

*Strand 2: The Historiography of Art Nouveau (looking back on the past)*

**Josep Puig i Cadafalch and the European Periphery**

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Note: This is a work-in-progress paper.

In a 1907 speech to the Spanish Congress of Deputies, Josep Puig i Cadafalch argued that the unity of Castile and Catalonia during the Early Modern period had been so little basted as that of Sweden and Norway:

"No hay que decir aquello de la unidad hilvanada (...); en aquellos momentos no había ni hilvanes, y os lo demostraré indicándoos que no existía entonces más organismo común que una unión personal, real, por el estilo del ha[sta] poco existente entre Suecia y Noruega"<sup>1</sup>.

With this comparison, Puig pretended to argue that Catalonia had had a past of political autonomy, and that the particular status of Catalonia within Spain was shared by other European countries. Later in the speech he mentions several regions that at the time were showing discomfort in the States they belonged to, such as *le Midi* in Southern France, Sicily and Naples, Hungary, Bohemia, Finland, Flanders, Ireland, or the Greek territories still under Ottoman rule<sup>2</sup>. Significantly, most of these territories, as Catalonia itself, are located in what may be called the periphery of Western Europe: Catalonia, Sicily, Naples and Greece at its southern extremes; Norway and Finland at its northern;

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<sup>1</sup> Josep PUIG I CADAVALCH, *Memòries*, Barcelona, Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1979, p. 145-146.

<sup>2</sup> J. PUIG I CADAVALCH, *Memòries*, p. 147-149.

Ireland at its farthest West, and Hungary and Bohemia at the eastern edge of the central European empires.

It is not randomly that Puig paid attention to the borders of Europe, as it was there that several territories were struggling for autonomy and, in some cases, independence. Significantly, these are also territories in which Art Nouveau played a prominent role. The Norwegian city of Ålesund, the architecture of Eliel Saarinen in Finland, Alphons Mucha's designs for Prague's theatres, or the Gödöllő movement in Hungary are just a few examples of Art Nouveau in the European peripheral or semi-peripheral countries cited by Josep Puig i Cadafalch in his speeches. As in Catalonia, in these countries Art Nouveau displayed the meeting of local identities and modernity. This paper attempts to portray Josep Puig i Cadafalch's engagement with these territories, as well as the exchanges he had with intellectuals and politicians in these territories. This will allow us to map out a cartography of Art Nouveau territories in which peripheral emerging countries dialogue with each other, and will thus promote future research on the mutual influences between early-twentieth century regional movements.

In order to elaborate this argument, this paper will built on a variety of recent scholarly trends from different disciplines. On the one hand, recent literature on second cities has drawn attention to the connections between modernisation and the construction of regional identities at the beginning of the twentieth century, challenging traditional histories of modernisation that linked the latter to the emergence of centralised nation-states. From a first focus on the German city-state of Hamburg, with works by Jennifer Jenkins and Maiken Umbach, attention shifted towards other geographies such as Barcelona<sup>3</sup>. In fact, the latter's article "A Tale of Second Cities" compares the two cities, Barcelona and Hamburg. Umbach's work also introduced the use of the built environment as a source for the study of the construction of modern cultural and

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<sup>3</sup> Jennifer JENKINS, *Provincial Modernity: Local Culture and Liberal Politics in Fin-de-siècle Hamburg*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2003; Maiken UMBACH, "A Tale of Second Cities: Autonomy, Culture, and the Law in Hamburg and Barcelona in the Late Nineteenth Century", *The American Historical Review*, 110, 2005, p. 659-692.

political identities. Parallel to this, art historians have also looked at the role of architecture in the creation of national imaginaries. This is the case of the volume *Idée nationale et architecture en Europe 1860-1919*, edited by Fabienne Chevalier, Jean-Yves Andrieux and Anja Kervanto Nevanlinna, which is interestingly focused on some of the peripheral territories above mentioned: Finland, Hungary, Romania and Catalonia<sup>4</sup>. Other approaches to the connection between Art Nouveau and national identity include Fabienne Chevalier's work on Eliel Saarinen and Finish national architecture, and Mireia Freixa's contribution on Catalan identity and *fin de siècle* architecture<sup>5</sup>.

