

Ramon Llull and the *virtus verborum*: A theological exploration*

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doi: 10.3306/STUDIALULLIANA.115.37

Rebut el 30 de setembre de 2019. Acceptat el 13 d'abril de 2020.

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Abstract

This contribution presents an alternative to Asin Palacios' assumed connection of Llull's statement from the prologue of *Cent noms de Déu*, "since God has put power into words, stones and herbs, how much more, then, has he put power in his names", with Muslim thinking. It maps out the Christian context of this statement, thus providing additional material to support the thesis that *Cent noms de Déu* was intended for a Christian audience. That "God has put power into words, stones and herbs" was in fact a widespread proverb in the medieval West. Thus, far from connecting Llull with Islamic sources, the presence of this statement on the virtue of words in the prologue of *Cent noms de Déu* would secure Llull a place in the medieval European debate on this topic. After situating the notion of *virtus verborum* in its theological context, above all that of medieval sacramental theology, we will sketch the use of the medieval proverb itself and have a closer look at Llull's use of the proverb, which also links this concept of *virtus verborum* with the concept of the names of God, before we draw some conclusions for locating *Cent noms de Déu* in the picture we sketched.

Key Words

Power of words, *verbum efficax*, sacraments, instrumental causality, white magic, textual amulets



*This paper is part of a project that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 746221 *Christianus Arabicus*.

Studia lulliana 60 (2020), 37-56

<http://www.msl.cat/revista/revista%20portada.htm>

<http://studialulliana.uib.cat>

ISSN 2340 – 4752

Resum

Aquest treball ofereix una alternativa a la connexió que Asín Palacios estableia entre el pròleg dels *Cent noms de Déu* i el pensament musulmà, quan s'hi diu que «con Deus haja posada virtut en paraules, peres e erbes, quant, doncs, mays l'ha posada en los seus noms». S'explora el context cristià d'aquesta afirmació de manera que també es proporciona material per donar suport a la tesi que Llull va escriure els *Cent noms de Déu* pensant en una audiència cristiana. De fet, que «Deus haja posada virtut en paraules, peres e erbes» era un proverbi molt estès a l'Occident medieval. Per això, en lloc de connectar amb fonts islàmiques, l'afirmació sobre la virtut de les paraules al pròleg dels *Cent noms de Déu* assigna a Llull un lloc en el debat que hi havia a l'Europa medieval sobre aquesta qüestió. Després de situar la *virtus verborum* en el context teològic que li escau, especialment el de la teologia sacramental, el treball perfila l'ús del proverbi medieval pròpiament dit i repassa l'ús que en fa Llull, de manera que la noció de la *virtus verborum* s'acaba associant al concepte dels noms de Déu, i d'aquí es poden extreure algunes conclusions per situar els *Cent noms de Déu* en el quadre que s'ha dibuixat.

Paraules clau

Poder de les paraules, *verbum efficax*, sacraments, causalitat instrumental, màgia blanca, amulets textuais

Summary

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Under the subheading *La virtud secreta de los nombres divinos*, Miguel Asín Palacios connects Lull's statement from the prologue of *Cent noms de Déu*, "since God has put power into words, stones and herbs, how much more, then, has he put power in his names",¹ with the statement in Ibn 'Arabi's *Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, "the letters that compose the divine names have virtues or qualities, the same which the physical elements, the drugs and all things have".² Thus, Asín Palacios assumes a natural link between a Muslim understanding and Lull's use of the concept of *virtus verborum*.

In this contribution I will question Asín Palacios' assumed connection of Lull's statement with Muslim thinking by mapping out its Christian context, thus providing additional material to support the thesis that *Cent noms de Déu* was intended for a Christian audience. My hypothesis is that the quotation which Asín Palacios believed Lull to have taken from Ibn 'Arabi's *Meccan Revelations* was in fact a widespread proverb in the medieval West. Thus, far from connecting Lull with Islamic sources, the presence of this statement on the virtue of words in the prologue of *Cent noms de Déu* would secure Lull a place in the medieval European debate on this topic. After situating the notion of *virtus verborum* in its theological context, above all that of medieval sacramental theology, we will sketch the use of the medieval proverb "God put virtue into words, stones, and herbs"—"in verbis, lapidibus et herbis", and have a closer look at Lull's use of the proverb, which also links this concept of *virtus verborum* with the concept of the names of God, before we draw some conclusions for locating *Cent noms de Déu* in the picture we sketched.

1. *Virtus verborum*. Do words have power?

In modern times, ever since John Austin published *How to Do Things With Words?*,³ later developed in the so called Speech Act theory,⁴ the answer to the question 'Do words have power?' is a clear 'yes'. Yet already in medieval times people were asking: Do words have power? And if so, from where

¹ Ramon Llull, *Cent noms de Déu*, ORL XIX, 75-170, p. 81: "Con Deus haja posada virtut en paraules, peres e erbes, quant, doncs, mays l'ha posada en los seus noms".

² Miguel Asín Palacios, *Abenmasarra y su escuela* (Madrid: E. Maestre, 1914), p. 160: "Las letras que componen los nombres divinos tienen virtudes o propiedades, lo mismo que las tienen los elementos físicos, las drogas y todas las cosas."

³ John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

⁴ Cf. e.g. John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An essay in the philosophy of language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

does this power originate? How is it transmitted? Is there a way to influence it? These questions sound as if this article were about to dive into the darkest period of the Middle Ages, first and foremost dealing with the incantations of witches, sorcerers, and magicians. Yet, as a matter of fact, the notion of *virtus verborum* was quite popular among theologians. Between the years 1230 and 1270 it was theologically discussed by Franciscan theologians, above all Roger Bacon (ca. 1220-1292) and Bonaventure (1221-1274). Of course, also other theological voices chimed in, like Albert the Great (ca. 1193-1280),⁵ William of Auvergne (1180/90-1249) and Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274). Not all of them were equally happy with the concept itself, yet nevertheless, even their opposition to it makes it less likely that it originated exclusively in the Muslim world.

