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The ***Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies (AJMS)*** is an Open Access quarterly double-blind peer reviewed journal and considers papers from all areas of Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Business and Law, Urban Planning, Architecture and Environmental Sciences. Many of the papers published in this journal have been presented at the various conferences sponsored by the Center for European & Mediterranean Affairs (CEMA) of the Athens Institute for Education and Research (Athens Institute). All papers are subject to Athens Institute's Publication Ethical Policy and Statement.

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The current issue is the third of the eleventh volume of the *Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies (AJMS)*, published by the Athens Institute for Education and Research.

Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute

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A World Association of Academics and Researchers

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30-31 March & 1-2 April 2026, Athens, Greece

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- **Dr. Steven Oberhelman,** Professor of Classics, Holder of the George Sumey Jr Endowed Professorship of Liberal Arts, and Associate Dean, Texas A&M University, USA, Vice President of International Programs, Athens Institute and Editor of the Athens Journal of History.
- **Dr. Nicholas Pappas**, Vice President of Academic Membership, Athens Institute & Professor of History, Sam Houston University, USA.
- **Dr. David Philip Wick**, Director, Arts, Humanities and Education Division, Athens Institute & Professor of History, Gordon College, USA.
- **Dr. Yannis Stivachtis**, Director, Center for European & Mediterranean Affairs and Associate Professor, Jean Monnet Chair & Director of International Studies Program, Virginia Tech –

Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **16 September 2025**
- Submission of Paper: **2 March 2026**

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15-19 June 2026, Athens, Greece

The Politics & International Affairs Unit of the Athens Institute will hold its **24th Annual International Conference on Politics, 15-19 June 2026, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies and the Athens Journal of Social Sciences. The aim of the conference is to bring together academics, researchers and professionals in private and public organizations and governments of Politics and International Affairs and other related disciplines. You may participate as stream leader, presenter of one paper, chair of a session or observer. Please submit a proposal using the form available (https://www.atiner.gr/2026/FORM-POL.doc).

Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **11 November 2025**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **18 May 2026**

Academic Member Responsible for the Conference

- **Dr. Yannis Stivachtis**, Director, Center for European & Mediterranean Affairs and Associate Professor, Jean Monnet Chair & Director of International Studies Program, Virginia Tech – Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, USA.

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Long and Short-term Economic Convergence in Southern Europe's Mediterranean Economies

By Inmaculada Hurtado Ocaña[*], *Pedro Fernández Sánchez*[±], *María-Carmen García-Centeno*[•] *& Mª Jesús Arroyo Fernández*[○]

The major Mediterranean economies of Southern Europe-Italy, Greece, Spain, and Portugal-are bound by deep historical, cultural, and economic connections. Over the last two centuries, these nations have followed a remarkably similar economic trajectory: slower growth during the 19th century, leading to economic divergence from the rest of Europe, and a subsequent period of partial recovery and convergence in the second half of the 20th century. This pattern, often referred to as the "Latin development model", reflects their shared economic challenges and opportunities. This study explores the long-term convergence of these economies, with particular focus on the impact of their integration into the European Monetary Union and its role in shaping their economic alignment with the broader European region.

Keywords: *Human Development, Economic Convergence, European Union, Great Recession, COVID-19*

Introduction

More than 10,000 years ago, the first human settlements appeared in different parts of the planet. It was the first economic revolution of mankind, what Gordon Childe called the Neolithic Revolution, which substantially modified the rate of progress of humanity (North, 1984: 91).

By 6,000 BC, the cultivation of wheat and barley and the care of livestock was established in the Mediterranean area (Cameron and Neal, 2005: 41). Since then, the mare Nostrum became the economic center of the world. This situation would remain unchanged until the eve of the Industrial Revolution, when the axis shifted to the Atlantic (Cameron and Neal, 2005: 142).

Throughout the 19th century, the major economies of Southern Europe moved further and further away from their more developed European neighbors. In 1820 the GDP per capita of Mediterranean Europe was $945, compared to $1706 in Great Britain, e.g. 44.6% lower. On the eve of First World War the difference had increased to 63% (Allen, 2013:14). As can be seen in Table 1 the process of divergence reversed in the 20th century and accelerated in its second half. In 1989 the per capita income of Mediterranean Europe was 67.8 of the British one and in 2008 of 77%.

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Table 1. *GDP of Great Britain and the Mediterranean countries between 1820 and 2008 in US constant dollars*

Country/Area	**1820**	**1913**	**1989**	**2008**
Great Brittain	1706	4921	16414	23742
Mediterranean Countries	945	1824	11.129	18218
MC/UK ratio	55.39%	37.07%	67.80%	76.73%

Source: Allen (2013)

Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy show important similarities in their economic and social behavior in the centuries since the 19th century[1] . All of them lag behind in economic and social terms in the 19th century, advancing notably in the second half of the 20th century when they are fully integrated into the European economy (Tortella, 2021196). This is what has been called the "Latin pattern" or Southern European pattern (Malefakis, 1992; O'Brien and Prados de la Escosura, 1992; Tortella and Núñez, 2012).

This process of convergence accelerated in the last decades of the 20th century, thanks to the incorporation into the European Economic Community (EEC) of Greece (in 1981), Spain and Portugal (in 1986), which made it possible to deepen the economic integration of the European continent. Thus, in 1993 the European Union (EU) was a more integrated unit than the USA (Frieden, 2006: 503), which allowed these countries to accelerate their development and approach the levels of their European neighbors

At the beginning of the 21st century, Spain, Portugal and Greece had per capita income levels close to those of Italy and Sweden. If economic progress was impressive, social progress was even more so. As Frieden (2006: 552) points out, in 1970 the Portuguese mortality rate was 61 per 1,000; in 2000 it was less than 6 per 1,000, better than that of the USA

The aim of this paper is to characterize the economic evolution of the major economies of Mediterranean Europe, which share important historical and cultural ties. And to put this evolution in a European perspective. For this purpose, the work has been organized in two sections, in addition to this introduction and the conclusions. In the first one, the analysis will be approached from a long-term perspective. To this end, the evolution of the expanded human development index and its components since 1850 will be analyzed. The aim is to find out how the Mediterranean has fared in comparison with its European neighbors in terms of life expectancy at birth, literacy and per capita income over the last century and a half. And in terms of development too.

The second section will focus on the process of economic and monetary integration. Has the adoption of the euro accelerated the convergence of the European

[1]The three large peninsulas of southern Europe share geographical features and important historical and cultural ties. Although there are historical differences (the Iberian countries present characteristics of national unity since the late Middle Ages, while Greece and Italy were not born as political entities until the 19th century), their contemporary history is very similar (Tortella, 2021: 196).

Mediterranean economies with their neighbors? How has the Great Recession of 2008 and the Covid-19 pandemic affected them?

Human Development in the Mediterranean Countries and their Convergence with Europe in the Long Term

Economists seek to measure the well-being of societies. This is a complex task due to the multiplicity of factors involved, ranging from household income to access to essential services such as health and education. To address this complexity, synthetic indexes that integrate various dimensions of development are used. Among them, the most widely recognized is the Human Development Index (HDI), prepared by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

The HDI is a composite index that assesses development across three fundamental dimensions: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living. It is calculated using the geometric mean of the normalized indices for each of these dimensions (Human Development Reports).

The health dimension is measured through life expectancy at birth, while the education dimension is evaluated by considering both the average years of schooling of adults over 25 years of age and the expected years of schooling of children. The third dimension, related to standard of living, is quantified by GDP per capita. These three indicators are combined into a composite index that provides an overall view of the development achieved by each country.

Although the HDI is the most common reference, for this study we have opted for the Augmented Human Development Index (AHDI). This is an adaptation of the HDI with a long-term perspective (Prados de la Escosura, 2021). This index maintains life expectancy at birth as an indicator of longevity, years of schooling as a measure of access to knowledge, GDP per capita and adds an indicator of freedom (Prados de la Escosura, 2023).

The use of these indicators, both individually and as a whole, makes it possible to evaluate the long-term evolution of Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal and their degree of convergence with neighboring European countries. The first data available in the historical series corresponds to 1870, the year in which the great advances in health and the generalization of primary education in Western Europe began (Prados de la Escosura, 2023: 3). The latest year available is 2020.

The following section will analyze the evolution of the components of the AHDI and of the AHDI of the four large Mediterranean economies and their relationship with the European average.

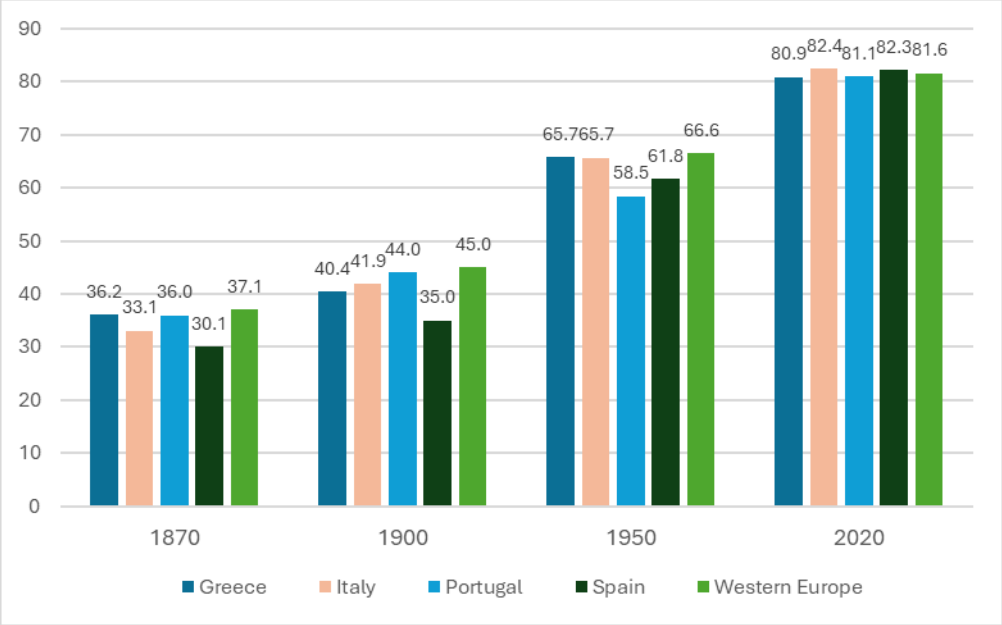
Life Expectancy at Birth: The Great Leap

Life expectancy is a measure of the level of well-being. Its evolution in Western Europe has been remarkable over the last 150 years. In 1870, the average life expectancy in the region was 37.1 years, while in 2020 it stood at 81.6 years. This increase of 44.5 years reflects the impact of factors such as improved health conditions, the development of medicine, increased quality of life and the consolidation of welfare

states. More specifically, the reduction of infant mortality, the eradication of infectious diseases through vaccination campaigns and the generalization of access to health services have played a fundamental role in this process.