The figure of Josep Puig i Cadafalch is an excellent case of study in this direction. One of the most representative Catalan Art Nouveau architects, he was also a prominent politician and a renowned art historian. As a researcher and member of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, one of Catalonia's most important learned societies, and also as the President of the Catalan government of the Mancomunitat, he travelled extensively and attended multiple conferences and other cultural and political events in Europe and in the United States. His works appeared also in foreign languages, sometimes being published first abroad than at home. The influence in Europe of his work as a historian of Romanesque art is in fact the only aspect of his international engagement that has been studied, with articles by Olivier Poisson and Antoni Pladevall i Font<sup>6</sup>. These works highlight the Puig's influence in France, which was indeed the most important model in his activity as an art historian, also as an architect and probably even as a politician.

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<sup>4</sup> Fabienne CHEVALIER, Jean-Yves ANDRIEUX and Anja KERVANTO NEVANLINNA, *Idée nationale et architecture en Europe 1860-1919, Finlande, Hongrie, Roumanie, Catalogne*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Fabienne CHEVALIER, *L'oeuvre d'Eliel Saarinen en Finlande et la question de l'architecture nationale de 1898 à 1909*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2001; Mireia FREIXA, "L'identité catalane et l'architecture 1860-1914", in F. CHEVALIER, J.-Y. ANDRIEUX and A. KERVANTO NEVANLINNA, *Idée nationale...*

<sup>6</sup> Oliver POISSON, "La "carrera francesa" de Josep Puig i Cadafalch", in Raquel LACUESTA CONTRERAS (ed.), *1907: el paper de l'IEC en la història de l'art i en la restauració de monuments medievals a Catalunya i Europa*, Barcelona, Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2008, p. 15-26; Antoni PLADEVALL I FONT, "Puig i Cadafalch i la difusió de la coneixença de l'art romànic català a Europa", in Albert BALCELLS (ed.), *Puig i Cadafalch i la Catalunya contemporània*, Barcelona, Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2003, p. 69-74.

However, a closer look at his speeches and his personal accounts shows that, beyond France, he travelled in and had contacts with personalities and events from a much wider variety of countries, many of which correspond to the European periphery we have been referring to. This paper will thus analyse several documents gathered together in Puig's memoirs, in order to, on the one hand, map out his international connections, and, on the other, present how he theorised on this European periphery and what influence these ideas had on his conception of the Catalan case.

Puig began writing his memoirs at the end of his life, in 1944, when he was already seventy-seven years old and had just returned to Catalonia from exile during and after the Spanish Civil War<sup>7</sup>. He wrote some sections and gathered together several documents -speeches, articles, notes- which he organized in chapters. This is why, even though the memoirs were begun in his elderly years, they include many originally older materials. Thus, Puig's memoirs are not just the retrospective look of an elderly man upon his life, but also a gathering of diverse texts that provide a deeper knowledge of his political, cultural and architectural thought during different moments of his life.

Most of Josep Puig i Cadafalch's international trips took place on the occasion of scientific congresses. The nature and location of these changed parallel to Puig's professional and personal circumstances. The first ones, and for more than fifteen years, took place almost exclusively in France. From 1906 to 1922 Puig regularly attended the Congrès Archéologique de France, which took place in different French localities such as Carcassonne, Reims, Limoges and Paris<sup>8</sup>. Other than France, he was only at the Congress of Art History in Rome in 1912. This timing coincides with the rise and plenitude of the political and cultural project of the Lliga Regionalista, the Catalan conservative party of which Puig was an active member. Having begun his political career as a councilor of the Barcelona city council (1902-1905), he was then elected

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<sup>7</sup> Josep MASSOT I MUNTANER, 'Nota editorial', in J. PUIG I CADAVALCH, *Memòries*, p. 5-7.

<sup>8</sup> J. PUIG I CADAVALCH, *Memòries*, p. 392.

deputy to the Spanish Congress (1907-1910), and eventually, president of the government of the Catalan Mancomunitat (1917-1923)<sup>9</sup>.