2. Medieval sacramental theology

The transforming power of Christ's words, when, during the Last Supper, he said "This is my body", "This is my blood", was an obvious truth for medieval faithful and theologians alike. "In the *Aurora*, a popular paraphrase of the Bible in verse written by the French cleric Petrus Riga (ca. 1140-1209) at the Abbey of St. Denis in Reims, Gospel accounts of the Last Supper emphasize the essential virtue of Christ's *sacra verba*."⁶ I quote the text of one of the most popular passages:

Sic sine Carne Sacra Christi uel Sanguine Sancto /
 Plebs non sanatur nec sciatur ei. /
 'Ecce meum Corpus hoc est; Sanguis meus hic est,' /
 Dum profert, miram *uim* sacra uerba ferunt. /
Verborum uirtus agit ut transumptio fiat; /
 Panis cum uino fit Caro fitque Cruor. /
 Dum Dominus profert hec uerba duo sacra, panis /
 Fit Corpus, uinum Sanguis ad illa duo. /
 Et *uerbis* illis tunc *uim* concessit eandem /
 Vt sic posteritas uerba per illa sacret.⁷

⁵ Cf. Albertus Magnus, *Commentarium in quartum librum Sententiarum*, d. 5B, a. 4, Auguste Borgnet (ed.) (Paris: Vivès, 1894), vol. 29, p. 11: "Ad aliud dicendum, quod nihil est simile de curatione corporum, et animarum: quia lapides et herbae ex virtutibus consequentibus contrarietates complexiones suas habent ad causas morborum corporalium: sed nullam potest homo habere talem comparationem ad causam morbi spiritualis: uerba autem non curant nisi per invocationem."

⁶ Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), p. 89, n. 42.

⁷ Paul E. Beichner (ed.), *Aurora Petri Rigae Biblia versificata*, Publications in Mediaeval Studies 19 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), vol. 2, pp. 514-515, ll. 2325-2334 (my emphasis).

The designations *vis* and *virtus* are used interchangeably in this narrative of the Last Supper. The power is first and foremost ascribed to the words uttered by Jesus Christ himself during the very event of the Last Supper. Yet the last two lines state that Christ intended their application in the future and therefore provided them with lasting power. Why this power of Christ's words would be obvious to every medieval Christian becomes clear when we go back all the way to Augustine (†430).

2.1 Sacramental theology according to Augustine

Augustine was thinking along Platonic lines. All things and events in the material, visible world are images and signs of the higher, spiritual world. Yet, through sin "Adam had perverted the relationship to signs and things that God had planned, but God, in the divine plan of salvation, had begun to restore the right order. Within this plan is the gift of the *sacramenta*, the sacred signs that indicate and contain the divine".⁸ Therefore, Augustine starts from locating the sacraments within the realm of signs, "or more precisely, of those visible signs that in and of themselves, that is, of their very nature, and not by convention (based on general agreement) lead us to perceive something other than what their external appearance at first reveals".⁹ By letting us detect something other than just the superficial external appearance, such signs facilitate a direct inference, as, for example, from a moving windmill to wind or from smoke to fire. This 'something other' is an invisible reality (*res*) which in the case of sacraments can only be perceived through them. "The most dignified of all signs is the word, for through it the invisible reality itself can be perceived."¹⁰ For Augustine words take such a pride of place that he can call all other signs 'visible words'.¹¹ He explains this further in his *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*: the external side of sacraments has a similarity to their sacred content, so that the sacraments are 'natural' signs, whose meaning is inherent in themselves. A sacrament is composed of an element, perceptible to the senses, and an interpretive word. In baptism, this would for instance be water and the baptismal formula 'Ego te baptizo in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti'. Since the word is the most dignified of signs, it causes the element to be a sacrament: "Take the word away, and what is the water other than

⁸ Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, transl. Linda Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), pp. 49-50.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹¹ Cf. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* II, ch. 3,5, in *Aurelii Augustini opera* 4,1, Joseph Martin (ed.), *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (CChrSL) 32 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1962), p. 34, ll. 3-10.

mere water? The word joins the element and becomes a sacrament”—“Accedit uerbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum”.¹² Ultimately, it is God through Christ in the Holy Spirit, who as the real and active agent in the sacraments causes grace. Yet for the Christians assembled for the Eucharist it is the priest who by repeating the words of Christ changes the bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord.

2.2 Scholastic sacramental theories on the effectiveness of sacraments

Augustine’s sacramental theory was adopted throughout the Latin West and remained influential also for the scholastic understanding of sacraments. Some early scholastic theologians, like Hugh of St. Victor (†1141), however, found the concept of ‘sign’ too broad. They were looking for a definition that would only apply to sacraments by not just designating their signifying, but also their effective character.¹³ For Hugh sacraments contain grace. He therefore uses therapeutic language and calls them ‘vessels of grace’ containing the medicine against sin and its consequences.

Peter Lombard (†1160) with his definition of sacrament already clearly moves beyond the threshold of the Patristic era with its Augustinian thinking. For him “sacrament in the true sense is called that which is in such a way a sign of the grace of God, that it bears its image and is its cause”—“sacramentum [...] proprie dicitur, quod ita signum est gratiae Dei [...], ut ipsius imaginem gerat et causa existat”.¹⁴ With the key word *imago* he still looks back to Augustine’s theory of signs, with the key word *causa* he already foreshadows the Scholastic attempt to integrate newly-discovered Aristotelian ideas into theological thinking.¹⁵ From Peter Lombard onwards, the *dictio communis* of scholastic

¹² Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium tractatus*, 80,3, R. Willems (ed.), CChrSL 36 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), p. 529, ll. 4-11: “Detrahe uerbum et quid est aqua nisi aqua? Accedit uerbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum, etiam ipsum tanquam uisibile uerbum. [...] Vnde ista tanta uirtus aquae ut corpus tangat et cor abluat, nisi faciente uerbo, non quia dicitur, sed quia creditur? Nam et in ipso uerbo aliud est sonus transiens, aliud est uirtus manens.”

¹³ Cf. Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacramentis legis naturalis et scriptae dialogus*, 34D, in *Opera omnia* II, Jacques-Paul Migne (ed.), Patrologia Latina (PL) 176, 17-42. Cf. also his definition of sacraments in *De sacramentis Christianae fidei*, I, 9,2 (PL 176, 317): “Sacramentum est corporale vel materiale elementum foris sensibiler propositum ex similitudine repraesentans, et ex institutione significans, et ex significatione continens aliquam invisibilem et spiritualem gratiam.”

¹⁴ Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae* IV, d. 1, ch. 4,2 (Grottaferrata-Rome: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae Ad Claras Aquas, 1981), p. 233: “sacramentum enim proprie dicitur, quod ita signum est gratiae Dei et invisibilis gratiae forma, ut ipsius imaginem gerat et causa existat. Non igitur significandi tantum gratia sacramenta instituta sunt, sed et sanctificandi”.

¹⁵ Cf. Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, pp. 52-53: “The hylemorphic doctrine that everything phys-

sacramental theology read *verba efficiunt quod figurant*—words bring about what they represent—which clearly attests to the notion of *virtus verborum*. Several commentaries on the Fourth Book of the *Sententiae* by Peter Lombard actually start from the sentence *sacramenta efficiunt quod figurant*.¹⁶

Thus, the main question in the 13th century was how sacraments would gain their effectiveness. Three possible solutions were being discussed. Arguing from an anthropological point of view, the *Summa Halensis*, published after 1235 as a common work of early Franciscan theologians, speaks of a dispositive effectiveness: the sacrament brings about a certain disposition, that is an effect in the human soul. This effect is not yet God’s grace itself but prepares for such grace.