In the case of the countries of southern Europe, Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal, as can be seen in Figure 1, during a large part of the period analyzed, their life expectancy was lower than the average for Western Europe. In 1870 and 1900, this difference was more important, a consequence of their lower degree of industrialization, lower degree of health infrastructures and more precarious socioeconomic conditions in comparison with neighboring countries such as France or Germany. Throughout the 20th century, economic modernization and public health policies allowed a progressive reduction of this gap between southern Europe and its continental neighbors.

Figure 1. *Evolution of Life Expectancy at Birth in Mediterranean Europe (1870, 1900, 1950 and 2020)*



Source: Prados de la Escosura (2003b).

Note: Western Europe includes Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

The most significant change occurred in the second half of the 20th century, when life expectancy in the countries of southern Europe experienced accelerated growth. In 1950, although still below the Western European average, the gap with the most advanced countries was considerably smaller than in previous decades (with the exception of Portugal and to a lesser extent Spain). Factors such as improved nutrition, the eradication of endemic diseases, increased access to healthcare and the implementation of social protection systems contributed to this convergence. In addition, sustained economic growth in these countries during the second half of the 20th century drove improvements in housing, education and health infrastructure, and led to an increase in longevity.

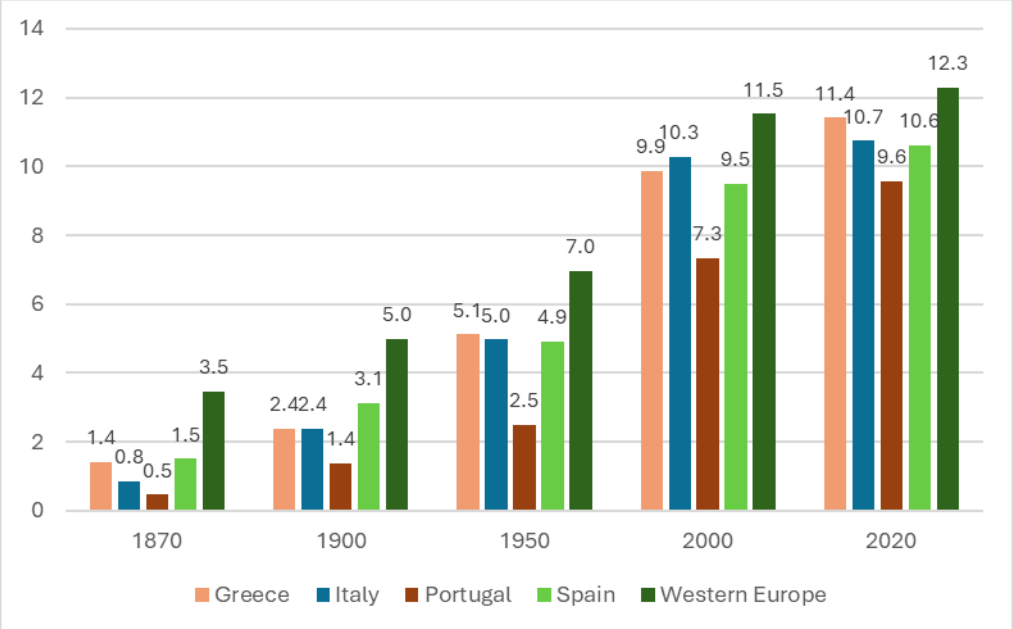
At present, as can be seen in Figure 1, Italy and Spain have surpassed the average life expectancy in Western Europe, while Portugal and Greece are practically at the same levels.

Access to Mass Education

Figure 2 shows the evolution of the average years of schooling in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain compared to the Western European average, from 1870 to 2020. The analysis of these data allows us to evaluate the process of educational convergence between the Mediterranean countries and their European neighbors over the last century and a half.

At the end of the 19th century, Mediterranean countries had considerably low levels of schooling, with an average of less than two years. In general, access to education was very limited, since educational systems had not yet been developed, although the situation was worse in predominantly agrarian economies such as those of the Mediterranean. Between 1870 and 1900, there was a moderate growth in schooling, with the first differences appearing between the countries considered. Thus, while Italy showed significant progress, Portugal maintained the lowest level of access to education of the countries considered.

Figure 2. *Evolution of Years of schooling in Southern European and Western European Countries (1870-2020)*



Source: Prados de la Escosura (2003b).

Access to education grew steadily during the century, especially after 1950, when the Mediterranean countries accelerated their educational modernization process. This resulted in a progressive reduction of the gap between them and Western Europe. In this period, the expansion of compulsory primary and secondary education, together with the development of educational infrastructures and the implementation of literacy

policies, contributed to the increase in years of schooling. In 1950, the values for Italy, Spain and Greece were around five years of schooling on average. Portugal, however, still had lower figures.

Thus, at the beginning of the 21st century, all Mediterranean countries exceeded seven years of schooling on average, with Italy and Spain approaching Western European values. Portugal, although it had made significant progress, continued to lag behind.

In 2020, educational convergence with Western Europe is practically complete in the case of Italy and Spain, whose schooling levels are around 11 years, very close to the European average. Greece and Portugal, although they have considerably reduced the gap with respect to previous decades, still show a slight gap. These results demonstrate the impact of educational reforms and human capital investment policies in Mediterranean countries, as well as the influence of economic growth on improving access to education.

From Dictatorships to Democracies: The Index of Liberal Democracy

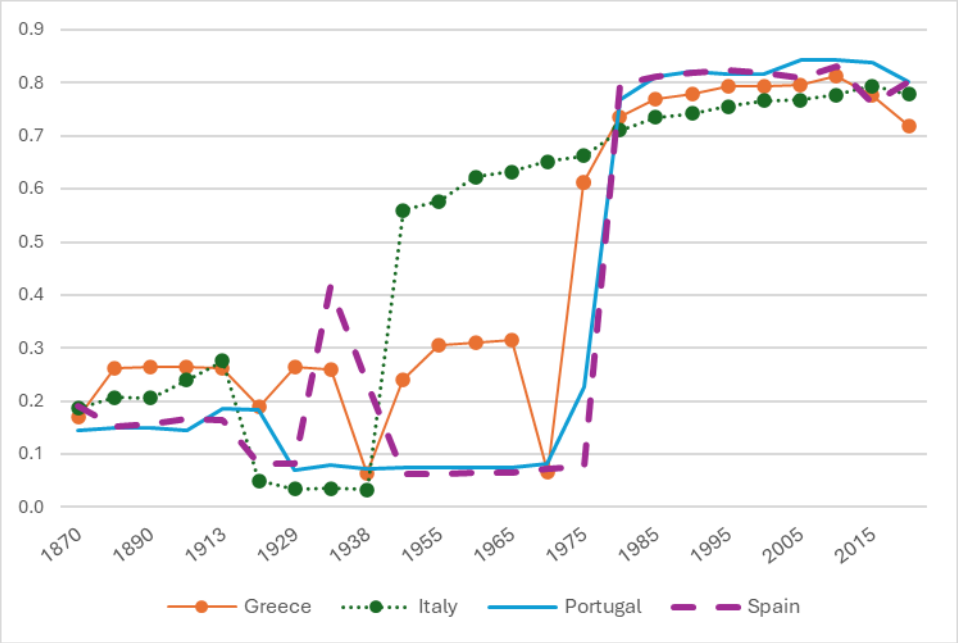
One of the components of the Augmented Human Development Index (AHDI) is the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI), which combines the Electoral Democracy Index and the Liberal Index. The former evaluates freedom of association and expression, the right to vote and the transparency of electoral processes, while the latter measures equality before the law, individual freedoms and institutional limits to executive power, both from the judicial and legislative spheres. The IDL takes values between 0, minimum, and 1, maximum (Prados de la Escosura, 2023:07).

Figure 3 shows its evolution in the four economies analyzed between 1870 and 2020. Beyond the general growth of the index, with a slight drop after the Great Recession and the COVID-19 crisis, the analysis will focus on the post-World War II period. The reason is that three of the countries considered, Greece, Spain and Portugal, went through dictatorial regimes and undertook democratic transition processes in the late 1970s, processes that significantly influenced their economic performance during the last quarter of the 20th century.

The military regime in Greece (1967-1974) originated in the context of the Cold War and was relatively short-lived. In contrast, the dictatorships in Spain and Portugal emerged in the context of the rise of totalitarianisms during the interwar period and the crisis of parliamentary systems (Gómez Fernández, 2011: 7). In the Spanish case, the index experienced a recovery in the 1930s during the Second Republic (1931-36) but suffered a collapse with the beginning of Franco's dictatorship in 1939, remaining at very low levels until the restoration of democracy in 1975. In Greece, the reduction of the LDI coincides directly with the military coup and the establishment of the authoritarian regime.

