

Ramon Llull and Islam, the Beginning of Dialogue

In the recovery of the Mediterranean memory, the 700th anniversary of the Majorcan philosopher Ramon Llull in Bougie (1307-2007) is a date that reminds us that the dialogue between cultures and religions has, for centuries, had a protagonist of recognised universal prestige. Ramon Llull (1232-1316) is a singular figure, a great versatile author who wrote 260 works in Arabic, Latin and Catalan, always with great concern for communication and reasoning. He created his own Art, a logical system inspired by the combinatorics of Muslim mathematicians that Llull developed with great wisdom in order to explain any concept linked to nature and theology.

Ramon Llull developed a personal religious, intellectual and political project of extraordinary scope. He was a heterodox character who can provide us with some keys to establish a reflexive link with the present as he represents a paradigmatic case of the meeting of cultures that took place in the Middle Ages. The work and life of the Blessed Ramon contain the seed of what today we can call the dialogue of civilisations, including conflict.

The son of colonists who accompanied King James I in the conquest of Majorca, Llull is a clear exponent of what at the time the Mediterranean represented: a crossroads of civilisations, of science, of thought and of confessional debate. His long life was highly intense: from the age of 30 he abandoned courtly life and developed a personal project, with a religious, intellectual and political character. Ramon Llull, influenced by the thinking of the Franciscans, alternated thought and action and was an activist capable of travelling on missions to the Middle East and Asia Minor, until reaching Armenia and the Maghreb. While disputing with the Muslim wise men of the time, he debated with the most notable political and ecclesiastic powers of the West: Rome, Paris, the Italian republics and the Crown of Aragon.

Ramon Llull had been a troubadour in his youth and therefore knew the importance of the ingenuity of words, but in his new period, ingenuity had to be supported by reason, which explains the interest of his method. The fact of being born in Majorca, where one third of the population was still Muslim and where a significant Jewish community resided with eminent manufacturers of astronomical instruments and nautical charts, gave him a capacity for knowledge that he used to the full in his missionary undertakings and in the formulation of original thought.

Llull lived at a time when Muslim scientific activity was still distinguished and multiform. Diverse subjects such as medicine, geometry, astronomy or mechanics were developed brilliantly by the Arabs, who in that era created disciplines such as algebra

and trigonometry, and conceived methods to improve cartography. Muslim thought and science, especially of the mystic Sufis al-Farabi, Avicenna and Ibn Sabin, influenced Llull. Illumination is found in Llull as in Avicenna, because the two wise men made the effort to include in the same thought rational and mystical spheres.

In Llull's experience, dialogue was not just an exchange of positions and the definition of resemblances and differences, but also an epistemological confrontation through which it was possible to advance beyond a disputation of authorities. The Blessed Ramon knew that these disputations, unlike the citation of texts, led nowhere. Llull was not a scholastic, and neither was he merely interested in the citing of authorities, which is why it is difficult to identify his sources. He seized on anything he found interesting in science and thought whether from Muslim, Christian or Jewish thinkers, in order to exploit it creatively. This is how the *doctor illuminatus* developed a new logic, the Art, which he modified over 40 years. The Lullian Art is a combinatory method, a method of methods which provided him with a tool of rational persuasion. Linked more to Neoplatonism than to scholastics, the germinal and anticipatory character of Lullian work offered some paths followed by Nicholas of Cusa and Leibniz and that today are precursors of computers. This is why the *doctor illuminatus* is the patron of computer technicians.

The participation in this dossier dedicated to Ramon Llull of specialists from both Mediterranean shores is the result of several meetings in Barcelona (IEMed), Majorca (Institut d'Estudis Baleàrics) and the University of Bougie. The texts are focused in particular on dialogue, but also on science and thought, and they seek to focus on the intercultural elements: scientific research, metaphor and the importance of languages and communication; everything, in short, which serves us as a valid footbridge in relation to current events. If 2007 was the Year of Science in Spain, 2008 is the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, in which Llull can be one of the representative figures.

We have divided the dossier into three parts: the first, "Intuition and Reason under Debate"; the second, "Medieval Science and Us", and the third, "The Difficulties of Dialogue". The interest of this meeting is in the way that the specialists contribute diverse visions and knowledge around the figure and his era, but that also helps us to reflect on some difficult moments like those in the present although, as several specialists point out, not as difficult as in the Lullian era. In this context, Anthony Bonner shows that in the Middle Ages the concept of tolerance did not yet exist and interreligious dialogue was one aspect of apologetic literature, a controversy within the vision of the world so profoundly theocratic that in those times reigned throughout the Mediterranean.