Bonaventure, in his *Breviloquium*, argues against any causal relation between sacrament and grace, because God is the sole agent and God did not bind his power exclusively to sacraments. That sacraments indeed possess an effect is not due to them causing that effect themselves but to God’s decreeing that they should have such an effect. In his *Commentary on the Sentences* Bonaventure states that God by a contractual promise (“ex quadam pactione”)¹⁷ each time operates his power whenever someone receives a sacrament.

Thomas Aquinas, however, was not content with Bonaventure’s contract theory, because it would degrade the sacraments from causes of grace into mere conditions for grace. They would resemble a lead coin (*denarium plumbeum*) which was only worth *centum libras*, 100 Pounds, because the king decreed so, but had in comparison to a genuine gold coin no value at all.¹⁸ Therefore, Aquinas advocates the concept of instrumental causality. Sacraments are the instruments in God’s hand (*causa instrumentalis*), yet God remains the

ical and perceptible by the senses is a union of the changeable (matter) and the principle (form) that gave structure and definition, was applied to the sacraments from the beginning of the thirteenth century onward.”

¹⁶ Peter Lombard himself uses the formula in dist. IV on baptism (*Sententiae* IV, d. 4, ch. 1, n. 2, 252) and dist. XXII on the sacrament of confession (ibid. IV, d. 22, ch. 2, n. 4, 389). More explicitly, the Albertist Lambertus De Monte starts his commentary on Book IV of the *Sententiae* with the first general question: “utrum sacramenta nove legis efficiunt quod figurant, hoc est conferant gratiam quam significant, et hoc ratione operis operati” (Brugge, Town Library 760, f. 220r).

¹⁷ Bonaventure, *In quartum librum Sententiarum*, d. I, p. 1, q. 4, in *Bonaventurae opera omnia*, vol. IV (Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi): Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae Ad Claras Aquas, 1889), p. 23.

¹⁸ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 62 a. 1 co.: “Quidam tamen dicunt quod non sunt causa gratiae aliquid operando, sed quia Deus, sacramentis adhibitis, in anima gratiam operatur. Et ponunt exemplum de illo qui, afferens denarium plumbeum, accipit centum libras ex regis ordinatione, non quod denarius ille aliquid operetur ad habendum praedictae pecuniae quantitatem”, Robert Busa *et al.* (eds.), <<http://www.corpusthomicum.org/iopera.html>> (October 24, 2019), from which source, that is an updated and corrected version of the *Editio Leonina*, all works by Aquinas in this article are quoted.

real agent in bestowing grace. This renders sacraments in no way superfluous. Because human beings are bodily creatures, for God bodily-material signs are the adequate means of communicating with them. Therefore, Aquinas is convinced that wherever a sacrament is administered according to the intention of Christ and the Church and the fitting matter is combined with the adequate form, there this sacrament infallibly effects grace.

In these sacramental concepts the *virtus* of the *verbum efficax*, of the effective word, is equivalent to the *virtus causandi gratiam* of the sacrament. The sacramental word ensures that God reliably bestows divine grace. The notion of performativity, of the spoken word as an act which effects something is embedded in these theological theories. Yet why should all this be confined just to sacraments? It does not come as a surprise that Bonaventure asks in his commentary on Book IV of the *Sententiae*: “Utrum virtus verborum possit convertere quantamcumque materiam”¹⁹—whether the power of words can convert any physical matter or element.

3. God put virtue into words, stones, and herbs

If the power of words is involved in sacraments, then it can also work in benedictions, vows, (apotropaic) prayers, exorcisms and even charms and incantations. After all, in John 14:14 Jesus Christ promised: “If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.” Relying on this sentence from the gospel, “a Christian with faith would surely expect this promise to be unailing”.²⁰ Thus the idea of *verbum efficax* was broadened and the *virtus verborum* became an element of folk religion embedded in popular devotional practices.

In the 13th century, there was an intense intellectual debate going on about how the power of words in such non-sacramental instances could be explained. The main concern of these discussions was whether it is possible to act “through words, naturally and at a distance, without the intervention of a divine or demonic force”.²¹ The options of God as immediate agent, God as agent in creation, and demons as agents basically boiled down to the binary choice ‘God or a demon’. As a rule of thumb with God as agent the *virtus verborum* was positive and aimed at protecting and healing, while the “negative goals of black magic

¹⁹ Bonaventure, *In quartum librum Sententiarum*, d. X, p. 2, a. 1, q. 4, pp. 232-234.

²⁰ Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 15.

²¹ Béatrice Delaurenti, “Agir par les mots au Moyen Âge: Communication et action dans les débats sur le pouvoir des incantations”, *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 158/2 (2012), 53-71, p. 55; quoted English version “Acting Through Words in the Middle Ages. Communication and Action in Debates on the Power of Incantations” <www.cairn-int.info> (October 24, 2019).

or necromancy, appealing to demons, often [intended] to injure other people”.²² The proverb “God put his virtue into words, stones, and herbs”²³ clearly opts for God as agent and supposes that a non-demonic efficacy of the human word would either entail God’s direct interference or a natural efficacy.

Yet, scholastic texts of the time provide ample material to show that this ligature between God and the *virtus verborum* was by no means the outcome that would have been obvious from the very beginning. The opinions on whether it is legitimate to use and rely on the power of words in such circumstances reached from total opposition, on the one hand, to an unreserved theological interpretation, on the other, and increasingly tended to assume natural causes, that in the end brought forth a naturalistic interpretation. Thus, from the second half of the 13th century onwards the question of the power of words clearly took a more specifically medical turn.

3.1 Some critical voices: fraud or demons

Notably the voices critical of any non-sacramental *virtus verborum* could rely on a longstanding Christian tradition that during the Patristic times, once again culminated in Augustine of Hippo.²⁴ In *De doctrina christiana*, he condemned all attempts at trying to influence God’s actions: “All the arrangements made by men to the making and worshipping of idols are superstitious, pertaining as they do either to the worship of what is created or of some part of it as God, or to consultations and arrangements about signs and leagues with devils, such, for example, as are employed in the magical arts.”²⁵ Augustine stressed that only God can work miracles and that pagan practices of incantations or other forms of idolatry are either fraudulent or based on demonic interference. Christians of sincere faith who pray in approved ways are deemed

²² Skemer, *Binding Words*, p. 60.

²³ Cf. Louise M. Bishop, *Words, Stones & Herbs: The healing word in medieval and early modern England* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007); Béatrice Delaurenti, *La puissance des mots, “virtus verborum”: Débats doctrinaux sur le pouvoir des incantations* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2007); Irène Rosier-Catach, *La Parole efficace. Signe, rituel, sacré*, Avant-propos d’Alain de Libera (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

²⁴ Augustine’s arguments against the use of magic are e.g. summarised by Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 413-418; Valerie I.J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 244-245; Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditations, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 7-8, 201-202, 389-390.