A distinctive feature that connects Greece, Spain and Portugal is that their transitions to democracy occurred in the last third of the 20th century, forming part of what has been called the "third wave of democratization". This shared process allowed the consolidation of democratic systems in all three countries and favored their integration into European institutions, which contributed to their economic and social development in the following decades.

Figure 3. *Evolution of the Liberal Democracy Index in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain (1870-2020)*



Source: Prados de la Escosura (2003b).

Italy, on the other hand, followed a different trajectory. The most pronounced fall in its IDL took place after World War I, with the arrival of fascism, a totalitarian ideology that, although opposed to communism, shared with it the rejection of liberal democracy (Tortella, 2021: 189). The defeat of fascism in World War II allowed Italy to reintegrate into the block of Western democracies, accelerating its economic and social convergence. In contrast, the southern European countries that still remained under authoritarian regimes delayed their integration into the processes of modernization and development that characterized other European economies in the second half of the twentieth century

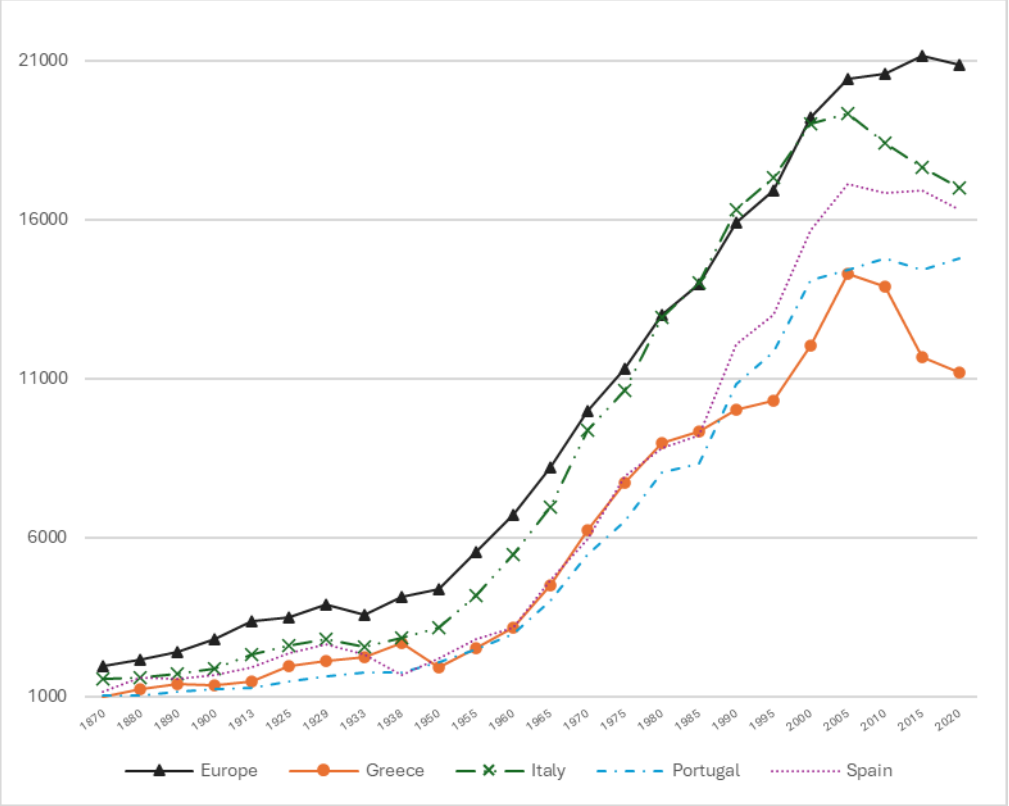
Divergence and Convergence in the Long-term

Figure 4 shows the evolution of GDP per capita in Italy, Greece, Portugal and Spain compared to the Western European average from 1870 to the present. The variable is expressed in Geary-Khamis $1990, to eliminate the effects of inflation. As can be seen, there have been alternating phases of divergence, in which the European powers grew more than the Mediterranean economies, with other phases in which, as the growth of the Mediterranean countries accelerated, there has been real convergence.

In the last years of the 19th century and up to the middle of the 20th century, the four countries analyzed had GDP per capita levels below the Western European average. Greece and Portugal were lagging behind in terms of pc income, while Italy was in a better situation. Historical events during this period, such as First World War, the Great Depression and Second World War, affected all economies. On average, Western Europe's GDP pc grew by 43% during this period. The GDP pc of

Greece (35%), Italy (20%) and Portugal (19%) grew less, and only Spain showed higher growth (48%).

Figure 4. *Evolution of GDP pc of Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain (1870-2020)*



Source: Prados de la Escosura (2003b).

After Second World War, the four countries experienced rapid economic growth, reducing the gap with the European average. Key factors in this were the completion of their industrialization processes, the expansion of trade, increased foreign investment and the implementation of development policies. Italy came considerably closer to the European average, consolidating its position as one of the continent's leading economies, while Greece, Portugal and Spain were hampered by the existence of dictatorships

In the 1980s, after completing their transition to democracy, Greece, Spain and Portugal joined the European Communities (European Coal and Steel Community; European Atomic Energy Community and the European Economic Community), which boosted their economic convergence with Western Europe, as can be seen in Figure 4. GDP pc growth between 1980 and 2000 in Greece (528%), Italy (500%), Portugal (576%) and Spain (621%) was much higher than the European average (341%). In this period, therefore, there was a clear convergence of the southern European countries with their European neighbors in terms of per capita income.

The 2008 financial crisis, however, marked a turning point in the evolution of GDP per capita in these countries. Portugal and Spain suffered economic stagnation, slowing their convergence with the European average. Greece experienced a sharp

setback due to the 2010 sovereign debt crisis, which is graphically reflected in a significant drop in its GDP per capita. Similarly, Italy's decline was significant. Thus, throughout the 21st century, the differences between Southern Europe and the rest of the countries have increased, being greater for Italy and Greece than for the Iberian countries.

In conclusion, the analysis of the last 150 years therefore shows that Italy, Spain and Portugal have experienced significant convergence with the Western European average, albeit with interruptions. Italy has been the country that has managed to come closest to and remain in line with the average, while Greece, after a period of sustained growth in the 20th century, has diverged significantly in the 2010s.

Human Development in Southern European Countries in the Contemporary Age

The combination of the variables analyzed in the previous sections (life expectancy at birth, access to education, liberal democracy index and per capita income levels) yields the Adjusted Human Development Index (AHDI), shown in Figure 5.

The first aspect to highlight is the notable improvement experienced by the four countries over the last century and a half. From initial values close to 0.1, Italy, Spain and Greece have now reached figures close to 0.7, while Portugal has a slightly lower value (0.663).

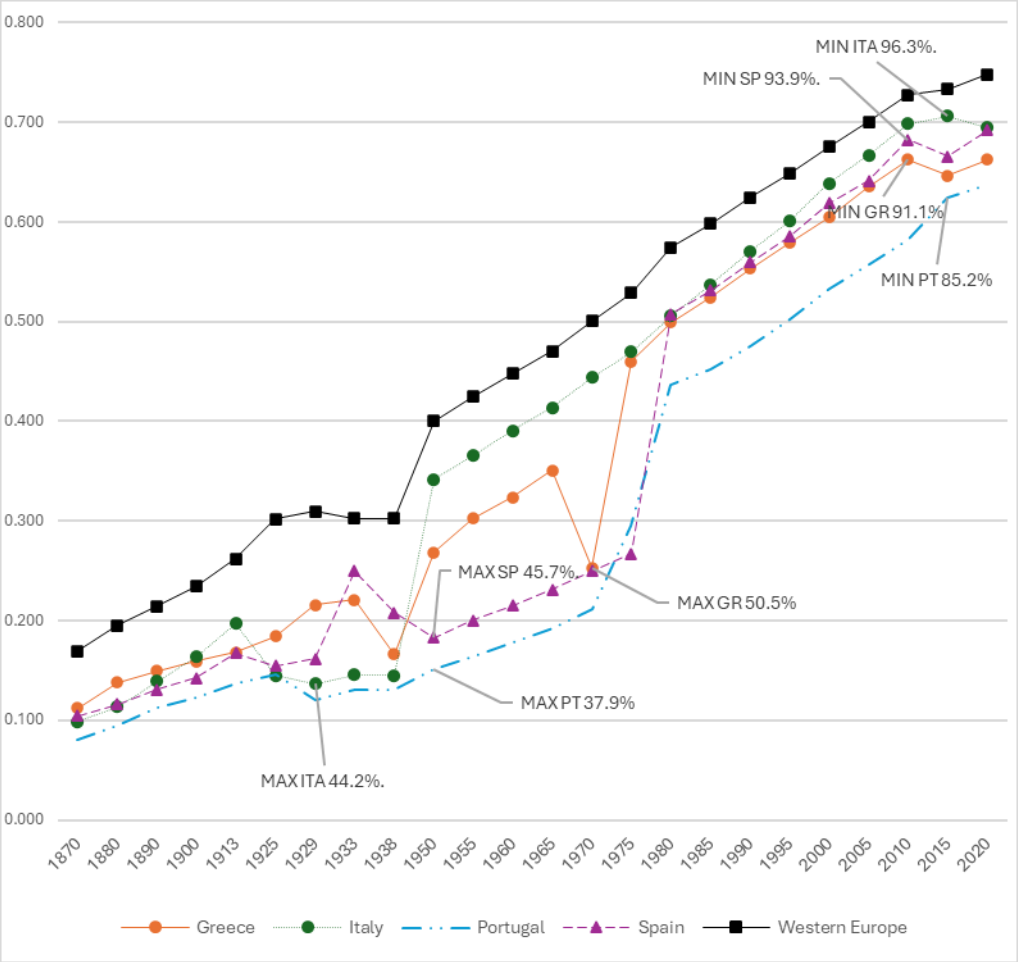
This sustained progress is largely due to the industrialization processes initiated at the beginning of the 20th century and consolidated in its second half. These processes led to significant improvements in living conditions, reflected in an increase in life expectancy, greater access to education and an increase in per capita income.