In 1276, in Miramar (Majorca), Llull founded the School of Languages, which had to train Christian missionaries. In his early period he wrote three books directly in Arabic: the *Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*, the *Book of Contemplation* and *Al-Gazhali's Logic*, of which only copies in Catalan and Latin remain. The philosopher believed that to convince the other it was not advisable to use force, but rather rational

logic. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of the authors especially talk of the *Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men* (1274), a sample of this strategy as a model of interreligious disputation and which was possibly conceived as a textbook for the missionary school of Miramar, given that throughout almost his whole career he did not tire of recommending it to his readers.

The challenge taken up by Ramon Llull with his life and work was the conversion of the Jews and, above all, of the Muslims of his time. Alexander Fidora reminds us that traditional apologetics, which had been practised for centuries, was designed for dialogue with the Jews. With these, the Christians shared a text of authorities, The Old Testament. This model of dialogue entered into crisis in the 13th century when the main interlocutors for the mission were no longer the Jews but, because of the political weight they had acquired, the Muslims. It was necessary, therefore, to develop new strategies for dialogue between the religions, without citing authorities or canonical texts.

In the *Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*, the Blessed Ramon systematically set out the principles of Christianity, of Judaism and of Islam, with a responsible knowledge of the contents of all three religions which was not usual among the writers of religious polemic of his time. The three monotheist religions sought to impose themselves as the absolute truth above the others, and it is in this context that Ramon Llull wrote this work. Using the rational and highly innovatory method, he starts from a new base, without prejudices, to construct a persuasive and coherent argument. Without mentioning the authorities, his Art could be used in equal conditions by all, thereby becoming a tool of discussion that the adversaries could not dismiss.

The Lullian project also follows on from the supposition that what the other says, even though you think it wrong, can be true, while your own most intimate convictions could be wrong. The Art or Lullian method is founded on the common concepts of the great monotheist religions; thus, the *Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men* shows this collective substrate of the three religions that consists, first, of the attributes of God. Moreover, the cultures of these three religions share some logical and ontological concepts, such as the staircase of the being that starts with the elements, continues with the plants, animals, men, and finally reaches God. There are also shared moral notions.

In the impassioned search for the truth, as Annemarie C. Mayer describes in her article, the originality of the Majorcan author is based on rationality and coherence of the arguments developed, without rejecting any influence of the most important currents of thought of his times and of other earlier periods. The articles by Dominique Urvoy, Mustapha Chérif, Maribel Fierro and Fatiha Benlabbah explain in the first part of the dossier how the ideas of the Arab-Muslim thinkers, especially those who bring Sufi thought, to some extent influenced the work of the philosopher. With a more general vision, Edgar Morin's text tells us that reason cannot be a closed and absolute phenomenon, but must be founded on more complex forms that allow its progressive evolution and reorganisation.

Insofar as many of Ramon Llull's major works of literature are written based on allegory and fable (we are thinking of the *Book of the Lover and the Beloved* or the *Book of the Beasts*), it can be said that they contain a universal and timeless modernity that converts his work into something alive, as shown by the examples found by Tassadit Yacine on the southern shore and by Sebastià Alzamora on the northern, who also presents us with a writer much more alive for today's tastes than some stereotypes would have us think.

As we see in the second part of the dossier, Muslim science had great importance between the 10th and 15th centuries, thanks above all to the al-Andalusian and Maghrebian wise men, who in Llull's time were considered the greatest exponents of diverse disciplines, such as astronomy, mathematics or the combinatory practices, which between the end of the 12th century and middle of the 14th appear in Maghrebian writings, just as Miquel Forcada, Ahmed Djebbar, Joan Vernet and Julio Samsó explain in their articles. All these disciplines were transmitted very importantly in the framework of Judaeo-Christian culture: the Jews, with their capacity for languages, contributed to this dissemination, as Manuel Forcano makes clear. Ramon Llull, *christianus arabicus*, dedicated many years of his life to the study of the ideology of these Arab-Islamic sciences, and explored diverse disciplines following his sojourns in the cities of the north and south of the Mediterranean. As we have said, the *doctor illuminatus* created his own scientific and interdisciplinary method, the Lullian Art, to approach the human and divine sciences. His influence survived for many centuries until philosophers of science such as Leibniz, a great admirer of Llull, and they exist in our time as a dynamic and interdisciplinary tool of knowledge, as Federico Mayor Zaragoza affirms.