After the coup d'état of Miguel Primo de Rivera, in 1923, Puig resigned as President of the Mancomunitat and eventually went into exile in Paris. It is then that he started attending events at a much wider variety of locations, many of which were in what may be called the European periphery. Thus, he first travelled to Oslo in 1923, on the occasion of the International Congress of History, and to Bucharest in 1924, to attend the First Congress of Byzantine Studies<sup>10</sup>. There, he met Crown Prince Carol, the future King Charles II of Romania, who invited him together with other delegates to have lunch at his residency. Puig recalls how he showed them his collection of paintings and oriental rugs:

"(...) el príncep Carol em féu l'honor de convidar-me a dinar i sa muller, després malaurada, convidà alguns congressistes i llurs senyores a prendre el te en son palau modest. El príncep era un home agradable, col·leccionador de catifes orientals, que ens mostrà després del dinar, aimador de les pintures"<sup>11</sup>.

In Bucharest Puig also encountered Nicolae Iorga, the organizer of the congress, who had been to Barcelona the previous year in order to give a talk on Romanian history and archaeology<sup>12</sup>.

Two years later, in 1926, Puig visited the United States' east coast, lecturing at Harvard and Cornell universities, Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, and the Metropolitan

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<sup>9</sup> On the political and cultural project of the Lliga Regionalista during the first third of the twentieth century, see Enric UCÉLAY-DA CAL, *El imperialismo catalán. Prat de la Riba, Cambó, D'Ors y la conquista moral de España*, Barcelona, Edhasa, 2003, p. 57-63. See also Borja de RIQUER I PERMANYER, *Lliga Regionalista: la burguesia catalana i el nacionalisme, 1898-1904*, Barcelona, Edicions 62, 1977.

<sup>10</sup> J. PUIG I CADAFAALCH, *Memòries*, p. 392.

<sup>11</sup> J. PUIG I CADAFAALCH, *Memòries*, p. 297.

<sup>12</sup> Albert BALCELLS, Enric PUJOL, *Història de l'Institut d'Estudis Catalans*. Vol. I: 1907-1942, Barcelona, Institut d'Estudis Catalans, Catarroja, Editorial Afers, 2002, p. 137, quoted in J. PUIG I CADAFAALCH, *Memòries*, p. 297.

Museum in New York<sup>13</sup>. Back to Europe, he travelled to Belgrade the next year, on the occasion of the Second Congress of Byzantine Studies. As in Romania, there he met a member of the Royal Family, the King Alexander Karadjordjevic. Although in this case the acquaintance was briefer, Puig points out that the King "had the paintings of the churches of his country copied":

"El rei de Sèrbia, amb qui vaig canviar curtes paraules, feia copiar les pintures de les esglésies de son país"<sup>14</sup>.

In 1928, he travelled to Brussels on the occasion of the International Congress of History, which he attended also in London in 1930<sup>15</sup>. This same year he went to the Congress of Byzantine Studies in Athens, and from there he travelled to Istanbul. In his memoirs, he calls it Constantinople and describes the "Turkish pressure" he felt in the place, occupied by an army that, in his words, treats it as an enemy country. In contrast to this, he then narrates how Byzantine hymns were sung to him in a Greek monastery:

"Es sent allí pertot la pressió turca com un exèrcit d'ocupació sobre un país enemic. El nacionalisme grec, com a vençut, s'amaga, però en un monestir grec de l'Illa dels Prínceps m'han cantat himnes litúrgics del temps de l'Imperi bizantí, sobretot l'himne triomfal de l'entrada de l'emperador a Santa Sofia"<sup>16</sup>.

However, a few pages earlier he has given a different version of the anecdote:

"Madame Darnois ha anat a l'Illa dels Prínceps, a un monestir grec, i allí li han cantat als himnes litúrgics del temps de l'Imperi bizantí, sobretot l'himne triomfal de l'entrada dels basileus a Santa Sofia"<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> J. PUIG I CADAFAALCH, *Memòries*, p. 391-392.

<sup>14</sup> J. PUIG I CADAFAALCH, *Memòries*, p. 297.

<sup>15</sup> J. PUIG I CADAFAALCH, *Memòries*, p. 292.

<sup>16</sup> J. PUIG I CADAFAALCH, *Memòries*, p. 353.