²⁵ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, II, ch. 20,30, 54, ll. 1-5: “Superstitiosum est quicquid institutum est ab hominibus ad faciendam et colendam idola pertinens uel ad colendam sicut Deum creaturam partem uel ullam creaturam uel ad consultationes et pacta quaedam significationum cum daemonibus placita atque foederata, qualia sunt molimina magicarum artium.”

worthy by God to receive divine blessings. However, “Christian ritual practices are useless when based on an idolatrous devotion to handmade objects rather than on faith. Oral repetition and magical arrangements of divine names produce sounds without meaning, words without truth. They are the Devil’s traps to snare the unwary and place their souls in grave peril.”²⁶ Augustine clearly flagged the dangers of using superstitious practices.

William of Auvergne followed closely in Augustine’s footsteps. From when he became bishop of Paris in 1228 until his death in 1249, he strongly opposed all forms of idolatry and superstition, especially those that involved words and names.²⁷ He tried to refute the notion of *virtus verborum* in both a non-sacramental and a non-natural context. If words by themselves really had a particular power they would either act by the strength of their meaning (*significatio*), or by the force of the thing they designate (*figuratum*).²⁸ He refutes the first possibility by introducing the example of images as a parallel: if words were to act through their meaning, even more so images would act through their meaning.²⁹ He writes: “Therefore, the image would have more power to kill anyone who looks at it than names or words. And thus the contemplation or sight of an image would kill anyone who observes it or sees it, and this would happen in the same way for all natural things.”³⁰ Thus William of Auvergne argues that attributing power to the *meaning of words* is not logical.

²⁶ Skemer, *Binding Words*, p. 32. In his fervent condemnation of magic, Augustine was followed by Martin of Braga (ca. 515-580), Gregory of Tours (538-593), Gregory the Great (540-604), Isidore of Seville (560-636), Eligius of Noyon (588-659) and others.

²⁷ Cf. William of Auvergne, *De legibus 27*, in *Guilielmi Alverni episcopi Parisiensis mathematici perfectissimi, eximii philosophi, ac theologia praestantissimi opera omnia...*, vol. I (Paris: F. Hotot; London: Robert Scott, 1674), 18-102; pp. 90-91: “Septima pars idolatriae, sicut diximus in praecedentibus, idolatria est verborum et nominum quibus tantam virtutem imponunt malefici, ut ipso auditu et homines et animalia occiderent, et etiam inspectione literarum et figurarum, quibus scripta essent, sicut dicebat Judaeus ille maleficus, qui sola infusione verborum quorundam, taurum visus est occidisse.”

²⁸ Cf. William of Auvergne, *De legibus 27*, 90: “Si enim ista virtus inesset verbis, esset eis ex necessitate uno quatuor modorum, hoc est, vel a parte materiae suae, hoc est aere, aut a parte formae suae, hoc est soni sive sonationis, aut a parte significatorum, aut ex omnibus his aut ex aliquibus illorum. [...] Tertia via similiter erronea est et impossibilis videlicet ut a parte figurati sit huiusmodi virtus verbis atque nominibus; si enim malitia et nocumenta signati praestarent hanc virtutem nocendi verbis atque nominibus, nomen mortis atque inferni mortem et tormentum intolerabile et tormentum necessario inferret audientibus.”

²⁹ *Ibid.*: “Ista virtus aut esset nominibus et verbis a parte signati, quia signant, hoc est ratione significationis, aut quia res, hoc est propter ipsam rem quae signatur. Quod si dixerit, quia ratione significationis tunc necesse est, ut quae magis eadem signant maiorem habent huiusmodi virtutem; quare imagines rerum, sive pictae, sive sculptae, magis huiusmodi virtutem habent, quam verba et nomina, cum magis hoc est evidentiuss, et expressius significant et ita fortior erit imago aliquantum et similitudo ad occidendum respicientem eam, quam nomina quaecumque vel verba.”

³⁰ *Ibid.*: “et ita inspectione alicuius imaginis vel visu morietur quicumque visor vel inspector: et de

The second option would be “that words act as a result of the power of the thing they name”.³¹ To refute this assumption William of Auvergne distinguishes between the order of meaning and the natural order. “The word, he says, does not contain the thing it names. It does not therefore contain the power of that thing either. The power of a word cannot derive from the powers of the thing it names.”³² For him as theologian it is clear that if there is a power in incantations or of any other superstitious practice, it derives from the devil alone.³³ “In his view, the veneration of physical forms (*figurae*), whether sculpted, written, painted, or carved, in expectation of working miracles and receiving divine blessing, was essentially idolatrous.”³⁴ However, he concedes that there is one exception, one form of ‘natural magic’: he acknowledges that this exception is worked by music and sound.³⁵ Yet he is quick in pointing out that it has a purely natural cause, referring to Plato’s cosmology and the music of the spheres.³⁶

3.2 Advocates: Natural causes or the grace of God

This exception leaves a loophole for integrating the views of the Muslim philosopher and polymath al-Kindi (†860) into Christian thinking. In his work *De radiis*, he reflects in chapter 6 on the power of words which he situates in the big picture of cosmic harmony. According to al-Kindi, all bodies, whether celestial or natural, emit rays. “This radiation is the manifestation of cosmic harmony and places all living beings in a sort of universal sympathy.”³⁷ Human beings possess a privileged status in this conception of the universe. They are perceived as a microcosm in the macrocosm and they possess the excep-

omni signo naturali similiter se habere necesse erit, cum naturalia signa magis significant quam positiva” (Engl. transl. Delaurenti, *Acting Through Words*, 6).

³¹ Delaurenti, *Acting Through Words*, 6; cf. William of Auvergne, *De legibus* 27, 90: “Tertia via similiter erronea est et impossibilis videlicet ut a parte figurati sit huiusmodi virtus verbis atque nominibus.”

³² Delaurenti, *Acting Through Words*, 6; cf. William of Auvergne, *De legibus* 27, 90: “res enim, quo res, non potius pertinent ad verba et nomina quam ad alia quaecunque: non enim pertinent ad ea nisi propter significationem, et ita non potius prestant eis virtutem huiusmodi quam aliis quibuscunque rebus; quare nulla erit a parte illa virtus nominibus et verbis”.

³³ Cf. William of Auvergne, *De legibus* 27, 89: “Quare declaratum est tibi figuras et characteres huiusmodi non ex virtute sua aliqua naturali operari mirifica illa, sed ex Daemonum pacto, quo cultoribus suis per huiusmodi signa se adesse polliciti sunt.”