This evolution has only been interrupted in historical moments marked by the establishment of dictatorial regimes, which causes a significant drop in the AHDI in the affected country. This is the case of Italy in the 1920s and 1930s under the Fascist regime, Spain from the 1930s to the 1970s due to the Civil War and Franco's dictatorship, Portugal in a similar period under the Salazar dictatorship and Greece during the dictatorship of the Colonels (1967-1974).

Another relevant aspect is the evolution of the relative position of the countries in the AHDI ranking. While at the beginning of the period under analysis Greece had the highest value, today it is Italy that tops the ranking (Figure 4). However, one pattern that has remained constant is the poorer performance of Portugal, which has consistently occupied the last position among the southern European countries.

To conclude this analysis of the long-term evolution of human development in the long term in southern Europe, we have indicated the moments in which the distance in percentage terms with respect to Europe has been greater and when this difference has been smaller (in Figure 5 with the legends MAX and MIN). Italy's largest gap with Europe was reached in 1929, while in Portugal and Spain it occurred in the 1950s, coinciding with the consolidation of their respective totalitarian regimes. The same happened Greece, whose maximum difference was reached in 1970, when its AHDI decreased to almost half that of Western Europe.

Figure 5. *Evolution of the AHDI of Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Western Europe (1870-2020)*



Source: Prados de la Escosura (2003b).
Note: the year in which each country reaches the maximum difference in relative terms in its AHDI with respect to Western Europe (MAX) as well as the moment in which this difference in relative terms is at its minimum (MIN).

The Convergence of Southern Europe since the Monetary Union: The Effects of the Great Recession and Covid19

After analyzing the long-term evolution of economic development in the countries of southern Europe, attention will focus on the 20th century. With economic integration already consolidated, the beginning of the 21st century was marked by the entry into force of the Monetary Union. Spain, Italy and Portugal adopted the euro in 1999, while Greece joined in 2001. Since then, the economic evolution of these countries has been conditioned by two major crises that have seriously affected the process of real convergence: the Great Recession and the COVID-19 health crisis.

Figure 6a shows that Italy maintains the highest GDP per capita. However, Spain and Portugal have achieved greater real convergence during the recovery

years after the Great Recession and the post-COVID period (Figure 6b). In the latter stage, Greece has acquired a prominent role, with a cumulative growth of 10.9% between 2020 and 2023.

Figure 6a. *GDP per Capita (current €)*

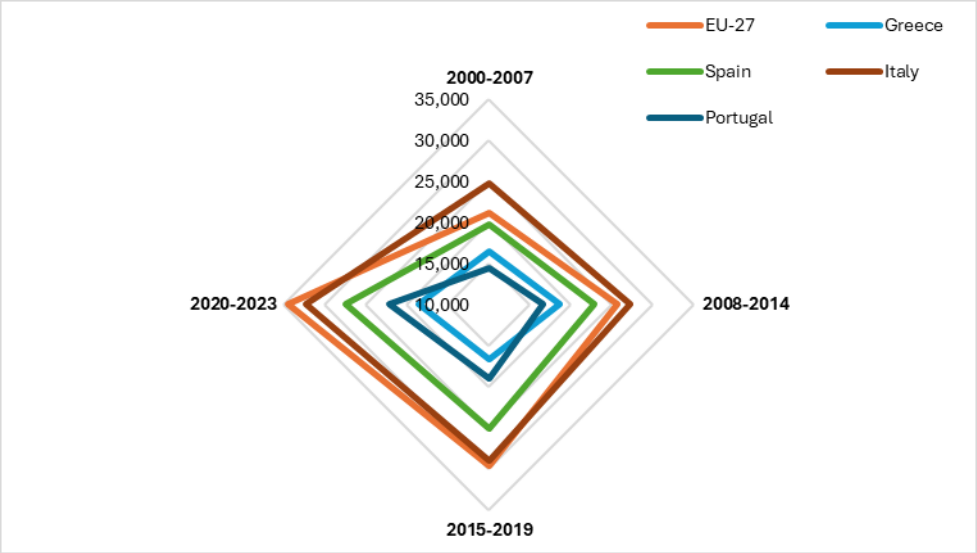
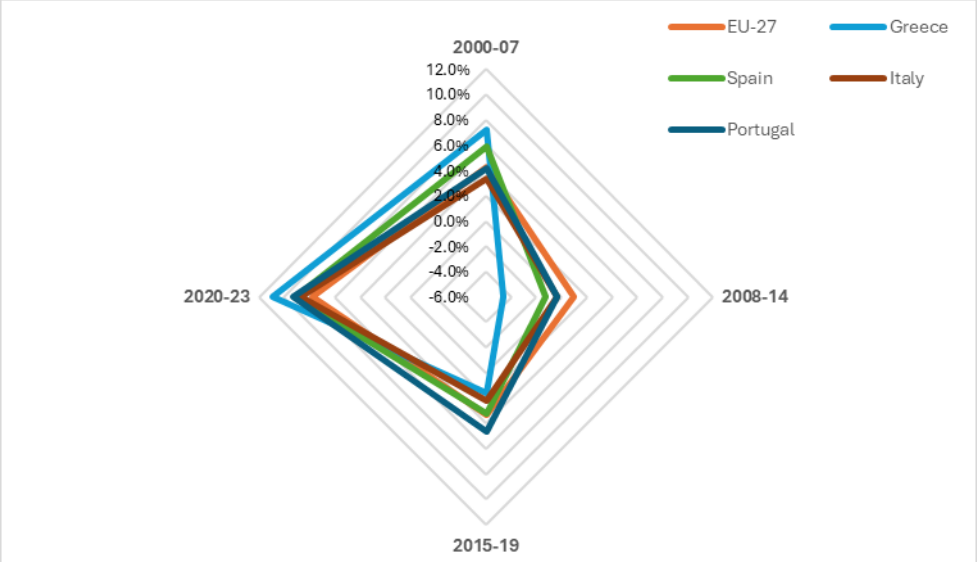


Figure 6b. *GDP Growth pc (average % for each period)*



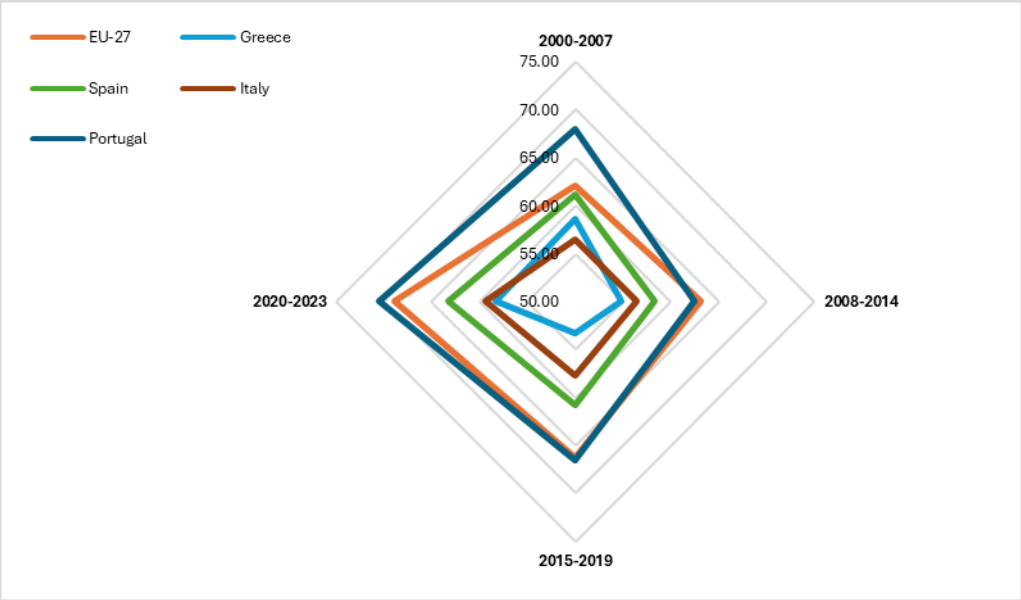
Source: Own elaboration based on Eurostat data, 2025

This behavior should be interpreted by considering some key variables that influence the countries' economic growth. From a labor market perspective, two fundamental indicators are the employment rate (Figure 7a) and the unemployment rate (Figure 7b). Both variables are aligned with the targets set by the European Union in the European Employment Strategy 2020, which sets an employment rate

of 78% by 2030[2] . To achieve this goal, Member States must reduce unemployment and promote initiatives that encourage the incorporation into the labor market of those who are outside it.

At present, the Mediterranean countries are still far from reaching this target. Portugal is the best performer, being only six percentage points away from the target. In contrast, Italy (16.5 p.p.), Greece (16.2 p.p.) and Spain (12.7 p.p.) are further behind. In addition, Portugal is also the country that has achieved the greatest convergence with the EU average, especially in the years of economic recovery, while Spain and Greece have performed more unfavorably, with differences of 6.1 and 5 percentage points, respectively, with respect to the EU-27.

