantis* (1627) by Francis Bacon, must have been of especial interest, because of the admiration they felt for the famous poem *Atlantis* by their friend Jacint Verdaguer, and because Bacon's work is in agreement with all their moral ideas as idealistic right wing reformers. Gaudí referred to *New Atlantis* in making the following observation: "Bacon said that the experimental method would produce great riches and well-being; the first of the two assertions is true, because all advances and improvements come from the workshops, but not the second, as riches in themselves lead to misery and thus we see that the richest cities contain the most abject misery". That is, Gaudí was interested in utopias and placed science and experimentation among the highest objectives of human activity, but combined with social action that would improve the lot of individuals and groups, by means of art, culture and economic means. As examples of this he referred to the *Orfeó Català* choir and the *Biblioteca de la Dona* (Women's Library)³.

FROM ONE SIDE, THE 3 CROSSES LINE UP VISUALLY, FORMING A SAGITTARIAN ARROW AND CROSS