In terms of the part dedicated to dialogue, we see first the framework of a historical era dominated by the violence of the crusades as the only way of annihilation and conversion of the infidels, within which Ramon Llull acted guided by his passion for the truth, in order to prove the veracity of Christianity above the other monotheist religions, as shown in the articles by the Lullian experts Amador Vega, Joan Santanach, Fatma Benhamamouche, Anthony Bonner and Víctor Pallejà de Bustinza. In this part we also find the contradictory aspects of Llull: one as a pacifist and another as a supporter of the crusades. However, he does not support the crusades in a traditional sense because the 13th century meant the realisation of the failure of the original idea of crusade, based on the occupation of the territory of the Muslims and their annihilation, at least physically. In fact, he knew that a crusade against infidels led to the crusade against the heretics (as in the case of Catharism) and, finally, the crusade at the service of the king of France. As Gabriel Ensenyat says in his article, these types of crusade sought to frustrate the policy of James I of creating a series of protectorates in Maghrebian lands to permit the Catalan-Aragonese crown to maintain political and trade hegemony. The Lullian crusade, conceived in his old age, has the objective of ensuring that some captive audiences listen to the missionary that otherwise neither Jews nor Muslims had any interest in hearing. Llull never proposed the physical elimination of the in-

fidels but rather their conversion. This is why much earlier, as we have pointed out, the Majorcan writer had constructed persuasive and coherent arguments to establish a tolerant and open interreligious dialogue, highly innovative as it was linked to his privileged capacity of perception.

Ramon Llull's open and tolerant attitude is an example for reflection on the necessary dialogue that must be carried out today between the East and West, in a context in which ideological polarisation has increased greatly for diverse reasons, considered in the articles by Pedro Martínez Montávez and Mohamed Arkoun. The latter reminds us that the Lullian position is now much in demand in hundreds of seminars, talks and conferences organised around the world to enrich interreligious and intercultural dialogue and apply a method and globalising categories of thought for a committed search for the truth.

The fact that religion has lost its absolute and unconditional character can make us think that it is irrelevant that Llull wanted to convince others of the truth of his religion. However, as Alexander Fidora says, in our times the idea of absolute or unconditional value is reappearing, for example in the debate about universality of democracy and of human rights. It is a complex debate that has much to do with the will to listen and promote it, as Llull did with the dissemination of his work. However much we are convinced by certain beliefs and values, we will never come to make others recognise them by force. This, unfortunately, is costing many lives and only serves to widen the conflict and close the dialogue. The interest of Llull's discourse is that he already knew in the 13th century that you can dominate someone but you cannot convince them; for this, other tools are necessary.

The dossier dedicated to Ramon Llull is accompanied by the culture and recent events sections. Eva Martínez Díaz, Antoni Mir, Juan Manuel Cid and Darío Marimón emphasise the knowledge of languages and the need for translations as a necessary element for dialogue. Patricia Almarcegui and Saliha Zerrouki introduce two deceased writers that offer us intercultural perspectives yet to be discovered. Patricia Almarcegui tells us of Annemarie Schwarzenbach, Swiss writer and traveller, with a work about the East far removed from the stereotypes of the western writer. Saliha Zerrouki, for her part, presents the historical and literary links between Spain and Algeria made clear in the work of Max Aub during his captivity in a French concentration camp in colonial Algeria. Through contemporary literature, the journalist Claudine Rulleau offers a perspective of light and shadow of the dialogue between civilisations and argues that today Ramon Llull would have an open blog in several languages.

In the current panorama, we cannot avoid the issues of the Middle East with the participation of Tomás Alcoverro, Ahmad Beydoun and Khadija Mohsen-Finan. Finally, this issue has a study carried out by Oihana Marco on British Muslim women who wear a veil and the conclusions of Laura Mijares and Ángeles Ramírez about how Islam is managed in Spain.

In order to advance today in dialogue a new reading is necessary of the contributions of the diverse cultures to civilisation, so that the young have a more balanced, less

endocentric and less frustrating vision. Llull's activity and work reminds us of the need to understand the thought and languages of the other, and of the need to find common ground; in other words, to accept shared values or concepts as the Blessed Ramon did with the Art to be able to continue dialogue.

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