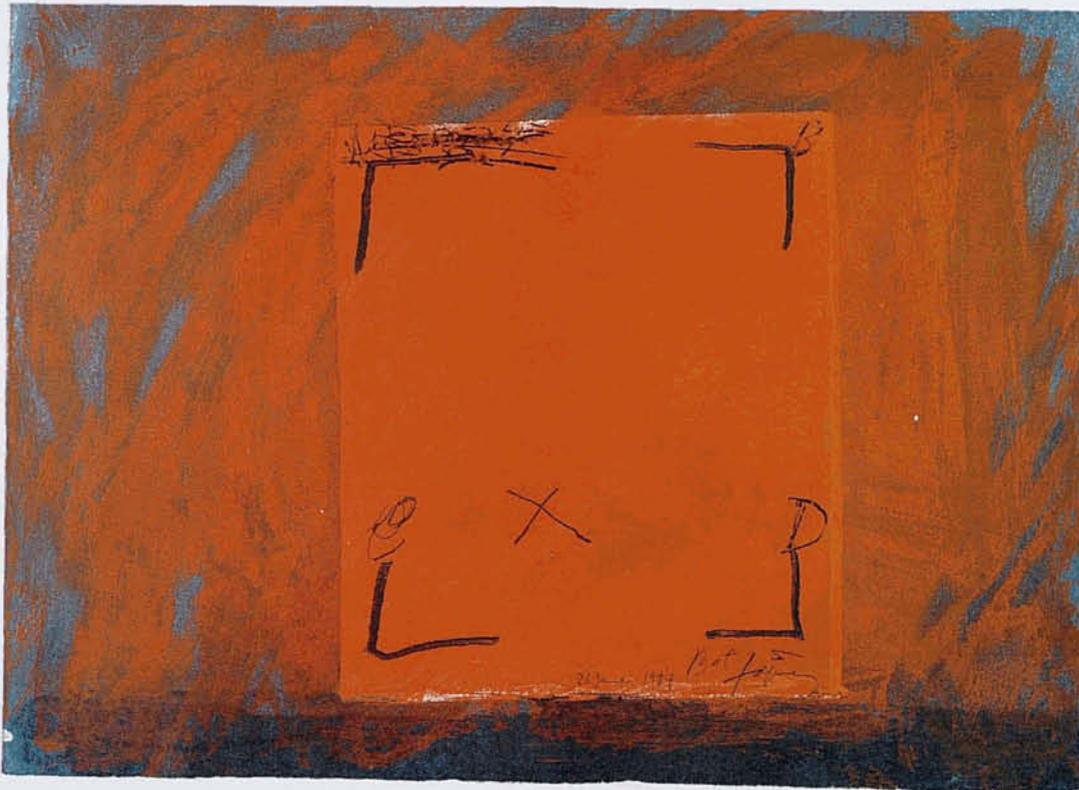


RAMON LLULL'S PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SYSTEM



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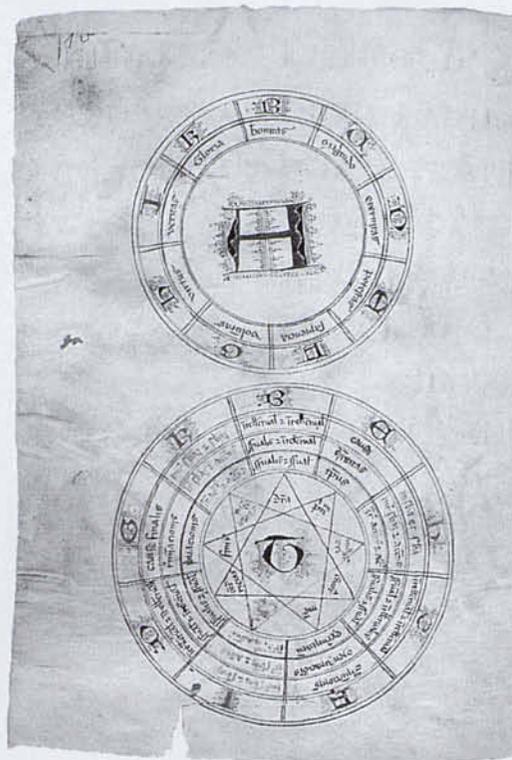
Ramon Llull was born in Mallorca in 1232, a few years after James the Conqueror took the island, which maintained commercial relations with all the important cities in the Mediterranean area, from the Saracens. Tradition has it that he died in 1316 on a ship that was taking him home after he had suffered stoning in North Africa. The life of this *virphantasticus*, as he called himself, who probably spoke Arabic better than he did Latin and who, dressed as a pilgrim and with his long beard, tried to win over to his cause cardinals and

