

MIQUEL BATLLORI



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MIQUEL BATLLORI I MUNNÉ HAS A CLEAR PREDILECTION FOR THE HISTORY OF CULTURE, NOT EXCLUDING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY. AS A HISTORIAN, HE PREFERS TO LEAVE IDEOLOGIES TO ONE SIDE. MOST OF HIS WORK HAS BEEN DEVOTED TO STUDYING THE HISTORY OF CATALAN CULTURE AND ITS RELATIONS WITH EUROPE. HE HAS SPECIALIZED IN RAMON LLULL, ARNAU DE VILANOVA, THE BORGHIAS, THE 18TH CENTURY AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT.

ASSUMPCIÓ MARESMA JOURNALIST

Miquel Batllori i Munné has one foot in Rome and the other in Barcelona. He has been director of the "Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu". He is emeritus professor of the Pontifical Gregorian University of Rome. He is a regular attendee at international congresses on historical sciences and the Crown of Aragon and has been on the International Committee of Historical Sciences. He is a member of the Madrid Academy of History and a corresponding member of the "Institut d'Estudis Catalans" and the "Acadèmia de les Bones Lletres".

His extensive writings, published in different languages, come to more than two hundred titles. He has a clear predilection for the history of culture. Most of his work has been devoted to a systematic study of European and American documentary sources on the history of Catalan culture and its relations with Europe. He has specialized in Ramon Llull, Arnau de Vilanova, the Borgia family, the 18th century and the Enlightenment.

When he was awarded the *Generalitat's* Gold Medal, the Catalan government's highest award, the philosopher Pere Lluís Font said of Miquel Batllori i Munné that he had "something –or a great deal– of the *uomo universale* of the Florentine grand hours".

Miquel Batllori i Munné recently celebrated his eightieth birthday. He was born in the Plaça Catalunya, the very heart of Barcelona, the convulsed Barcelona of 1909, a city ablaze with anticlericalism. In 1928 he became a Jesuit, as a result of which he was exiled in Italy when the Jesuit order was dissolved by the 2nd Republic. His age, which brings him homages, compliments and recognition of his achievements –a little late, as always–, doesn't keep him from his habit of studying and writing. He still has a lot of work to do. He's aware of his age because it forces him to make concessions. Concessions in his timetable; to reduce the number of hours he works and have a break every two years or so.

And although he's now going through one of these periods of convalescence, he's preparing a speech for the Catalan Parliament on the bicentenary of the declaration of Human Rights in Paris in 1789. This is one of the many jobs he hasn't been able to avoid. After that, he's going back to Rome, to live what he calls a "different age", devoted to



work on the Dictionary of the History of the Jesuits, a project on which he's making good progress. He says he turns down 10 % of the invitations he receives.

Once the work is finished, he'll devote himself to his most eagerly awaited work, the collected letters of the Borgias, a work which has raised great expectations and which he seems to be in no hurry to finish. This delay, with all its reasonable reasons, could suggest a certain wish to let the work mature, so that it appears at just the right moment, and neither author nor work are devoured by controversy.

He talks learnedly, with the precision of the wise, with a vocabulary which is rich, natural and direct, though inevitably containing the occasional Jesuitic twist. Throughout the interview, he uses this linguistic weapon to intentionally avoid revealing too many of the discoveries of the collected letters, while at the same time hinting at them. He who avoids siding with either the pseudo-

Borgians or the anti-Borgians knows he will have to face the music when the letters are published.

Perhaps because he knows this, he wrote in 1958, "In history, there is no place for excuses or claims, but only for documentary evidence and reflections leading to revisions which are objective and serene, free of any kind of passion or prejudice. If the pseudo-Borgians get annoyed because I give no belligerence to their anticritical fantasies, then I shall rejoice with a contemptuous silence. And if the anti-Borgians accuse me of excessive sympathy for the pope who dignified for the last time, at the height of the *Renaissance*, his language, which is also mine, then forgive me my slight sympathy for their profound, impassioned antipathy".

A great believer in the value of documentary evidence, Miquel Batllori also tells us that as a historian he prefers to leave ideologies to one side, as they are biased and harmful. Also, he says, he is becoming more and more of a historical agnostic.

His European vocation comes from a time when people still didn't speak of Europe. It comes from a university, Barcelona, and from his teachers. It was here that he graduated in history and law in 1928. Miquel Batllori can still recall each of his courses and teachers and their good points. The general, international vision that Bosch i Gimpera gave in his classes on Ancient History, Professor Angel de Peláez, with his History of Art, and, especially, Jordi Rubió, of whom he considers himself a disciple. One thing stands out in all his teachers: their ability to make him see culture as something universal. "It was when I was at the university that I felt much more Catalan, much more European. That was my taking-off point."