<sup>17</sup> J. PUIG I CADAFAALCH, *Memòries*, p. 349.

Here, it is not Puig himself who has listened to a hymn in a Greek monastery, but a Madame Darnois. It is not strange that the same anecdote is told twice, as Puig's memoirs are a compilation of diverse notes and documents, sometimes lacking editing and revision. In this case, his not revising the text allows us to have two different versions of the story that may correspond to the original note -told to him by this Madame Darnois- and his rewriting of the anecdote, setting himself as the protagonist, maybe to enhance the epic of the story and his personal understanding of the Greek-Ottoman conflict? In any case, this shows that Puig's description of his Eastern Mediterranean trip -and, by extension, of all his international accounts- must be read cautiously.

After this oriental trip, he attended congresses in Ravenna (1932) and Stockholm (1933). The only Swedish meeting he describes is, once more, one with a Royal:

"Un dels prínceps reials de Suècia, que era pintor, havia decorat una sala de la Casa de la Ciutat d'Estocolm. El vaig retrobar en un poblet de la rodalia, abillat modestament amb una americana tronada, i em serví de guia en el poble i em parlà amablement a l'entrada del jardí de la seva casa en el qual una de les plantes d'ornament era una planta per a nosaltres avorrida: l'esbarzer"<sup>18</sup>.

These anecdotes show that, at the end of his life, Puig is choosing to recall a certain kind of international acquaintances. They are probably not representative of the type of meetings he held during these international congresses, but in any case they do show that he travelled to many countries located at what we have been calling the borders of Europe -Norway, Sweden, Serbia, Romania, Greece, the Ottoman Empire-, and that in most of them he got to meet important representatives of these countries' ruling institutions. Ultimately, these accounts show that Puig i Cadafalch was not a Catalan politician and intellectual whose notion of the international was limited to Paris, but one that actively travelled to and engaged with a great diversity of geographical, political

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<sup>18</sup> J. PUIG I CADAVALCH, *Memòries*, p. 297.

and cultural realities, usually going beyond the geography of Western and Central Europe.

It has been shown that Puig began travelling to these peripheral countries after Miguel Primo de Rivera's coup d'état in 1923. However, the documents gathered in his memoirs reveal that he began engaging with the political and cultural situation of these countries much before that date. Already in 1907, in the speech mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Puig used Sweden's and Norway's recent history to make a parallel with the past relationship between Castile and Catalonia:

"No hay que decir aquello de la unidad hilvanada (...); en aquellos momentos no había ni hilvanes, y os lo demostraré indicándoos que no existía entonces más organismo común que una unión personal, real, por el estilo del ha[sta] poco existente entre Suecia y Noruega"<sup>19</sup>.

In the past, he says, nothing else than a personal, royal unity existed between Castile and Catalonia. The personal and royal unity Puig is referring to is probably the marriage of Isabel of Castile and Ferran of Aragon in the late-fifteenth century, which unified Castile and Aragon under a common crown, but preserved each region's own institutions and laws<sup>20</sup>. A union he sees similar to that of Sweden and Norway, which were united under a single monarch at the beginning of the nineteenth century<sup>21</sup>.

Other regions with which Puig finds a parallel to the Catalan case in this speech are the Midi in Southern France, Sicily and Naples, or the Greek territories under Ottoman rule:

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<sup>19</sup> J. PUIG I CADAVALCH, *Memòries*, p. 145-146.

<sup>20</sup> On the unification of the Castile and Aragon Crowns, see Ángel RODRÍGUEZ SÁNCHEZ, José Luis MARTÍN, *La España de los Reyes Católicos: la unificación territorial y el reinado (siglos XIV-XV)*, Madrid, Espasa Calpe, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> On the union between Sweden and Norway, see Hildor Arnold BARTON, *Sweden and Visions of Norway: Politics and Culture, 1814-1905*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 2003.