³⁴ Skemer, *Binding Words*, p. 60.

³⁵ Cf. William of Auvergne, *De universo* II, 3, 21, in *Opera omnia*, vol. I, pp. 1056-1057.

³⁶ Cf. William of Auvergne, *De legibus*, p. 90: “Quod si dixerit quis, quia consonantia et dissonantia in sonis virtutem habent plurimam atque fortissimam, propter quod et Plato dixit in Timaeo, quia potentissima nostra est musica: et respondemus ei, quia verum est hoc, sed virtus eius tantum naturalis est.”

³⁷ Delaurenti, *Acting Through Words*, 10; cf. id., *Agir par les mots*, p. 61: “Un tel rayonnement manifeste l’harmonie cosmique et installe l’ensemble des êtres vivants dans une sorte de sympathie universelle.”

tional “power to act on the world through words. In this general framework the explanation of *virtus verborum* is based on two principles. First, the emission of sounds belongs to celestial harmony: sounds and words convey the power of the heavens. Second, certain conditions are necessary for the deployment of this force. They concern the aptitudes of the soul: the strength of intention of the speaker and the power of his imagination confer an efficient power on words.”³⁸

Regarding the influence of *De radiis* in the Latin world, it seems that in the second half of the 13th century al-Kindi’s theories became more and more contested. “Between 1259 and 1265, Thomas Aquinas attacked the treatise for its theory of astral influence.”³⁹ Aquinas did not deny that planets can cause natural effects, yet he denies that they possess any supernatural powers whatsoever; therefore they cannot be used for any astrological practices.⁴⁰ The condemnations of Paris in 1270 and 1277 sanctioned the astral determinism on which al-Kindi had built his explanation of the *virtus verborum*. The list of thirteen statements that Étienne Tempier condemned on 10 December 1270 also explicitly denounced the statement that all which happens here on earth underlies and is caused by the coercion of planets.

Nevertheless, the Franciscan friar Roger Bacon (†1292)⁴¹ was obviously influenced by *De radiis*. Bacon was writing about thirty years after William of Auvergne. He refuted any theologically motivated condemnation of the *virtus verborum* which would attribute it to the power of demons. He was convinced that the power of words exists, yet that it has natural not demonic causes.

³⁸ Delaurenti, *Acting Through Words*, 10; cf. id., *Agir par les mots*, pp. 61-62: “Cette conception de l’univers privilégie l’homme, conçu comme un microcosme dans le macrocosme; elle lui attribue le pouvoir d’agir sur le monde par l’intermédiaire des mots. Dans ce cadre général, l’explication de la *virtus verborum* est fondée sur deux principes. Premièrement, l’émission de sons appartient à l’harmonie céleste: les sons et les mots véhiculent la force des cieux. Deuxièmement, certaines conditions sont nécessaires à la mise en œuvre de cette force. Elles concernent les dispositions de l’âme: la force de l’intention du locuteur et le pouvoir de son imagination confèrent aux paroles une force efficiente.”

³⁹ Delaurenti, *Acting Through Words*, 12; cf. id., *Agir par les mots*, p. 62: “Dans les années 1259-65, le traité avait été visé par les attaques de Thomas d’Aquin contre la théorie de l’influence astrale.”

⁴⁰ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, lib. 3 c., p. 104, n. 1: “Fuerunt autem quidam dicentes quod huiusmodi opera nobis mirabilia quae per artes magicas fiunt, non ab aliquibus spiritualibus substantiis fiunt, sed ex virtute caelestium corporum. Cuius signum videtur quod ab exercentibus huiusmodi opera stellarum certus situs consideratur. Adhibentur etiam quaedam herbarum et aliarum corporalium rerum auxilia, quasi ad praeparandam inferiorem materiam ad suscipiendam influentiam virtutis caelestis.” He argues in *ibid.*, n. 3: “Ipsa loquela proprius actus est rationalis naturae. Apparent autem aliqui colloquentes hominibus in praedictis operationibus, et ratiocinantes de diversis. Non est igitur possibile quod huiusmodi fiant sola virtute caelestium corporum.” Cf. also *Quodlibet*, XII, q. 9, a. 2, and *Summa theologiae*, II^a-IIae q. 96 a. 2 co. and II^a-IIae q. 96 a. 4 co.

⁴¹ Cf. in particular David Lindberg, *Roger Bacon’s Philosophy of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), and Jeremiah Hackett, *Roger Bacon and the Science* (New York: Brill, 1997). For a specific analysis of his conception of *virtus verborum*, see Irène Rosier, *La parole comme acte. Sur la grammaire et la sémantique au XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Vrin, 1994), pp. 207-231, and Delaurenti, *La puissance des mots*, pp. 157-200.

According to Bacon, several factors contribute to the power of words: the astral harmony, the power of the soul, the mediation of the air, and the formula's sound vibration.⁴² For Bacon "[t]he word is the vocal vehicle of the soul's impressions".⁴³ The human soul's receptivity for the *virtus verborum* depends on four conditions: *cogitatio*, profound thought, *desiderium*, great desire, *intentio*, firm intention, and *confidentia*, real trust.⁴⁴ These four conditions "were fundamental according to Roger Bacon: they were indispensable for exerting a power through words".⁴⁵ Despite holding this view, Bacon managed not to be adversely affected by the condemnation of *De radiis*, because he unambiguously declared himself not in favour of any magical practices. "While believing in the efficacy of words, especially a priest's solemnly uttered words in connection with the Eucharist, Bacon criticized 'magical' incantations, invocations, conjurations and *characteres* [i.e. foreign unreadable letters] as illusions and fascinations."⁴⁶ It is at their own peril that human beings ignore the free will of God and potential astrological influences. Yet charlatans and 'old women', by intermixing demonic and fraudulent elements when trying to produce wondrous effects at whim, foolishly abuse practices and formulae which otherwise might be efficacious.⁴⁷ Bacon was more open-minded than William of Auvergne and inclined to allow what one would call 'white magic'. He tells and interprets the following story about a boy who had encountered an epileptic man for whom he made a textual amulet. This amulet, when worn around the neck, 'cured' the man, i.e. he remained free of symptoms. Yet, when he took a bath, his wife, claiming that it was necessary to protect the amulet from becoming wet, deceived the man into removing it from his neck. She had said so not because she wanted to help but out of a desire to freely indulge in her love for a cleric. As soon as the amulet had been removed, the man's epileptic seizures started again. His frightened wife took pity on him and quickly bound the textual amulet around his neck again ('ligavit cedulam') which cured him.

⁴² The sound is also something Petrus Hispanus reflects on in his *Summulae logicales*, written around 1240, when he discusses *sonus, voces, nomina* and *verba*: cf. *Summulae* I, 3, Joseph M. Bocheński (ed.) (Torino: Marietti, 1947).