Going back over his origins, Miquel Batllori remembers that his mother was Cuban, the daughter of a farmer who went to Havana to make his fortune, and that because of that they spoke Spanish at home. "It was when I went to university that I became aware of what our Catalan culture meant. It was then that I began to 'change my skin' a bit. I've never had to change my jacket or shirt, but I began to feel more and more Catalan. And I began to make a point of learning not only the language and the literature but also to think the same in Castilian and Catalan. When I was a child at the school in the carrer Casp, I



spoke Catalan very badly, and the boys used to laugh at me."

In describing this man, who dislikes superlatives and exaggerations—except when absolutely necessary—it becomes impossible not to use every possible superlative to qualify his Catalan spirit and his erudition.

—What was Catalonia's geopolitical position as regards Europe in the late Middle Ages?

—First of all, let me point out that, in spite of what is often said in journalistic circles, the union of Catalonia and Aragon, although it was a personal union, wasn't just a union by marriage, it was a political pact.

"This was of a very considerable political and economic interest. On the one hand, Catalonia increased its hinter-

land; and on the other, Aragon made sure of its independence as regards Navarre and Castile and of the chance of having an opening to the sea.

"It was a time that shows us what our history should have been, the history of the whole of the Crown of Aragon, which was a political plurality at home and a unity away from our territory. From that moment a dual phenomenon arose: our king was always referred to simply as the King of Aragon, except in the complicated chancellery documents that specified all his kingdoms and added Count of Barcelona at the end; while all the subjects of the King of Aragon, away from the Peninsula and the Balearics, were normally just called Catalans.

One example of this can be seen in the

right granted to Pere el Ceremoniós to resettle Alguer, where it says quite clearly that by 'Catalans' it is understood to mean all his subjects.

—Was it at this moment that Catalonia's period of expansion began?

—The union of the Crown of Aragon allowed commercial expansion across the Pyrenees with the counties of the south of France, especially Tolosa (Toulouse) and, even more so, Provence, which was linked to Catalonia at different times. And in the other direction, Catalonia's political and commercial expansion towards Italy, providing a bridge towards North Africa and the East.

"The expansionist tendency directed towards the Mediterranean was the result of a key marriage, that of Pere el Gran



and Constança of Suabia, which put the Crown of Aragon in contact with an eastern world which in those moments was of enormous importance to commerce.

"Then came the occupations of Sardinia and Naples. And though the second of these kingdoms became politically detached from the Crown of Aragon after the death of Alfons el Magnànim, Catalan survived there as the second language of the chancellery and Castilian as the second language of the court.

—What relations did Barcelona and Valencia have with Naples?

—There are very serious studies —some of them unpublished, like those left by the late Federigo Melis— on the importance of the two cities' contribution to the conquest of Naples. There was a

moment when King Alfons was practically cornered and couldn't make a final attack on the city. It was the financial help from Barcelona and Valencia, and the military help from the Cabrera family, who had fiefs in Catalonia and Sicily, that backed up the final campaign leading to the submission of Naples.

"That was why King Alfons did so much in our favour. In 1494, his grandson, Alfons II, gathered together the privileges of the guild of Catalans in the city of Naples, which were special trading privileges. This guild lasted until the time of Carles II, that is, until the end of the 17th century. That was why the merchants of Catalonia, Valencia and Majorca weren't too interested in trading with America; they preferred to go

on with a medieval tradition which had been a great financial boost to them. In fact, foreign travellers of the time speak of the great splendour of the city of Barcelona, at a time when we speak of decadence. So this supposed decadence wasn't so obvious; from the economic point of view, perhaps it wasn't so bad.

—At this time of Catalan domination...

—Domination is an ultranationalist word that I don't like. It's out of date. Catalonia was extremely successful in Mediterranean trade, but to speak of domination would be an exaggeration.

—Expansion or empire?

—Expansion more than imperialism, because imperialism is a word that implies domination. But the significance we Catalans originally had in history was



that political pact with Aragon, which allowed and guaranteed Mediterranean expansion. That first pact between Catalonia and Aragon, and the subsequent conquests of Majorca and Valencia, created a personal union, but one which came closer and closer to what in modern constitutional law is known as a confederation.

—Was Catalan expansion political, cultural or economic?

—It was primarily economic, secondly —but at the same time— political, and thirdly cultural. Of course, it's quite clear that Catalonia received far more from Italy than vice versa, especially after early humanism. Before that, the influence of Ramon Llull, Arnau de Vilanova and some of our great chroniclers was quite widely felt in Italy.

—Do you think these people you mention from our culture are the ones that stand out most both in Italy and in other European kingdoms?

—When I was researching into the Catalan Jesuits in Italy, after the expulsion of King Carles, I made a systematic study of Italy's most important archives and libraries. Concentrating on the field of medieval Catalan culture, I realized that there were three truly international figures from the whole of the Catalan area. "From Catalonia, Sant Ramon de Penafort; from Majorca, Ramon Llull, and from Valencia, Arnau de Vilanova. As

an international figure, I'd add Sant Vicenç Ferrer, as well, especially for his spiritual writings and his collections of sermons. There aren't many Italian or European libraries with important medieval collections which don't include these figures.