"De Francia no hay para qué hablar, porque en estos mismos días vemos en las páginas de los diarios la reseña de turbulencias ocurridas allí que tienen un fondo regional, estando de una parte los pueblos del Mediodía, y de otra los del Norte. (...) Y, ¿qué he de decir yo de esa Italia que todos los días se muestra como el prototipo de Naciones unificadas? Yo tengo la nota de un Tratado del Vizconde d'Avenel, en el cual se demuestran las variantes étnicas y de aspiraciones políticas de los sicilianos y napolitanos traslucidas por una literatura y un teatro característicos, y por un idioma propio y diferente de los de los pueblos del centro y del norte de la península italiana. ¿Y el movimiento nacionalista griego, ese movimiento panhelénico de secesión respecto de Turquía, y de agregación respecto a los países griegos, respecto a la Grecia continental y Creta? ¿Y ese movimiento actual de Prusia que se ha citado como ejemplo de unificación?"<sup>22</sup>.

On France, he recalls a contemporaneous conflict between the "peoples of the Midi", he says, and those of the north. About Italy, he argues that, even though the country is nowadays often presented as the "prototype" of "unified nations", he has "proof" that Sicilians and Neapolitans have political aspirations based on their distinct ethnicity, literature, theatre and language. As for the Pan-Hellenic movement, he points out that, whereas it is secessionist with regards to Turkey, it seeks aggregation in another direction, that of continental Greece and Crete. Likewise, he cites Prussia and its "recent movement" of unification. Here we see that Puig does not portray regional conflicts of his time under a common standard. He presents as parallel cases to Catalonia both regions that seek to distinguish themselves from a greater State -le Midi, Sicily and Naples-, and others that actually aim to create a greater State -Ottoman Greece and Prussia-. Both in the examples he gives of France and Italy, it is the regions of the south that are in conflict with their northern counterparts. Puig seems to find a parallel between the situation of these southern and 'ignored' regions and that of Catalonia, but a few lines later he builds the parallel with Prussia, a Northernmost power within the

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<sup>22</sup> J. PUIG I CADAFAALCH, *Memòries*, p. 147-148.

German Empire, which also took the lead in its process of unification<sup>23</sup>. Thus, Puig seems to see Catalonia as being Sicily and Prussia at the same time, and his comparing the Catalan case to so different and even opposing European models shows that the task of portraying the aspirations of Catalonia within Spain was complex.

At the same time, with these examples Puig pretends to argue that Catalonia's aspiration for autonomy is not an isolated and rare case, but something to be found in many different parts of the Europe of his time. In yet another fragment of his speech, he argues that he would like a Constitution for Catalonia similar to the one granted to Ireland by the British Empire:

"Inglaterra, el poderoso Imperio británico, está dictando estos días una Constitución para Irlanda, que bien quisiéramos para nosotros"<sup>24</sup>.

And later on he explicitly criticises the idea that the Catalan "problem" is not a European one:

"Yo, cuando oigo que este problema nuestro no es actual ni europeo, pienso en tantas cuestiones como en este siglo se han promovido por causa de la diversidad de las Naciones oprimidas en un Estado único, y algunas de ellas, por falta de previsión y de libertad, han llegado al extremo de la separación. El problema de Bélgica y Holanda, el problema de Suecia y Noruega, el problema austrohúngaro, el mismo problema del pueblo checo, la cuestión entre walones y flamants en Bélgica; la cuestión entre Finlandia y Rusia prueban que en Europa no hay acaso Nación que no tenga este problema nacionalista, ni hay parte del mundo donde no surja"<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Enric Ucelay-Da Cal has already pointed out the influence that the Prussian process of unification had in the political project of the Lliga Regionalista: E. UCELAY-DA CAL, *El imperialismo catalán...*, p. 57-63.

<sup>24</sup> J. PUIG I CADAFAALCH, *Memòries*, p. 148.

<sup>25</sup> J. PUIG I CADAFAALCH, *Memòries*, p. 149.

According to Puig, the "problem" is indeed to be found in present time Europe, and its cause is the "diversity of oppressed Nations under a unique State". He warns that some of these have come to "the extreme of separation" when they have not been given freedom. And as examples of the latter, he cites both territories that had indeed been segregated before 1907, as Belgium in Holland, and Norway in Sweden, and others that had not formed new States yet, such as Hungary within the Dual Empire, the "Czech" under Austria, Walloons and Flemish in Belgium, or Finland under Russian rule.