popes, princes and kings of Europe, North Africa and the Near East, was dominated by a single purpose: to lead the different peoples of the world towards *concordia*, to unity.

In pursuing his aim, Llull turned out an admirable literary production, in spite of the great agitation that marked his life. He wrote approximately 280 books, some very long, not only in Latin but also in Catalan and Arabic. Although these works show that he made considerable and rapid progress, his aim always remained the same. As he saw it, his task

was to write a book which would make the Christian dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation comprehensible to Jews and Muslims.

Llull called his book *Ars inveniendi veritatem*, the art of finding the truth, and he always saw this *Ars* as the illumination of God. Over a period of more than thirty years he untiringly rewrote and revised it. But Llull did not only write the *Ars*; he also wrote on philosophy and theology, logic and natural science. In his condition as "the infidels' advocate", he directed warnings at popes and in several works he



FIGURES I AND II OF THE ARS GENERALIS ULTIMA, FROM THE MANUSCRIPT KEPT AT THE MUNIC BAYERISCHE STAATSBIBLIOTHEK (1M. 10522, FOLIO 2R)

sketched a programme for the Crusades. He usually wrote these works in Latin, but his poetic production places him amongst the founders of early Catalan literature. The *Doctrina pueril* and the *Libre de orde de cavalleria* have obvious educational intentions. The book *Felix o Libre de meravelles* is a young person's encyclopaedia in narrative form. The novel *Blanquerna* deals with the reform of the Church. In his great book *Libre de contemplació en Déu* he develops a method for mystical ascension based on the reflections of the divine perfections in Creation, so as to approach the infinite Creator himself.

Llull pursued a single objective in all his writing: *concordia* between all the peoples of the world. He had the idea that it was possible to reach the one true God through the contemplation of his names. He considered sacred names the "principles" of his *Ars* and always named nine in the definitive formulation: the Bountiful, the Great, the Eternal, the Powerful, the Wise, the Loving, the Mighty, the True one, the Glorious. He believed that contemplating the names of God, which

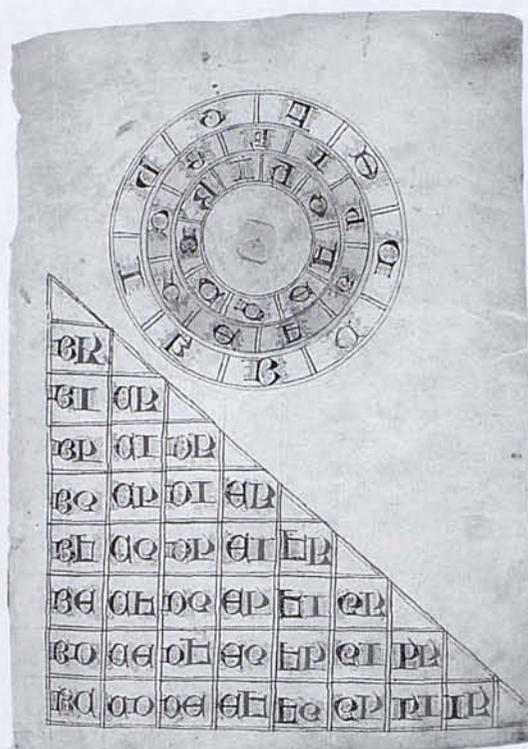
are common to all religions, would allow agreement between all peoples, a *concordia* between Muslims and Jews and Greek and Roman Christians. His dream was to win the whole world over to Christianity by converting the Tartars, who had penetrated the Mediterranean area shortly before.