—Who was Ramon Llull of interest to?

—Ramon Llull was of interest to everyone in the world of the new Renaissance philosophy. No other writer in Catalan has left his mark so clearly, geographically and chronologically, as Ramon Llull.

"'Lul·lisme' continually recreates itself. First we find a 'Lul·lisme' of an intellectual type, mainly theologico-philosophical in nature. At the end of the 15th century, there was a growing interest in science as such, and then Llull was taken as the man who sought the unity of all scientific truth. Round about the year 1400, a 'pseudo-Lul·lisme' appeared, and a lot of doctors wrote works on alchemy which are falsely attributed to Ramon Llull and which help to make him a myth.

"But his influence over the years doesn't end here. As a result of the persistence of his 'combinatòria', both in northern Italy and in Germany, he has had an important influence on the world of Giordano Bruno, in 'nemotècnica'.

"Following the decline of philosophical and theological 'Lul·lisme', we find a

critical 'Lul·lisme' of a historical sort, which has its precedents in 16th century Majorca, with Father Andreu Moragues, the first person to attempt a more or less critical biography of Ramon Llull. Critical 'Lul·lisme' continues into the 18th century and then joins forces with the Renaissance 'Lul·lisme', which develops into a philological interest in Ramon Llull.

—Was this Catalan cultural movement made up of isolated figures or is it a more extensive movement?

—I realized that there was a group of thinkers and writers who had had a certain significance as isolated individuals, like Eiximenis. But we also come across important remains of what we could call a Catalano-Neapolitan culture. This group includes one very interesting Catalan figure called Lluís de Besalú, falconer to Alfons el Magnànim, who left a book on falconry, written in Italian in Catalan spelling. And a Valencian, Llop Despejo, from Oriola, who wrote a history of the kings of Naples in Italian.

"At the end of the 15th century, one of the Italian classics is Joan Garret, from Barcelona, who changed his name to Cariteo, who was a Dantesque poet, one of the Italian classics at the peak of humanism. At the same time, there was a survival of the medieval spirituals, which lasted well into the 16th century in the Kingdom of Aragon. I won't go



into it in depth, because it's recently been extensively and accurately covered by Alain Milhou.

—You've been studying the Borgias for a long time now. Why do the Borgias arouse more controversy and feeling than almost any other European family?

—Because the Protestants used them as an example of Catholic corruption in the court and in the person of Alexander VI. This has made them a controversial topic which comes up in any conflict between Catholics and Protestants.

"On the other hand, one must admit that they gave cause for controversy. The only thing that saved Alexander VI was the fact that he was a very intelligent Valencian. He managed to combine pontifical politics and Italian, Spanish and family politics, and play them off against one another.

—It has been said that only family politics mattered to them.

—It's been said that the basis of their politics was the exaltation of their large family. But that wasn't the only thing their politics centred on. Their reign can be taken as the end of all feudalism in the small states of north-central Italy—a low-key feudalism from a political point of view, though not from a cultural point of view—in favour of a more coherent organization of Papal States.

"The Papal States of Pius IX were practically a continuation of the ones crea-

ted in the days of Alexander VI and Cèsar Borgia. This was the politician in him. From the moral and individual point of view, Alexander VI was a disaster. A contradictory man, a man who was personally devout but amoral on a human level. His daughter used to say he was *l'uomo piu sensuale que e conecutto del mondo*.

—Do the documents that you've investigated on the Borgias say anything about the relationship between Lucretia and her father?

—There are two documents in the Modena Archives which we already know of, a document in the Archives of the Jesuits of Rome and two more in the Capitular Archives of Valencia, from which we deduce with almost historical certainty that Lucretia was Alexander VI's lover. These documents refer to Joan Borgia I, Duke of Nepi and of Camerino.

—Did the Borgias use the Catalan language?

—The Catalan language of Valencia was the language of the court of Rome. There are even letters from a certain Ortiz to a certain Carranza, both Castilian, which are written in Catalan. Catalan was the language of the court and it was respected and used as such.

—You've devoted a lot of time to the collected letters of the Borgias. Are you still working on them?

—The collected letters will have to be

very well annotated; what's needed is a critical edition. By my calculations there'll be five volumes. Of these, I've got three that are ready with the philological section complete. For the historical section, I'm waiting for the imminent publication of the documents collected by Lluís Cerveró i Gomis in Valencia, which are being checked by two experts from the "Generalitat Valenciana". This work covers the period from the 12th century to the 16th century. I reach the time of Sant Francesc de Borja and his brothers and step-brothers.

"As from next summer, God willing, once I've finished the last volume of the Vidal i Barraquer Archives, I hope to start on the prologue of the history of the Borgia family and start publishing the collected letters. I don't regret not having published the collected letters of the Borgias before now, because a lot has changed in the forty years since I started the work. Now, after this century of Freud and sexual revolution, people are better prepared, even the 'most devout' people aren't so easily shocked. There are some things that would have caused a real scandal if they'd been written forty years ago. ●