⁴³ Delaurenti, *Acting Through Words*, 13; cf. id., *Agir par les mots*, p. 64: "Le mot est le véhicule vocal des impressions de l'âme."

⁴⁴ Cf. Roger Bacon, *Opus tertium*, 26, in id., *Opera quaedam hactenus inedita*, J. S. Brewer (ed.) (London: Longman, 1859), vol. I, pp. 96-97.

⁴⁵ Delaurenti, *Acting Through Words*, 13; cf. id., *Agir par les mots*, p. 64: "Ces quatre conditions, *cogitatio, desiderium, intentio* et *confidentia*, sont fondamentales selon Roger Bacon, elles sont indispensables pour exercer un pouvoir par les mots."

⁴⁶ Skemer, *Binding Words*, p. 61.

⁴⁷ Cf. Skemer, *Binding Words*, p. 61.

Far from attributing the amulet's efficacy to the power of demons, Bacon reasons that, because the boy's motive had been blameless and free of deceit, God himself had rewarded what he deemed worthy of divine intervention and blessing by restoring the man's health.⁴⁸ Good intentions and sincere faith always deserve God's grace. "By contrast, the wife had acted under demonic influence and was motivated by the evil desire to deceive and injure."⁴⁹ Yet Bacon does not dwell any further on the part she played in all of this.

Béatrice Delaurenti and other experts in the field assume that it is of pivotal importance that the words used for such textual amulets or non-demonic incantations would not convey any meaning.⁵⁰ For her, "[t]he reason for this restriction must be seen in the necessity to distinguish *virtus verborum* from demonic incantations. The fact that the formula has a meaning would imply that it is addressed to an interlocutor. Giving importance to the formula's meaning would be similar to giving too much importance to this interlocutor: this position would open the way to a suspicion of demonic causality."⁵¹ I rather doubt this and would argue that the opposite is the case, that God is the interlocutor and he should be addressed in understandable terms because otherwise the danger is too high that inadvertently any demons are conjured. This becomes crystal clear when we look at the position which Thomas Aquinas holds.

⁴⁸ Roger Bacon, *The "Opus maius" of Roger Bacon*, p. 3, c. 14, John Henry Bridges (ed.), vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), pp. 123-124: "Et novi hominem qui cum fuerat puer invenit hominem in campis qui ceciderat de morbo caduco, et scripsit illos versus ac posuit circa collum ejus, et statim sanatus est; et nunquam postea ei accidit donec post multa tempora uxor ejus volens eum confundere propter amorem clerici cujusdam quem amavit fecit eum n[udari] ut saltem balnei tempore propter aquam deponeret cedulam de collo suo ne per aquam violaretur. Quo facto statim arripuit eum infirmitas in ipso balneo; quo miraculo percussa mulier iterum ligavit cedulam et curatus est. Quis erit ausus interpretari hoc in malum, et daemonibus ascribere, sicut aliqui inexperti et insipientes multa daemonibus ascripserunt quae Dei gratia aut per opus naturae et artium sublimium potestatem multoties facta sunt? Quomodo enim probavit mihi aliquis quod opus daemonis fuit istud, quoniam nec puer decipere sciebat nec volebat? Et mulier, quae decipere volebat non solum virum sed se per fornicationem dum abstulit scripturam, viso miraculo pietate mota cedulam religavit. Malo hic pie sentire ad laudem beneficiorum Dei quam ex praesumptione magna damnare quo verum est."

⁴⁹ Skemer, *Binding Words*, p. 62.

⁵⁰ Cf. Delaurenti, *Agir par les mots*, p. 63: "Alors que ses développements sur les causes du pouvoir des mots sont précis et argumentés, il reste flou sur cette question essentielle [i.e. le rôle de la signification]."

⁵¹ Delaurenti, *Agir par les mots*, p. 63: "Le motif d'une telle restriction doit être rapporté à la nécessité de distinguer la *virtus verborum* des incantations démoniaques. Le fait que la formule ait une signification supposerait qu'elle s'adresse à un interlocuteur. Accorder une importance au sens de la formule reviendrait à donner trop d'importance à cet interlocuteur: cette position ouvrirait la voie au soupçon de causalité démoniaque."

3.3 The cautious voice of reason

When we compare his stance with Roger Bacon's, we find a slightly different and certainly more cautious picture. In the *Summa theologiae* Aquinas answers the question: "Is it wrong to wear from one's neck a textual amulet based on *verba divina*?" Aquinas seems to agree with the first argument which he quotes: "It would seem that it is not unlawful to wear divine words from the neck. Divine words are no less efficacious when written than when uttered."⁵² However, he admonishes to be extremely cautious in two regards: One needs, above all, to know what the exact meaning is of what one wears, especially if the amulet contains unknown signs, to avoid (incidental) demonic invocations. Like Augustine before him, Aquinas took the act of conjuring spirits and demons as evidence of having abandoned the Christian faith. Secondly, such amulets should not contain any symbols apart from the cross.⁵³ Aquinas also emphasizes that one cannot expect higher efficacy or any other benefit from the style in which amulets are written. Not how they are written, but what is written on them is decisive.

Thus, "Aquinas condemned astrological talismans as demonic and condemned ritual practices that the church deemed 'superstitious.' Yet he allowed a limited role for textual amulets based on Christian texts."⁵⁴ Just as people could keep relics on their bodies or at home, it was legitimate to wear prayers like the 'Our Father' or other quotations from Scripture. Yet, people had to do so in sincere Christian devotion if they were hoping to secure divine protection. Such textual amulets were meant to be an outward sign of the fact that one was bearing God's words *in pectore*, in one's heart, "just as God had commanded the Jews in connection with *tefillin* (Deutero-

⁵² Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II^o-IIae q. 96 a. 4.

⁵³ Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II^o-IIae q. 96 a. 4 co.: "Respondeo dicendum quod in omnibus incantationibus vel Scripturis suspensis duo cavenda videntur. Primo quidem, quid sit quod profertur vel scribitur. Quia si est aliquid ad invocationes Daemonum pertinens, manifeste est superstitiosum et illicitum. Similiter etiam videtur esse cavendum, si contineat ignota nomina, ne sub illis aliquid illicitum lateat. Unde Chrysostomus dicit, super Matth., quod, *Pharisaeorum magnificentium fimbrias suas exemplo, nunc multi aliqua nomina Hebraica Angelorum confingunt et scribunt et alligant, quae non intelligentibus metuenda videntur*. Est etiam cavendum ne aliquid falsitatis contineat. Quia sic eius effectus non posset expectari a Deo, qui non est testis falsitatis deinde, secundo, cavendum est ne cum verbis sacris contineantur ibi aliqua vana, puta aliqui characteres inscripti, praeter signum crucis. Aut si spes habeatur in modo scribendi aut ligandi, aut in quacumque huiusmodi vanitate quae ad divinam reverentiam non pertineat. Quia hoc iudicaretur superstitiosum. Alias autem est licitum. Unde in decretis dicitur, XXVI, qu. V, cap. non liceat Christianis etc., *nec in collectionibus herbarum quae medicinales sunt aliquas observationes aut incantationes liceat attendere, nisi tantum cum symbolo divino aut oratione dominica, ut tantum creator omnium et Deus honoretur*."