Figure 7a. *Employment Rate (%)*

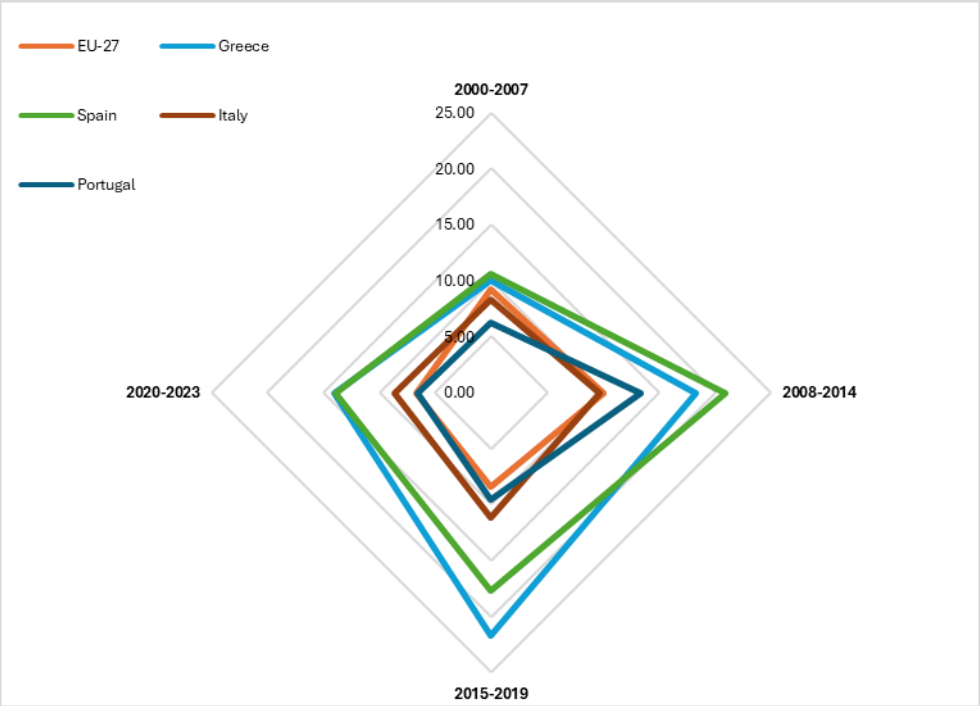


The functioning of the labor market is a key factor for economic growth and for reducing the risk of poverty. For this reason, the governments of the countries with the worst indicators must take decisions that favor their recovery.

Another relevant aspect is the growth of real productivity per hour worked (Figure 8), a fundamental indicator of the efficiency with which human resources are used in each economy. Productivity can be improved through the adoption of new technologies that optimize labor performance or through a higher qualification of human capital. Figure 8 shows the evolution of productivity in the four Mediterranean countries over different economic cycles.

[2]European Commission (2024, p. 23)

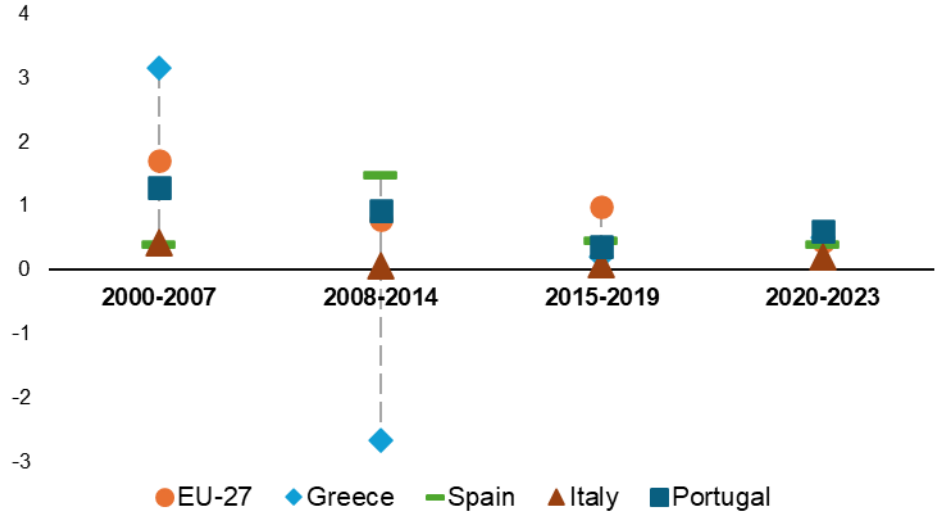
Figure 7b. *Unemployment Rate (%)*



Source: Own elaboration based on Eurostat data, 2025

At the beginning of the 21st century, productivity growth showed a clear divergence: Greece experienced a faster advance, while Spain and Italy grew at a considerably slower rate. During the Great Recession, real productivity in Spain grew faster than in the other countries, in contrast to Greece, where the growth rate was negative (-2.66%). However, from 2015 onwards, the differences between countries narrowed significantly, and in the post-COVID stage a remarkable convergence in this variable has been achieved.

Figure 8. *Real Productivity per hour worked (annual % variation)*



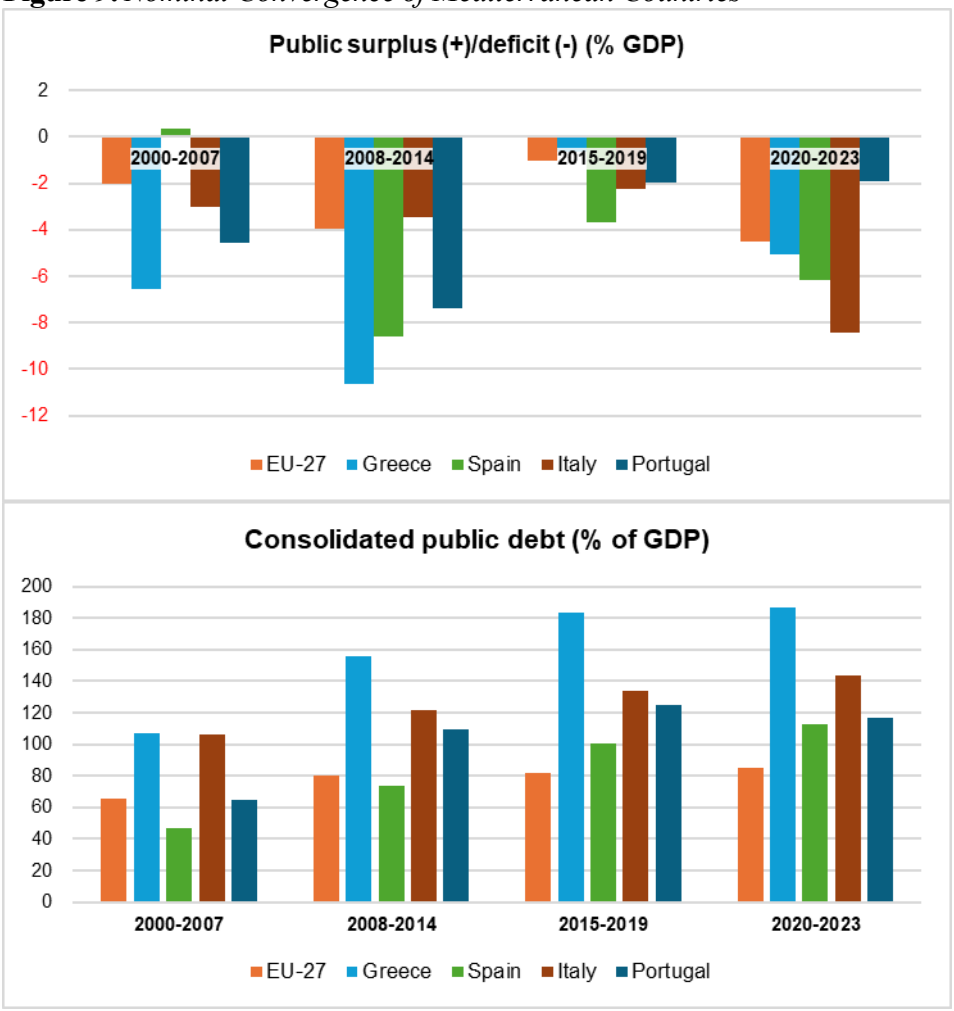
Source: Own elaboration based on Eurostat data, 2025

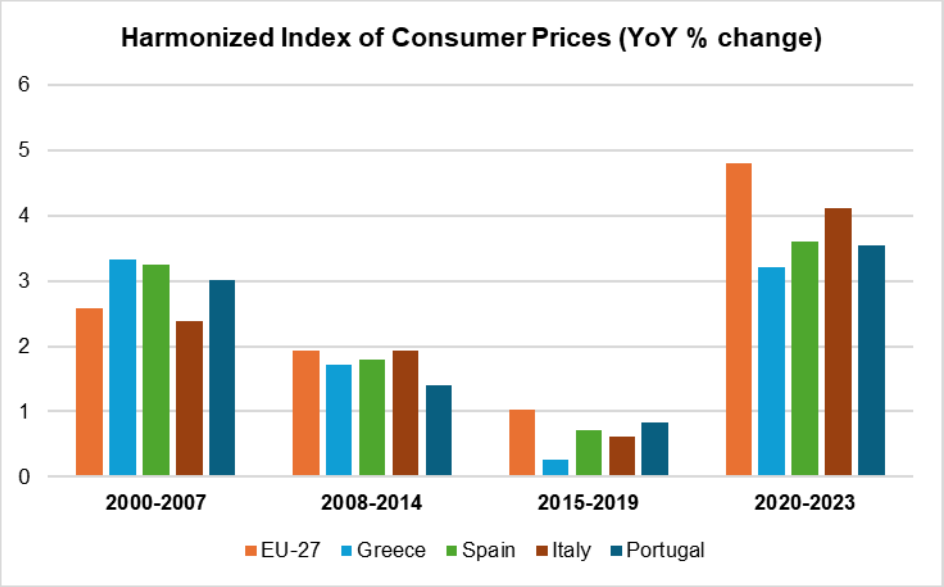
In addition to the analysis of real convergence, it is essential to examine nominal convergence, based on the three variables that governments can manage to improve the economic climate: public debt, public deficit/surplus and harmonized index of consumer prices. Figure 9 shows the evolution of these indicators in Mediterranean countries.

