How to Deal with Muslims? Raymond Lull and Ignatius of Loyola

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As a small contribution to the topic of the relationship between Christians and Muslims, I should like to exploit two sources that shed light on it from a late medieval and a Renaissance angle. One is Raymond Lull’s *Vita coetanea* and the other is Ignatius of Loyola’s autobiography, which was originally referred to as *Acta P. Ignatii*. What is peculiar about these sources is that both are non-thematic accounts of the relation of a Christian to Muslims; each is an autobiographical narrative about events that occurred before the author’s main career, but which was dictated late in his life. In addition, the narratives are indubitably designed to instruct their followers, as they are written in the third person, which decreases subjectivity and enhances authority. I tend to read the two accounts as deliberate messages about what was important to each author, to the effect that all of *Acta* may be read as an *agenda et vitanda* because the narrated facts acquire emblematic meaning. If we keep in mind Ignatius’s instruction to visualize the life of Christ (*compositio loci*), we may as well visualize the episodes of his life for the sake of gaining delight and instruction about our own courses of action. Without further ado, here is a quick summary of the two stories:

1 The title of this article has been deemed provocative by some people. The word ‘to deal with’ appeared to be demeaning. However, there must have been a suspicion that this ‘dealing’ might be derogatory because it is about Muslims. *Honi soit qui mal y pense*. And indeed, both Ignatius and Lull did not think highly of Muslims. Therefore, I want to share the way both converted in their views, in addition to the conclusions we may draw.


Raymond Lull’s (1232–1315) narrative has to do with his Saracen slave who had taught him Arabic. One day in 1273, he and his slave began to fight after the slave uttered some anti-Christian slurs. While the Saracen was in prison, Lull was tormented by the thought that he might be obliged to kill his teacher-servant. When the prisoner had hanged himself, Lull thanked God for sparing him from having to soil his hands. Ignatius of Loyola’s account, on the other hand, occurred in 1522, when he encountered a Moor who ridiculed the virginity of St. Mary. Unsure about whether or not to go after him, Ignatius let his mule decide. As a result, he saw it to be God’s will to proceed to Montserrat, instead of fighting the Muslim.

In both cases, it is not the wickedness or ignorance of the Muslims that drives the conflict; instead, it is the weakness of the Christians. Let us now take a closer look into the biographical and theoretical contexts of each story, in order to see whether there is a pattern that helps in conceptualizing the Christian-Muslim relationships.

**Raymond and the Slave**

There is no need to explain further the structure and origin of the *Vita coetanea*; however, what is worth stressing is the fact that it is a narrative of conversion and illumination. In this narrative construction, the slave episode is located after Raymond had completed a peregrination and had accepted that he would return home instead of going to Paris. When he arrived at home, he tells us, he did three things: he dressed himself in the simplest fashion, he learned Latin (here rather than in Paris), and, “having bought himself a Saracen,

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