Another example of Puig's identification with these emerging nations is found in a fragment of his memoirs in which he explains that he went to Paris to defend the Catalan cause, as did also other "peoples" that had "reached freedom, or at least a new regime". Among these, he mentions the Turks, the Serbs, and the Bulgarians:

"(...) vaig anar cap a París per a donar estat europeu a la nostra indignació. Els pobles que ara han assolit la llibertat, o almenys un nou règim, tenien a París llur petit periòdic i llur organització. Els joves turcs, els serbis, els búlgars, me'n mostraren exemplars amb llurs pàgines plenes d'homes penjats i de viles cremades"<sup>26</sup>.

The accounts commented in this paper show a significant engagement of Josep Puig i Cadafalch with the regions that were gaining autonomy at the beginning of the twentieth century in diverse parts of Europe, particularly those located at the margins of the Western and Central European powers, in what may be called the European periphery. Even though the conclusions of this paper are provisional -as it intends to be the basis for future archive research on the topic-, they do reveal an interest in a typology of countries that had not been highlighted in the scholarship on Josep Puig i Cadafalch and the Lliga Regionalista. Traditionally, the territories that have entered these discussions are those located in the Western and Central European area. On the one hand, France has been seen as the constant reference for Puig, especially as an art historian and an

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<sup>26</sup> J. PUIG I CADAFALCH, *Memòries*, p. 119.

archaeologist<sup>27</sup>. As for the countries that inspired the Lliga's political and cultural project for Catalonia, historians have mostly considered the German Empire, and also Switzerland and the United States, as models<sup>28</sup>. Without questioning the overall importance of France in Puig's imaginary, as well as the prominence of the German, the Swiss and the American models in the conception of the Lliga's project for Catalonia – and Spain-, this paper adds a new perspective to the international engagement of Josep Puig i Cadafalch, and, by extension, of the Lliga Regionalista, that is, the relevance of the emerging countries of the periphery of Europe in the conceptualisation and public portraying of Catalonia's demands of autonomy.

We have seen that, during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, Puig visited many of these countries -mostly on the occasion of several scientific congresses-, and that, in the first years of his political career, he used them to make parallels with the Catalan case in several public speeches. The ways he refers to them in these talks are very diverse, sometimes arbitrary and limber. He uses different countries from different historical periods in order to make parallels with the situation of Catalonia in the present or in past times. For example, he describes the relationship between Castile and Catalonia in the Early Modern Times as being similar to that between Sweden and Norway in the nineteenth century, and subsequently argues that the recent separation of the latter from Sweden justifies their present time's demand for Catalonia's autonomy. The adscription of these nationalist movements in Puig's texts are also variable: in one fragment, he considers the Turks and Catalonia to be part of a same movement of new emerging countries, and in a later one he describes epic feelings of proximity with the cause of the Greeks under Ottoman rule experienced in a trip to Constantinople. Likewise, he is aware that the Greek cause can be a model for both secession and aggregation, and it remains unclear for the reader which of the two Puig prefers as a resolution to the conflict between Catalonia and Spain. Ultimately, Puig's widely varied and sometimes contradictory references to these new European countries show the difficulties he finds

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<sup>27</sup> See O. POISSON, "La "carrera francesa"..." and Antoni PLADEVALL I FONT, "Puig i Cadafalch i la difusió..."

<sup>28</sup> See E. UCELAY-DA CAL, *El imperialismo catalán...*

in defining Catalonia within a European context. Thus they also suggest the uniqueness of the Catalan case: not similar enough to any other European country as to be easily compared to a single one, but in need of several, sometimes contradictory, overlapping parallels. And amidst this diversity, these accounts also show Puig's need to contextualize the Catalan cause in this international scene, that is, to portray the Catalan issue as a European one, with its European supporters, and its European travel companions.

As it was pointed out at the beginning of the paper, one common thing to all these countries is the simultaneous emergence of their demands of political autonomy and of Art Nouveau as their 'regional' or 'national' art. The cartography of emerging countries mapped out in this paper may thus inspire future research on the influences these regional movements had on each other, and eventually may lead to reconsider Art Nouveau not only as an aesthetic movement, but also as an eminently political art.