During the two major crises, the public deficit increased significantly in these countries. In the case of Spain, it went from a surplus of 0.3% of GDP to a deficit of 8.6%, and then to 6.2%. This increase in the deficit led to a greater need for financing, raising the average public debt of the four countries from 81.3% in 2007 to almost 140% in the most recent stage.

As for the evolution of prices, in the first three phases of the analysis they remained relatively stable, with a sharp deceleration during the years of economic recovery. However, following the health crisis, prices have increased by more than three percentage points compared to the previous period. Italy has experienced the largest increase in prices, accompanied also by higher growth in the deficit and public debt.

Figure 9. *Nominal Convergence of Mediterranean Countries*





Source: Own elaboration based on Eurostat data, 2025.

In conclusion, the process of nominal and real convergence has shown disparate dynamics among these countries. While there is clear convergence in terms of GDP per capita and real productivity, the situation is less favorable in nominal variables. Portugal is the exception, as it has obtained the best results in this aspect.

The labor market has not evolved positively either, except in the case of Portugal. Unemployment rates remain high, and hiring has not improved significantly, remaining far from the targets set out in the European Employment Strategy 2020.

However, rising prices and public debt, together with persistently high fiscal deficits, continue to represent major challenges.

Conclusions

Over the last century and a half, the major economies of Southern Europe have converged with Western Europe, although there have been episodes of divergence due to historical conjunctures and economic crises. The evolution of the Augmented Human Development Index (AHDI) and its fundamental components (life expectancy, education, democracy and GDP per capita) over the long term shows that there have been substantial improvements in Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal, as a result of the improvements in living conditions brought about by the processes of industrialization and the consolidation of democratic institutions.

In the field of health, the Mediterranean countries were at a disadvantage at the end of the 19th century. However, the gap that separated them from the European average has been closing, and in some cases, such as Italy and Spain, they have even surpassed it. This progress is due to the improvement in health conditions, the expansion of access to public health care and the strengthening of social welfare.

With regard to the evolution of human capital, the trajectory has been similar. Although at the end of the 19th century, literacy and schooling levels in these countries were substantially lower than in Western Europe, the implementation of educational reforms and the universalization of compulsory education throughout the 20th century narrowed the gap.

From an institutional and political perspective, the democratic transitions in Greece, Spain and Portugal in the last quarter of the 20th century were decisive for their consolidation within the European political framework. These countries overcame authoritarian regimes and integrated their economies into European institutions. This facilitated their stability and boosted their economic development. In the case of Italy, the establishment of the Republic after World War II favored an earlier convergence with Western Europe.

So far in the 21st century, the analysis shows a more volatile dynamic. The financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent sovereign debt crisis of 2010 had a particularly severe impact on Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy, slowing down their convergence process and even causing setbacks in some macroeconomic indicators.

Finally, although the economies of southern Europe have made significant progress in terms of human development, education and health, it should be noted that structural gaps persist in the economic sphere, particularly in terms of productivity and fiscal sustainability. This is why the consolidation of their convergence processes requires the implementation of policies that address these challenges and strengthen the resilience of the Mediterranean economies in the face of future crises.

Acknowledgments

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Mediterranean Port City Identity: The Walls of Galata and their Spatial Impacts

By Elif Ceren Tay[*] & Yasemen Say Özer[±]

The Galata Region, located southwest of the Bosphorus, has developed as a harbor settlement since ancient times. With the establishment of the Genoese settlement in 1267, it became an important center in the trade network between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, maintaining its port identity until the 1950s. The area was surrounded by walls that conformed to the natural topography, serving both defensive and commercial functions, and the city gates connected the port and urban fabric. During the zoning works in the 1950s, the walls were expropriated, and the construction of wide boulevards significantly altered the urban texture. After the 1980s, the relocation of industrial zones from city centers and transportation infrastructure projects led to the weakening of Galata's port identity, while coastal interventions after 2011 and the construction of the Golden Horn Metro Bridge largely erased the remaining traces of the walls and gates. This study examines the relationship between the walls and gates in Galata and trade, as well as their impact on urban form, within the framework of the fringe belts theory based on a morphogenetic approach, using historic maps and field observations. The port area boundaries have been defined starting from Karaköy Square along the coast up to the Golden Horn Metro Bridge. The historical development of the port function has been analyzed in four phases: establishment, expansion, specialization, and regionalization. Each phase provided the basis for the reshaping of fringe belts in parallel with the transformation of the urban form. To reveal the spatial reflections of these processes, the 1858 d'Ostoya, 1905 Goad, 1944 Schneider-Nomidis, and 1970 Arnould maps were comparatively analyzed. The analyses show that the fringe belt structure in the Galata port area has been shaped according to historical, physical, and functional breaking points and that city walls and gates played guiding spatial roles in these transformations. As a result, the fringe belt structure of the Galata Region represents a unique morphological example within Istanbul's polycentric urban development model, embodying both continuity and change.

Keywords: *Galata Region, Galata City Wall, Istanbul, Port City, Historical Maps*

Introduction

Throughout history, ports have established complex relationships with cities as global networks that shape the circulation not only of goods but also of social, cultural, and intellectual phenomena (Hein 2011, Xu et al. 2025). This interaction has transformed port cities into complex urban areas shaped by unique social dynamics, changing environmental conditions, and continuous flows of people and materials

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(Rossetto et al. 2021). The relationship between the port and urban form dates back to the very beginning of settlement and directly influences the form of the city. Hoyle (1989) addressed this relationship through the concept of the port-city interface, pointing to the existence of a transitional zone between port activities and the urban fabric. Over time, industrialization, globalization, and planning policies have significantly transformed the interactions within this interface (Hein 2011, 2016, 2018, Schubert 2018).

Galata has been an important port settlement throughout history, both regionally and internationally. Galata Port, operational from the—as far as is known today—7th century BC until the 1950s, has played a central role in terms of trade and diplomacy for centuries. The port's spatial configuration was shaped by the geographical location and topographical characteristics of the region, hence considerably impacting the built form of the city. Under the influence of Genoese commerce, Galata adopted the characteristics of a Medieval Mediterranean city and was encircled by walls as a necessity of this identity. But the fast urbanization that happened around the world between 1950 and 1980, along with neoliberal policies, made the Galata Port dysfunctional and eventually disappeared. Consequently, the port-connected urban fabric underwent significant changes.

The aim of this study is to examine the formal structure of the walls and gates in Galata, a port city, and their impact on the urban space through historical maps and on-site observations, as well as to document their current condition. In this regard, the study is based on the historical-geographical approach situated within the discipline of urban morphology. The study looks at how the city has changed over time by using the term of the fringe-belt, one of the characteristic analytical tools of this approach, which is a key tool in understanding urban shapes and layouts.

Literature Review

Urban morphology is a specialized field that examines the elements that constitute the form and physical fabric of cities, the conditions under which these elements come together, and the processes of formation, change, and transformation of urban form along with their actors (Kropf 2017). This field analyzes the origin, form, layout, function, and architecture of the built environment within a historical process, revealing the spatial transformation of cities over time and the social, cultural, and physical impacts of this transformation (Conzen 2004, Madanipour 1996). The Urban Morphology Research Group (1990) defines urban morphology as the study of the physical (or built) fabric of urban form and the people and processes that shape it (Marshall & Çalışkan 2011). At the same time, urban morphology, which evaluates the different layers of the city from past to present, contributes to a better understanding of the current urban structure and supports the development of spatial foresight for the future (Oliveira 2024).

The theoretical framework of urban morphology is based on three fundamental components: form, resolution, and time. Form defines the ratio of built to unbuilt space in the built environment and the spatial relationships between these elements, while resolution encompasses various analytical levels ranging from the building scale

to the regional scale. Time allows for understanding the evolution of urban spaces within historical processes (Moudon 1997). In this context, comparative urban studies enable the evaluation of similar or contrasting phenomena in different contexts, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of specific places, events, or situations (Ward 2008, Rossetto et al. 2021). Especially in the case of complex structures such as port cities, urban morphology provides significant insights into understanding the impacts of port activities on urban development by juxtaposing seemingly incomparable urban forms and development processes (Rossetto et al. 2021).

The historical-geographical approach has been adopted as a fundamental principle in Conzen's studies on urban morphology and enables the understanding of the evolution of urban form within historical processes through conceptual tools such as the morphogenetic method, cartographic (map-based) representation, and terminological precision (Arat 2022). This approach also makes the comparative analysis of the formal development of cities possible. It argues that urban form is composed of the integration of patterns at different scales and levels of permanence. The urban structure is shaped by the combination of the two-dimensional city map—comprising streets, blocks, plots, and building plans—with the three-dimensional configuration of the building fabric and the multi-layered composition of land use. This composition creates similar morphological units or character areas within the city, and these gradual, interwoven transitions are regarded as the spatial expression of the city's historical development (Ünlü 2018).

The historical-geographical approach is based on the method of producing and comparatively analyzing maps to understand the shaping of cities throughout historical processes. This approach uses terms like "fringe-belt," "burgage cycle," "morphological region," "form complexes," "morphological frame," "morphological period," and "morphotope" to analyze and compare maps (Arat 2022). Since the Galata port area is separated from the urban settlement fabric by the city walls functioning as a line of fixation and displays a spatial configuration distinct from the residential area, the term the fringe-belt has been adopted as the main analytical tool to examine the transformations occurring within this interface.