⁵⁴ Skemer, *Binding Words*, p. 63.

nomy 11:18), only wearing the written representation of words as a visible sign of devotion. Aquinas allowed people to use textual amulets in order to show their pure faith and a fervent belief in God as a font of divine power and ultimate source of protection and healing”.⁵⁵ In any case, there was no automatism. God’s grace “did not flow automatically from the shape of the letters written on a piece of parchment. Rather, the power of sacred words was a divine blessing, freely given in response to someone’s sincere faith.”⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Aquinas, much like other theologians of his time, was keenly aware of the fact that “subtle scholastic arguments were beyond the comprehension of most Christians, who turned to textual amulets and other sources of divine protection in a dangerous but increasingly literate world and expected divine protection in a fairly mechanical way”.⁵⁷ That he should allow their use nonetheless is of pivotal importance, because we have evidence that the names of God were worn as textual amulets during the 13th century (e.g. the *Prayer to the 72 Names of God*). According to Thomas Aquinas, Christians could use such amulets as emblems of faith and devotion, in the hope (but not in any absolute certainty) of enjoying God’s grace and protection.

4. *Virtus verborum* in Ramon Llull’s writings

Where does Llull position himself in this whole picture?⁵⁸ How does he make use of the medieval proverb? In his *Cent noms de Déu* he recommends saying the hundred names of God once a day and carrying them along in writing.⁵⁹ By this, in all probability, he does not mean that people should walk around with his book, but that they should carry the 100 names in mini-format as a textual amulet. By giving these recommendations and already by writing *Cent noms de Déu*, Llull dedicates himself to bridging the division between theological reasoning on the *virtus verborum* and popular piety.

Moreover, he recommends doing this with the hundred names of God because he attributes to them even more power, granted by the grace of God, than to other prayers or spiritual exercises. To drive his point home, he

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 63.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 73.

⁵⁸ On Llull’s understanding of sacramental theology cf. Jordi Gayà Estelrich, “La teologia sacramentària de Ramon Llull (I). La definició de sagrament”, *Studia Lulliana* 49 (2009) pp. 51-69.

⁵⁹ Cf. Ramon Llull, *Cent noms de Déu*, ORL XIX, 81: “Per què jo consell que hom cascú dia diga los cent noms de Déu, e que escrits amb si los port.”

repeats, some two years later, this sentence from the prologue of *Cent noms de Déu* almost identically in the *Proverbis de Ramon*:

Con Deus haja posada virtut en *paraules*, *peres e erbes*, quant doncs mays l’ha posada en los seus *noms*.⁶⁰

Si Deus ha posades vertuts en *peres e erbes*, tant més la ha posada en sos *noms*.⁶¹

The major difference between the two versions of the sentence is that actually in the *Proverbis* he leaves out “*paraules*” and, by doing so, emphasizes “*noms*”.

Apart from *Cent noms de Déu* Llull refers to the medieval proverb in nine other works of his.⁶² In the few instances, when Llull gives an explanation of the proverb (which he does not always do), it becomes clear that he is keen on linking it with an ‘orthodox’ attitude of good Catholic faith, not with obscure magical practices. Thus, in *De contemplatione Raymundi* each of the three components, *verba*, *lapides* and *herba* serves a special purpose: the power of words is connected to the Eucharist in a similar way as was the case in the poem *Aurora*: “ut per ipsa presbyter corpus Christi conficere possit”—so that by those words the priest can change the bread into the body of Christ. The power of stones does not exist just at random, but represents Peter, the stone on which Christ founded his Church and stands for the longevity of the Church.⁶³ The purpose of the herbs is in comparison rather prosaic; they are there to feed us and heal us.

⁶⁰ Cf. Ramon Llull, *Cent noms de Déu*, ORL XIX, 81.

⁶¹ Approximately two to four years later, Llull writes this sentence in *Proverbis de Ramon*, [Rome 1296?] ch. 27 “De virtuos”, ORL XIV, 34.

⁶² Simone Sari, in his “I *Cent noms de Déu* de Ramon Llull: Il Corano e l’epica romanza”, *Carte Romanze* 8/1 (2020), pp. 173-197, in pp. 183-185 provides a list of all nine instances: *Libre de oracions e contemplacions de l’enteniment* [1274-6?], ORL XVIII, 268; ROL XXXIII, 601; *Art demostrativa* [Montpellier, ca. 1283], ORL XVI, 265; ROL XXXII, 304; *Proverbis de Ramon* [Rome 1296?], ORL XIV, 34; *Taula general* [Tunis-Naples 9/1293-1/1294], ORL XVI, 321, 327, 397; ROL XXVII, 36, 42, 109; *De contemplatione Raymundi* [Paris, 8/1297], ROL XVII, 33; *Rhetorica nova* [Cyprus 1/1301], ROL XXX, 59; *Ars generalis ultima* [Lyon-Pisa 11/1305-3/1308], ROL 14, 165; *Liber de venatione substantiae, accidentis et compositi* [Montpellier, 2/1308], ROL XXII, 58; *Llibre de virtuts e de pecats* [Mallorca 1/1313], NEORL I, 82; ROL XV, 194.

⁶³ Ramon Llull, *De contemplatione Raimundi* [Paris, 8/1297], ROL XVII, 33: “O diuina uirtus, gloriosa et excellens! Tu similitudinem tuam communicas herbis, lapidibus, uerbis: Herbis, ut cum ipsarum uirtute nostra uiuat uegetatiua, et cum ipsis nostram sanitatem procuremus; lapidibus, ad significandum magnam uirtutem arae beati Petri, supra quam sacrosancta Romana mater ecclesia est fundata, quae perseverantia significatur; uerbis, ut per ipsa presbyter corpus Christi conficere possit.”

The *virtus verborum* is always depicted as positive and useful.⁶⁴ In the *Llibre de vertuts e de pecats* the *virtus verborum* serves to provide inner strength in order to overcome sin (“per fortitudinem animi ad superandum peccata”) and to show one’s faith. As an example, Llull argues for ‘ordinary’ practices of popular piety on the basis of the *virtus verborum*, like vowing to go on a pilgrimage when one is in life-threatening peril.⁶⁵ This was a quite common vow in his times.