To this end, he mainly wrote works in the form of conversation, dialogues in which wise men representing the great universal religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – lay out the principles of their faith. They do so on the basis of combinations of the sacred names: the Good, who is Great, is at once the Powerful, the Eternal and Wise, etc. In doing so, Llull was making use for his own ends of an Islamic method of contemplation, a method which sets out to ascend to God himself through the reflections of the infinite names of God present in the creation.

Llull used this method mainly in writings that take the form of conversation. The course of a discussion described in the *Libre del gentil e dels tres savis* is char-

acteristic as regards the setting in which these conversations take place. One day, three learned friends – a Christian, a Jew and a Muslim – happen to meet outside the gates of a city. After exchanging friendly greetings, the three agree to talk somewhere quiet about theological problems.

They come across a pagan philosopher in a wood, who is in despair over the question of life after death. The wood abounds in symbols and allegories. Beside the spring that waters five trees a beautiful maiden appears whose name is Intelligence. She tells them that the five trees incarnate in their different flowers the qualities and virtues of God and various combinations of the virtues and sins of men. The trees provide the means necessary to demonstrate how religious truth can be found and the consolation this brings with it. The wise men agree to debate, with the help of the trees and their flowers, until they discover the one true divine law beneath which all the peoples of the world can be united.



FIGURES III AND IV OF THE *ARS GENERALIS ULTIMA*, FROM THE MANUSCRIPT KEPT AT THE MUNIC BAYERISCHE STAATS BIBLIOTHEK (1M. 10522 FOLIO IV)

From the discussion described in the first book, the pagan listener becomes convinced of the truth of faith in the existence of a single God the Creator and in the resurrection of the flesh. After the three wise men have in this way agreed on what they have in common, each of them wants to convince the pagan of the truth of his own faith. In the work's next three books, first the Jew, then the Christian and finally the Muslim try to explain the special dogmas of their faith and answer the pagan's questions. The Jew explains the Jewish belief in a single God and in the creation of the world, the Christian explains the Christian belief in a single God and in the Trinity and the Saracen explains the Saracen belief in a single God and Creator and in the death of all things outside God.

All three wise men use the same method. They look for arguments for the dogmas of faith in combinations of the sacred names or of divine qualities. For example, the Jew wants to show that the world has been created by God. He picks a flower from the first tree with the attributes

of "Power" and "Greatness" and argues as follows: either the world has been created by God, or it is eternal. If it were eternal, God's power would not be the greatest power imaginable because it is greater to create the world out of nothing than if the world is eternal. The other two wise men use the same procedure. Whatever makes God's attributes agree in the greatest possible measure is in keeping with the truth.

Since Llull understood truth as an organic entity, he compared the sacred names with the branches of a tree and the arguments with its flowers. The first tree comprises seven sacred names: Good, Great, Eternal, Mighty, Wise, Loving and Perfect. The second tree combines these attributes with the seven virtues, the third combines them with the seven capital sins. He who can best show the agreement between the dogmas of his faith and the flowers of the trees will consider his profession of faith to be better than the others.

The dialogue between the three wise men gives no definitive result. The pagan bids

the three farewell without saying which confession he has chosen. The Christian then proposes continuing the discussion some other time until they reach the truth in all questions of religion, because if a unity of faith could be reached and religious tensions and differences could be made to disappear, men would also stop fighting and destroying each other for the sake of religion. A time and place is fixed for the next dispute. The three adversaries then part on the best of terms, and each of them remembers to apologize to the others for any offensive expressions he may inadvertently have used.

The method of the *Libre del gentil e dels tres savis* is the method of the famous *Ars lulliana*, Ramon Llull's philosophical and theological system. The *Ars* sets out to overcome the religious tensions and controversies in the world through the contemplation of the names of God and the mutual respect of the interlocutors. All the peoples of the world must unite under the law of the one true God and live in *concordia*. What Llull hoped to achieve is still relevant today. ■