The Impact of Fringe-belts on Walls and Commercial Areas in the Historical-Geographical Approach

The concept of the fringe-belt is an analytical tool frequently used to analyze the historical development of urban form and has been diversified and reinterpreted in different cultural contexts in recent years (Ünlü 2012). When considered together with the analytical tools of the historical-geographical approach, it provides a strong theoretical framework to explain the formal structure of urban transformation processes.

This term elucidates both the processes of urban expansion and the enduring impact of historical barriers—particularly city walls—on spatial organization. The clear differences between areas inside and outside the walls show the historical layers of how cities are shaped, while the "closed fringe belts" created by the walls help us see where things have stayed the same or changed in the city layout. Consequently, the examination of fringe belts in historical cities is an essential approach for

discerning regions of spatial continuity and alteration (Arat 2022, Oliveira 2024).

Fringe belts are structural areas characterized by large and open spaces, shaped by factors such as environmental conditions, costs, and geographical advantages (Spolaor & Oliveira 2022). Their typical association with large ownership units determines the distinctive character of these belts within the urban fabric (Ünlü 2022). In this context, while the walls function as a boundary barrier surrounding the city, the area inside the walls is predominantly residential; the region between the walls and the port is characterized by commercial functions. In the study, the morphological distinction between these two functions is examined in detail by considering the port area as a fringe belt.

Methodology/Materials

The research examines the development of port activities in Galata from their inception to the present day within the context of historical turning points that influenced these activities (establishment, expansion, specialization, and regionalization) (Hein 2011, 2016, 2018, Schubert 2018) and comparatively analyzes the formal and functional changes occurring in the transitional zone between the settlement area and the port strip. This intermediate zone, separated from the walled settlement area and characterized by heterogeneous and coarse-grained structures with distinct functions, qualifies as a fringe belt. The comparative analysis focusing on the walls, city gates, roads, and related structures will be conducted to examine the fringe belt, providing a strong framework for understanding the formal transformations of the area. In particular, the periods after 1860, 1923–1950, 1950–1980, and 1980–2025 are critically important in terms of planning decisions, zoning practices, and transportation interventions that have shaped the formation and transformation of the fringe belt in Galata Port. Historical maps are used as primary sources for evaluating these processes (Conzen 1988, Knox & Pinch 2006).

A total of thirty-one high-quality maps of Galata, dated between 1776 and 2001, have been identified. From among these, four maps representing each historical period were selected (Table 1). The selection criteria included the maps' scales (1/2000, 1/1000, and 1/500), their basis in measured drawings, and their ability to reflect key spatial parameters such as the port strip, street-block structure, walls, and gates.

Table 1. *List of selected Maps*

Period	Year	The Map Name
Setting (Ancient Period-1800)	1858	Plan général de Galata Péra et Pancalti
Expansion (1800-1900)	1905	Plan d'assurance de Constantinople. Vol. II - Péra & Galata (24-45)
Specialization (1900-1950)	1944	Galata, topographisch-archaologischer plan
Regionalization 1950-2024	1986	J.-L. Arnaud ile P. Philippon 1970- Galata

d'Ostoya developed the Plan général de Galata Péra et Pancalti Map to meet the municipality's need for a cadastral plan in 1858–1860 (Figure 1a). The map, scaled at 1/2000, depicts the urban configuration prior to the Great Pera Fire of 1870 (Özbay

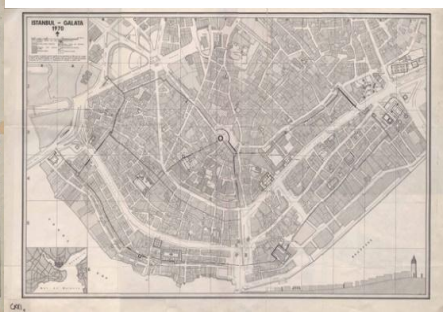
Kınacı et al. 2021). The map also records the historical road network, including dead-end streets and the former coastline prior to any land reclamation, the demolition of the city walls in 1864, and later urban design initiatives. The insurance maps created by C. E. Goad in 1905, Plan d'assurance de Constantinople (1/600 scale), are significant as they illustrate the effects of extensive urban planning initiatives undertaken in Galata during the first half of the 19th century on the city's configuration (Figure 1b). The Topographic and Archaeological Plan of Galata, published in 1944 by Alfons Maria Schneider and Miltiadis Isaak Nomidis, documents the historical topography of the city (Figure 1c). The map records the general structure of Galata after the proclamation of the Republic and prior to the post-1950 redevelopment activities. The map titled 1970 Galata–Istanbul, on the other hand, reveals the physical transformation of Galata after the 1950s (Figure 1d).

Figure 1a. *d'Ostoya Map*

Figure 1b. *Goad Map*

Figure 1c. *Schneider and Nomidis Map*

Figure 1d. *Galata–Istanbul Map*



Source: SaltMap

For the analyses to be based on accurate qualitative and quantitative data, the selected maps must share the same coordinate system and measurement standards (Podobnikar 2009, Rumsey & Williams 2002). To evaluate the planimetric accuracy of historical maps, topographic measurement errors were first identified and then corrected in a digital environment. Historical maps in JPEG format were imported into AutoCAD and scaled using the Galata Tower as a reference point. The positions of the building blocks were considered fixed based on a contemporary map prepared through photogrammetric methods, and the historical blocks were aligned accordingly within the same coordinate system. Although efforts were made to preserve the original characteristics of the historical maps, the presence of certain uncertainties should be acknowledged. All maps were finally transferred onto a unified metric coordinate plane and visualized using Adobe Photoshop. Maps are already included in the

discussion heading as Figure 12.

Findings

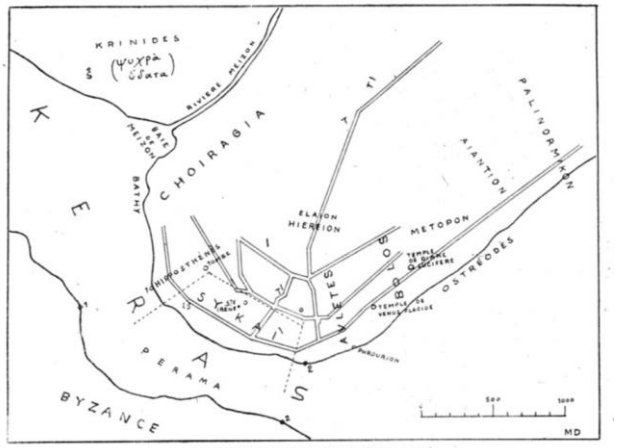
Galata is in Istanbul, at the northern entrance of the Golden Horn, southwest of the Bosphorus (Figure 2). Historically, it has served as a significant port settlement, both regionally and internationally. Its coastal access to the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus provided Galata with many natural piers, while the fan-shaped topography surrounding the ports along the coast allowed the settlement to expand along the ridgeline into the hills. Oliveira (2024) emphasizes that the First Expansion Area located in Galata's port zone possesses a strong spatial character largely defined by the presence of water. This area consists of small urban blocks composed of numerous parcels and continuous building frontages, as well as a variety of street and block patterns (Oliveire 2024).

Figure 2. *Location of Galata Region*

Source: *Created by author 1 via Google maps*

It is known that in Galata, in the 7th century BC, there was a port called "Hupo te Suke," and immediately behind it a settlement called "Sykae" (d'Alessio 1946, Herodotos 2006). Strabon (2000), notes the existence of a port at present-day Karaköy dock in 50 BC. The earliest urban representations from the 5th century suggest the existence of a settlement named Sykai in Galata, featuring a principal street with columns at sea level and a dock. This public route is currently referred to as Tersane Street (d'Alessio 1946) (Figure 3). Perşembe Pazarı Street, Mumhane Street, and Voyvoda Street coincide with the thoroughfares referenced in antiquity (Glysus 2007).

Figure 3. *Galata in 5th Century*



Source: *d'Alessio, 1946*

During the Middle Ages, Genoa emerged as a hub of international commerce, creating an extensive trading network that encompassed the Mediterranean, Aegean, Marmara, and Black Seas, while also founding colonies in the port cities within this network (Nicol 2000). The colony cities founded by the Genoese transformed the Mediterranean into a commercial center and a primary locus of cultural exchange. With an agreement made in 1267, the Genoese developed this trade network with their colonies in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, centered on Galata. During this period, Galata became an important transit point and a dynamic diplomatic center (Eyice 1969, Kuban 1996, Vasilev 1958).

Fortifications encircled Galata, as they did with several settlements in the Mediterranean area (Camiz &Verdiani 2016). The Genoese constructed a wall system in Galata from 1316 to 1453 to extend their colonies. The Genoese constructed the wall system based on remnants of walls erected in 296 and 528, adhering to the existing defensive lines (Kuban 1996). The initial privileged zone, enclosed by walls, encompassed an area beginning at the coastline and extended to Voyvoda (Banks) Street, including Karaköy Square (Eyice 1969). The wall gates of this period established a direct connection with Perşembe Pazarı and Tersane streets (Sağlam 2020). Consequently, we can regard these two avenues as the principal axis of the former urban structure. These streets serve as the principal conduits for Galata's commercial and transit network, owing to their connections with the ports.

The collapse of the Eastern Roman Empire in 1453 was a turning point for Galata, and the Genoese continued their economic activities under Ottoman rule as an autonomous commune under the name "Magnifica Communità di Pera" until 1805 (Akıncı 2021). Throughout this period, Galata preserved its commercial character, leading to the construction of inns and caravanserais in the area (Mantran 1979). During the 18th century, the density of commercial buildings, offices, warehouses, and shops on Voyvoda Street escalated, hence maintaining the region's economic significance (Akın 2002). In the same period, structures designed with the architectural plans and facades characteristic of European commercial buildings influenced the urban fabric of Galata.