The healing power of herbs and the moving power of magnetic stones serve him as an analogy to explain the power of words and above all of truth.⁶⁶ He embeds the notion of the *virtus verborum* in his world view of descending perfection and of exemplarism, indebted to Plotin and Neoplatonism. There, as a basic principle, analogy applies; an ascent or descent to the different levels of being and perfection is possible. If one focuses on the order of being, the use of the metaphor ‘descent’ is appropriate; if one starts from the order of knowing the metaphor of ‘ascent’ applies. This way of thinking corresponds to the traditional position of Hugh of St. Victor († 1141) that the human mind descends to the visible by viewing the invisible. Hugh states, “et sic ‘a primis usque ad ultima descendens’ conducit illuminationem suam per singulas virtutes”.⁶⁷ Llull applies

⁶⁴ This is, for example, the case when our sensitive faculties are directed through true words “ad obiecta necessaria et amabilia” (cf. *Taula general*, ORL XVI, 397).

⁶⁵ Ramon Llull, *Llibre de virtuts e de pecats* [Mallorca 1/1313], NEORL I, 82: “Deus ha posades virtuts en pedres, erbes e paraules, donchs, ha posada virtut per força de coratge e de fe a vengre pecats e a fer miracles. E d’açó avem esperiència con hom es temptat a fer pecat e no·l vol fer per neguna res; e açó metex con es malafte ho con es en perill de mort e promet que irá en romaria a alcun sentuari, aven fe que aquell sant li ajud.”

ROL XV, 194: “Deus posuit uirtutes in uerbis, herbis et lapidibus. Igitur posuit uirtutem per fortitudinem fidei et animi ad superandum peccata et ad faciendum miracula. Et de hoc habemus experimentum, quando aliquis tentatus est ad faciendum peccatum, et non illud aliquo modo facere uult. Et hoc idem, quando infirmatur uel est in periculo mortis, et promittit ire ad peregrinationem ad aliquod sanctuarium, habendo fidem, quod ille sanctus eum adiuuet.”

⁶⁶ Ramon Llull, *Taula general*, dist. V, p. V, “De vertut”, ORL XVI, 397-398: “14. *Questió*: Per que vertut està en paraules, e en erbes e en peres?”: [...] en paraules, axí com la sencitiva qui es moguda per vertut d’oyr paraules veyers als objetz necessaris e amables; en erbes, enaxí com la planta qui à vertut de sanar per so que sa vertut pusqua montiplicar de sa contraria vertut; en peres, enaxí com la caramida qui tira a sí lo ferre per so quar en ella ha major simplicitat de terra que·n neguna altra pera, a la qual major simplicitat à apetit lo ferre en qui la terra à major vertut que negú altre element.”

ROL XXVII, 109: “In uerbis sicut in sensitiua, quae per uirtutem mouetur ad audiendum uerba uera ad obiecta necessaria et amabilia. In herbis sicut in planta, quae habet uirtutem sanandi, ut suam uirtutem possit multiplicare de sua uirtute contraria. In lapidibus sicut in magnetem, qui attrahit ferrum, quia in illo habetur maior simplicitas terrae quam in aliquo lapide, ad quam maiorem simplicitatem habet ferrum appetitum, in quo terra maiorem habet uirtutem quam aliquod aliud elementum.”

⁶⁷ Hugh of St. Victor, *Exegetica II: Expositio in hierarchiam coelestem S. Dionysii Areopagitae*, lib. IX, ch. 13, PL 175, 1127BC.

this world view to the medieval proverb. Following the order of being, he assumes a higher power (*virtus*) that is mirrored in inferior things capable of possessing this power. This *virtus* originates from *bonitas* and *magnitudo*. In the *Taula general* he explains: “That *virtus* transmits its likeness to the outside, so that in that likeness it can be spread abroad and be multiplied, and is able to go over unto other substances, which have the *virtus* to receive this *virtus*, which comes, so that many *virtutes* can accumulate together into one single multiplied *virtus* out of all, and this latter *virtus* is manifest in words, herbs and stones.”⁶⁸ For Llull, the fact of creation undoubtedly and inevitably leads to a causal relationship between God and the world and therefore he assumes an ontological causal chain ‘from top to bottom’. Thus, for Llull his entire conception of thought and his whole world view are mirrored in the *virtus verborum*, since in the respect of being mirrored *virtus* corresponds to the attributes of God. This, in its turn, provides an obvious link to Llull’s understanding of the divine names. God’s names are connected to and sometimes even coincide with the attributes of God. Yet to deepen this topic would mean to embark on writing an article, if not a book of its own.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion we can state that Llull in all probability meant his *Cent noms de Déu* to be a contribution for bridging the increasing gap between theological reasoning, especially as developed in scholastic sacramental theology at the time, and popular piety. *Cent noms de Déu* may not speak the language of popular piety in all and every respect, yet its understanding of *virtus verborum* is one important element of folk religion, next to gestures, textual formulae, songs and music. *Cent noms de Déu* is a text to be used in devotion, not designed for the desk of scholars.

As always with Llull’s works, especially in the case of *Cent noms de Déu* it is difficult to identify reliable direct intertextual links. Yet in this case exis-

⁶⁸ Llull, *Taula general*, dist. V, p. V, “De vertut”, ORL XVI, p. 398: “*Solució* h. En la substància nex vertut de bontat, granea, e dels altres comensamens. Aquesta vertut tramet de fores sa semblansa per so que n aquella semblansa sia manifestada e montiplicada, e que pusca passar a les altres substàncies qui an vertut a reebre aquella vertut qui ve per so que moltes vertutz se pusquen ajustar en una vertut montiplicada de totes, sustentada en paraules erbes e peres.”

ROL XXVII, 109: “*Quaestio*: Quare uirtus stat in uerbis, herbis et lapidibus? *Solutio*: H. In substantia oritur uirtus de bonitate, | magnitudine | etc. Virtus ista transmittit suam similitudinem extra, ut in illa similitudine sit manifestata et multiplicata, et ut possit transire ad alias substantias, quae uirtutem habent ad recipiendum illam uirtutem, quae uenit, ut multae uirtutes se possint congregare in una uirtute multiplicata ex omnibus, sustentata in uerbis, herbis et lapidibus.”

ting associations can help our understanding of the text. We need to associate it with the understanding of *verbum efficax* in medieval sacramental theology; with the popular piety that firmly reckons with the existence and efficacy of the *virtus verborum*; and, finally, with Llull's world view of the interconnectedness of all that God has created.

None of these issues would explicitly point into the direction that Llull was drawing mostly from Muslim sources or mainly had a Muslim audience in his mind when he wrote *Cent noms de Dieu*. Yet the fact that this topic might provide another bridge to liaise with the Muslim world certainly did not deter him.