



Llull, Ramon, *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, translated by Noel Fallows (Boydell Press, 2013), 120pp. ISBN: 978-1-843-83849-4

By 'Order of Chivalry' Llull did not refer ostensibly to any existing chivalric order such as the Knights Templar, which already had a written rule; neither was he thinking of their successor in one of the lands of the Crown of Aragon, the Order of Montesa, a fact of direct relevance to Llull as he was consulted on the trial of the Templars shortly after having visited Jacques de Molay in Cyprus. As the leading Platonist of his Age, Llull was of course referring to the categories of spiritual reality which determine the parameters around which the Code of Chivalry may legitimately be adumbrated for those seeking initiation into the knighthood. Evidently, Llull adapted this Platonic philosophy to the needs and requirements of the pedagogical programme outlined by the *Ars Magna*, a universal epistemological, logical and mnemotechnical system of Neoplatonic thought shared by the Christian tradition of Eriugena and many others. Llull is remarkable not only for the systematic exposition of all aspects of his system, but seems especially significant in Neoplatonic thought, because of the obvious connections linking him both to Jewish Cabala and the teachings of Sufi initiates, with whom Llull was in contact in Mallorca and on his travels around both sides of the Islamo-Christian divide of the Mediterranean. Ambitious as this project was, it did not sever Llull from the communicative needs of his immediate entourage, including his peers in the gentry with sons preparing to enter the knighthood.

The resulting work is remarkable as it furnishes the most popular manual of chivalry known to Western Europe, and one which teaches the

Lullian system in the most accessible way, developed by Lull to be read by young aspirants to the knighthood. In it Lull explains the historical and spiritual Origins of Chivalry (chapter I); the office that pertains to a knight (chapter 2); on examining the squire who wishes to join the order of chivalry (chapter 3); on the way in which the squire shall receive knighthood (chapter 4); on the meaning of the knight's arms (chapter 5).

For the Platonist Lull, the spiritual value of the knight determines his external actions and societal values. It is little wonder that, playing such a key role, the allegorical armour of the knight must correspond to the combination of the ternary and quaternary sets contained within the seven virtues, the so-called 'theological virtues', Faith, Hope and Charity and the cardinal virtues: Justice, Prudence, Fortitude and Temperance. In this sympathetic set of Platonic correspondences, the chapter on the meaning of the knight's arms is particularly interesting for students of medieval Catalan literature, as the symbolism referred to permeates literary evocations (e.g. in Pere March's 'L'arnés del cavaller'). Thus, the full mnemonic list:

- (1) **Sword** = **Cross.**
- (2) **Lance** = **Truth.**
- (3) **Chapel-de-fer** = **Shame.**
- (4) **Hauberk** = **Castle and rampart.**
- (5) **Iron chausses** = **Safe feet = Safe highway.**
- (6) **Spurs** = **Diligence = Zeal.**
- (7) **Collar** = **Obedience.**
- (8) **Mace** = **Strength** of courage.
- (9) **Misericorde** = **(Betrayal)** trust neither in men, arms nor strength = Trust in God alone.
- (10) **Shield** = Stands **between** enemy as knight = A knight stands **between** his king and his people.
- (11) **Saddle** = **Security** of courage = The **burden** of responsibility.

- (12) **Horse** = (**Power**), wealth & nobility of courage.
- (13) **Horse's bit** = (**Self-control**) = self-discipline & refraining from uncouth language.
- (14) **Shaffron** = **Horse protection** = **Reason** = No knight may use arms without reason.
- (15) **Bardings** = **Protect** his possessions.
- (16) **Pourpoint** = Great **travails**.
- (17) **Blazon** = To **identify praise** or **reprimand** on the field.
- (18) **Standard** = "In the **honour of the kingdom** and the principality and in the **honour of their lord** they are **honoured by the people**."

Llull makes it clear, should there be any doubt, that it is not the word-for-word correspondences which are significant of themselves, though they may serve as useful mnemonic devices; rather it is the explanation of the mode of analogical reasoning which serves as the foundation of all Platonic philosophy and which Llull is at pains to explain as a set of correspondences or similitudes underpinning the tradition he voices.

Ramon Llull assumed the current definition of Chivalry as a Roman institution, dating back to the foundation of the Roman polity, wherein 1 in every 1000 was chosen to join the ranks of the *milites* or the knightly order of Ancient Rome. But if the kernel of Llull's mythopoetic vision is Roman, the work as a whole expresses very much Llull's own concerns, as a member of the chivalric order, to promulgate and propagandise a form of Spiritual Chivalry somewhat akin to the *Futuwwa* of the Sufis. Aside from Jewish Cabalists, Llull's Neoplatonic synthesis seems to partake of traditions also known to contemporary Sufi philosophers and mystics.

Always a popular text in the Anglo-Saxon world, because of its wide circulation in Latin translations up to the Renaissance, when it was translated

into English by Caxton. It again attracted the interest of Allison Peers, who first promoted Lullian studies in England. While far from being Lull's most engaging or demanding work, it has been considered a classroom classic in Catalonia uninterruptedly since the time it was written. It is easy to see how this little text has acquired its status as a classic, as relevant today as it ever was in the opposition of tyrannical government, as we can read in Fallows' elegant and accurate translation of Lull's raw no-nonsense prose:

If Chivalry, which is such an honourable office, were an office that involved robbing and destroying the poor and the helpless, and deceiving and raping widows and other women, it follows that offering aid and support to orphans, widows and the poor would be a very great and noble office indeed. (50)

It is hard to pass judgment on the quality of a translation from medieval Catalan into English, as translation strategy differs so widely, and not all translators will agree with the decisions taken by Fallows, and explained carefully in the introduction. In this case, Fallows has brought to bear his technical expertise in the vocabulary of knighthood to ensure that accuracy of technical terminology is privileged. The desire to be consistent is also a guiding principle of this translation, which notes and respects the nuances of Lull's terminology, consistently translating "bell" as "fine", and so forth.

Granted that systematic technical accuracy has rarely been attempted in previous translations of chivalric material, Fallows' translation demands the serious and immediate attention of those who intend to pursue further the difficult task of capturing some of the best and most challenging Catalan authors of pre-humanism and rendering them into idiomatic English. Lull is hard to convey in English not least because he is so concerned with direct and unadorned communication; capturing what remains of the 'speech effect' of perfectly constructed literary sentences which nonetheless retain some of the energy of the spoken word is perhaps one reason why the vast literary corpus

of Llull, the greatest Catalan stylist of the medieval period, remains almost entirely neglected by Anglophone translators.

The Boydell press is also to be congratulated in producing such a handsome volume, of interest to students of medieval culture who would like to gain as close an insight as is possible to get into medieval Catalan culture without accessing the documentation in the original language, which is, after all, the principle use of Philology.

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