

Manuel Sanchis Guarner¹



Manuel Sanchis Guarner was born in Valencia 1911, in the Plaça de l'Almoina, to a petty bourgeois family from the Vall d'Albaida. At the age of five he was left orphaned and was taken in by his

uncle, the arqueologist and promoter of Valencian culture, Canon Josep Sanchis Sivera. Educated at the Escola Pia secondary school and, subsequently, in the Faculty of Law at the University of Valencia, Sanchis participated fully in the movements for Valencian recognition such as the founding, in 1930, of *Acció Cultural Valenciana*, which sought to encourage the harmonization of students within their society and the application of academic criteria to the study of the locality.

After the award of the Ph D in the Humanities Sanchis Guarner won an award, whilst carrying out his doctirial studies in Law in Madrid, to study in the *Centro de Estudios Históricos* in that city under the presidency of Menéndez Pidal. It was in that centre he was to become a philologist and historian. He participated in a field trip to Morocco with the Arabist Lévi-Provençal, who acted as his guide and was to have a profound influence on him as evinced subsequently by the scholarship undertaken devoted to the toponymy and the Arab presence in Valencia and Majorca. Besides Menéndez Pidal, Sanchis was also to meet the most relevant figures of the time in the field of Hispanic philology, such as Américo Castro, Rafael Lapesa and, especially, Tomás Navarro Tomás, who helped him with one of his

¹ This biography has been reproduced by kind permission of the Associació d'Escriptors en Llengua Catalana and is available in Catalan on their website www.escriptors.cat

first important articles, ‘Análisis fonético del valenciano literario’, in 1934. In the preceding year he had published his first book, *La llengua dels valencians* which, through its numerous re-editions, has remained to our days a key point of reference in the field of Valencian identity and its language.

What is more, Tomás Navarro Tomás invited Sanchis to participate in the research team preparing the highly ambitious *Atlas Lingüístico de la Península Ibérica*. To this effect our scholar undertook several field trips to Aragon, Extremadura, Castile, Navarre and the Basque country and, months later in the company of Francesc de Borja Moll, to the Catalan-speaking areas where they gathered ‘the



most characteristic words from each county.’ The Atlas was never published owing to the outbreak of the Civil War.

During the conflict he joined the Republican Army spending most of the three years in Extremadura and Madrid, reaching the rank of captain in the artillery. At the end of the war he was interned in a concentration camp in Salamanca and subsequently sent to prison in Madrid. He was sentenced to twelve years imprisonment but was released on license after serving four years in 1943.

On his release his friend Francesc de Borja Moll found him a job as supply teacher in German in a secondary school in Palma de Mallorca. In his free time he collaborated with the Majorcan in the records and referencing of the *Diccionari català-valencià-balear* which had been begun by Antoni M. Alcover. At the same time, from 1946 onwards, both linguists re-started work on the *Atlas Lingüístico de la Península Ibérica*. The following year he was named member of the *Instituto Miguel de Cervantes de Filología Hispánica*. Sanchis continued work on the history of the language and literature of

Valencia publishing monographs like *Introducción a la historia lingüística de Valencia* (1948) and the important *Gramàtica valenciana* (1950), which is considered the first serious study on the this subject in the autochthonous tongue.



In 1952 he was named as correspondent of the *Real Academia Española* and the following year "magister" of the *Estudi General Lul·lià* and collaborator of the *Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas*. He also published studies on literary, linguistic and historical topics related to Majorca such as *Els poetes romàntics de Mallorca* (1950), *Els poetes insulars de postguerra* (1951) and *Els molins de vent a Mallorca* (1955). In the words of Francesc de Borja. Moll:

Besides his contribution to the *Diccionari*, Sanchis Guarner's presencia became extremely important for the cultural life of our island where he made many great friendships amongst *literati* and others involved in cultural life [...] He was completely at home in Majorca but it was entirely normal that he should look to the future with the objective of returning to his birthplace which had a similar dire need for dynamic and committed scholars like himself. The moment arrived when he could

return to Valencia and he informed us that he was leaving. That was after fifteen years of residence in Majorca where he left friends by the dozen.

In 1959 he returned to his home town where he would work as a French teacher in a secondary school and, subsequently, became responsible for the courses on Romance Philology and General Linguistics at the University of Valencia. He was soon named Head of the Department of French in the Faculty and, after the section was established, he became lecturer in Valencian Linguistics. In 1979 he was awarded the chair in this discipline and elected Dean of the Faculty of Modern Languages. From this period the following publications are of major importance: *Els pobles valencians parlen els uns dels altres* (1963-1968, 4 vols); *La Renaixença al País Valencià* (1968) –an attempt to further scholarship on Valencian classics–; *La ciutat de València* (1972), one of his most popular texts with many re-prints and *Per a una caracterització valenciana* (1972).

The author of innumerable articles, prologues and reviews – over one hundred and fifty –, he participated in a wealth of conferences on Romance Philology. On two occasions he was awarded the *Cerdà Reig* prize of the *Diputació Provincial de València* (1963 i 1974). He was made a member of the *Institut d'Estudis Catalans*, and correspondent of the *Centre de Cultura Valenciana*, as well as member of the *Associació d'Escriptors en Llengua Catalana*. In 1974 he was awarded the *Premi d'Honor de les Lletres Catalanes*, in recognition of his lifetime achievement. Moreover, his role in the University should not be forgotten where he became director of the *Institut de Ciències de l'Educació* (1975-1981) and established in 1978, the *Institut Universitari de Filologia Valenciana*.

In 1976 the Valencian publishing house *Tres i Quatre* began publication of his *Complete Works* though the project became paralysed in 1987 after the publication of volume six.

Ever the model of democracy, dialogue and understanding – particularly in relation to differing linguistic sensitivities in Valencia– he was the subject of reprisals for his defence of the unity of the Catalan language both from within academia and also the political and social spheres of the locality. He was the target of a bomb outrage which was attributed to the extreme Right-wing elements of Valencia.



On December 16, 1981, shortly after receiving the *Unitat de la Llengua* prize and taking his last class Sanchis Guarner died from a heart attack. In 1992 the *Miscel·lània Sanchis Guarner* was published, comprising three volumes wherein a series of

scholars and personalities from the world of culture reviewed the work and achievement of the man who was for many the founder of the discipline of modern philology in Valencia. A quarter of a century after his death he was named “Writer of the Year” by the *Acadèmia Valenciana de la Llengua*, which organised the exhibition “Manuel Sanchis Guarner, a Valencian Humanist of the Twentieth Century.” Similarly, *Tres i Quatre* re-initiated publication of the *Complete Works* with the publication of *La ciutat de València* (2007) and *El Regne de València* (2009).

Illustrations

1. At work on the *Diccionari català-valencià-balear*.
2. With Francesc de B. Moll i Rafael Catardi by the monument to Miquel Costa i Lloberta. Cala Murta, Formentor, 1957.
3. During the award of the Premi d'Honor de les Lletres Catalanes, el 1974.
4. At the homage to Joan Fuster, Valencia, 1981.