Setting Period-(Ancient Age-1800)/1860 Plan Général de Galata Péra et Pancalti

The initial settlement of port cities concentrated on commercial edifices and open markets established directly on the ports or in their vicinity (Hein 2011, 2016, 2018, Schubert 2018, Rossetto Ribeiro et al. 2021). The Plan général de Galata Péra et Pancalti Map, produced between 1858 and 1860, illustrates the urban configuration of the Galata District, reflecting the port-trade requirements of that era.

Galata is a city characterized by walls and towers that bear traces of Mediterranean architecture. These walls both served a defensive function and formed a framework that organized the city's social and commercial activities. As the city developed, the walls likewise increased, and this growth facilitated Galata's dynamic and adaptable urban development. The d'Ostoya Map indicates that the walls along Bankalar Street on the southern boundary of the first expansion zone and those along Karaköy Street on the western boundary were omitted, while the remaining walls were fully retained, The d'Ostoya Map reveals the strong relationship between city gates, piers, and commercial buildings. Each gate is directly connected to the ports along the Golden Horn and serves as a central hub for key functions such as trade, customs, and population registration (Figure 4). The streets surrounding the gates shaped the built environment as designated areas for craftsmen and merchants. These roads, located between the residential area and the port zone, link the dense and compact built fabric with the more dispersed and small-scale commercial structures of the port. The proximity of the Kürkçü, Yağkapanı, and Balık Pazarı gates, in particular, contributed to both the high building density and the concentrated development of port activities in this area. The city wall, as a fringe-belt, creates a heterogeneous structure between the port and residential zones in terms of form, function, and density, whereas this heterogeneity diminishes around the gates. The gates play a significant role as physical and functional thresholds between areas with differing morphological characteristics.

Figure 4. *The Port Wall and Gate in d'Ostoya Map*

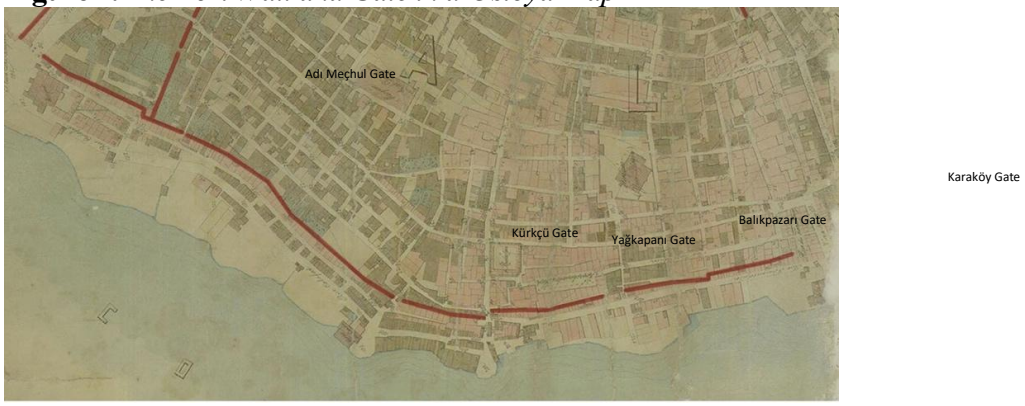


Figure 5. *The Kurşunlu Khan, Yelkenciler Khan, Galata Bedesten in d'Ostoya Map*

The Karaköy Gate, opening onto Karaköy Square located at the strategic junction of the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus, functioned as a significant transitional point between the port area and the residential fabric. Over time, this square became a focal point where trade and transportation activities concentrated. Following the international trade agreements of 1838, the construction of bank buildings in the area by Western countries initiated a process of spatial transformation in Karaköy Square; the demolition of the Karaköy Gate in 1857–1858 made the expansion of the square possible (Kafesçioğlu 2016, Okur, 2011) (Figure 6). Through the interventions of the Sixth Municipality Department (Altıncı Daire-i Belediye), the section where Karaköy Street reached the waterfront was transformed into a square, during which buildings such as Havyar Han and Komisyon Han were also situated around the square. Havyar Han represents an example of an organically developed traditional urban space, while Komisyon Han reflects the early modern architectural approach of the period. Today, Karaköy Square serves as an integrated threshold area that provides morphological continuity between two different expansion zones, characterized by homogeneous urban blocks and a coherent street layout.

Figure 6. *The Komisyon Khan, Havyar Khan in d'Ostoya Map*

Expansion Period (1800-1900)/1905 Plan d'assurance de Constantinople

The growth process of port cities is typically linked to the transformations initiated by the industrial revolution. Throughout this period, port-related activity encompassed industrial operations as well. Generally, there was an expansion of docks, piers, and warehouses. (Hein 2011, 2016, 2018, Schubert 2018). Moreover, numerous administrative bodies were instituted to guarantee urban governance, legislation was implemented, and extensive urban planning initiatives were conducted.

The 6th Department Municipality was the inaugural municipality founded within the Ottoman Empire in 1857, adhering to European principles. The 6.th Department Municipality's most drastic action was the destruction of the Galata walls. The Goad Map illustrates the damage inflicted on the walls following the decision to dismantle them in 1864. During this period, a significant portion of the outer walls and coastal walls was dismantled. Despite the physical disappearance of the walls, it is observed that the port area still exhibits the characteristics of a fringe belt. The small-scale, buildings positioned adjacent to the wall preserve the spatial continuity of this area and maintain its function as a historical boundary. The increase in larger-scale commercial and administrative facilities located behind these buildings indicates that this belt serves not only as a physical boundary but also as a functional transition zone. The dense construction concentrated around the gates demonstrates that these areas function as threshold points enabling transitions between both sides of the fringe, thereby revealing that spatial continuity is maintained through these thresholds.

Significant alterations on the Goad Map have occurred in the transportation infrastructure and roadways, accompanied by extensive road expansion initiatives. The region's organic road configuration, featuring several dead-end streets, has evolved into a design comprising two primary arteries oriented east-west, along with secondary roads linked to them (Özbay Kınacı et al., 2021). During this process, streets including Grande Galata Street (Grande Rue de Galata), Yorgancılar Street (Rue de Yorghandjilar), Yenikapı, Şişhane, and Büyük Hendek were established. Furthermore, Yüksek Kaldırım Street, linking Karaköy to the Galata Tower, has been renovated (Özbay Kınacı et al. 2021). Following the demolition of the city walls, a series of urban modifications were implemented on Mumhane Street (Orçun Kafesçioğlu 2016), with Gümrük Street and Mumhane Gate emerging as the principal access points along the former coastline. The Kurşunlu Mahzen Gate serves as the point where Gümrük Street and Mumhane Gate converge with the sea. Furthermore, the port in the vicinity was filled, and Rıhtımlar Street was inaugurated in the reclaimed space. The construction of the Galata Bridge commenced in 1845, coinciding with the rise in economic activities in Galata (Çelik 2016).

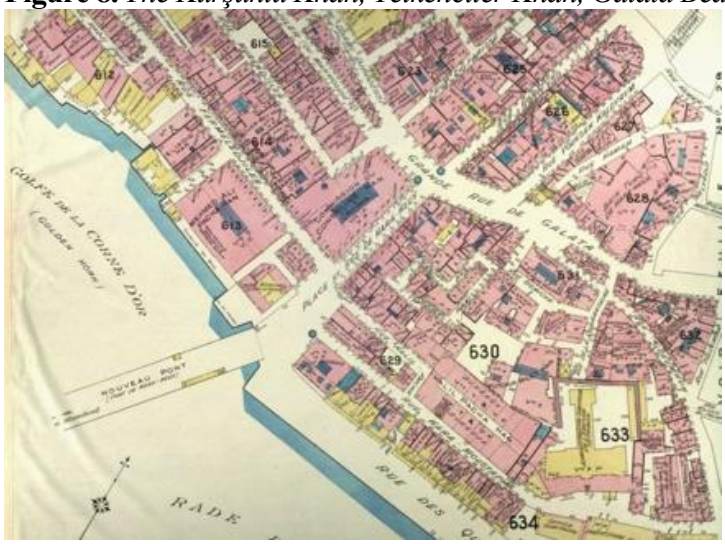
On the 1905 map, Kurşunlu Han, Galata Bedesten, and Yelkenciler Han retain their original architectural layouts and commercial purposes (Figure 7). Land reclamation along the shoreline led to the expansion of the pier areas, resulting in a more structured coastal character. This transition enhanced business operations in the region and stimulated new construction. Particularly in the region between Kalafatçılar Street and the coastline, the newly constructed edifices predominantly comprise warehouses and small commercial establishments. This scenario underscores the significance of commerce and storage roles within the urban structure of the era, closely linked to the

region's economic activities.

Figure 7. *The Kurşunlu Khan, Yelkenciler Khan, Galata Bedesten in 1905 Goad Map*

The bridge links to Karaköy Square. The location of the Komisyonu Han was altered due to new transportation infrastructure, resulting in the reconstruction of the building as a single level (Orçun Kafesçioğlu 2016) (Figure 8). In line with these developments, Karaköy Square has strengthened its connection with the port and has transformed into a more defined urban space. Although it possesses a homogeneous built fabric, its location on the boundary of the fringe belt places it in interaction with the surrounding heterogeneous textures. Through its connections with both the urban core and the reshaped waterfront, it functions as a permeable and transformative intermediary space within the fringe belt.

Figure 8. *The Kurşunlu Khan, Yelkenciler Khan, Galata Bedesten in 1905 Goad Map*



Specialization Period – (1900-1950)/1944 Galata, topographisch-archaologischer Plan mit erlauterndem Text

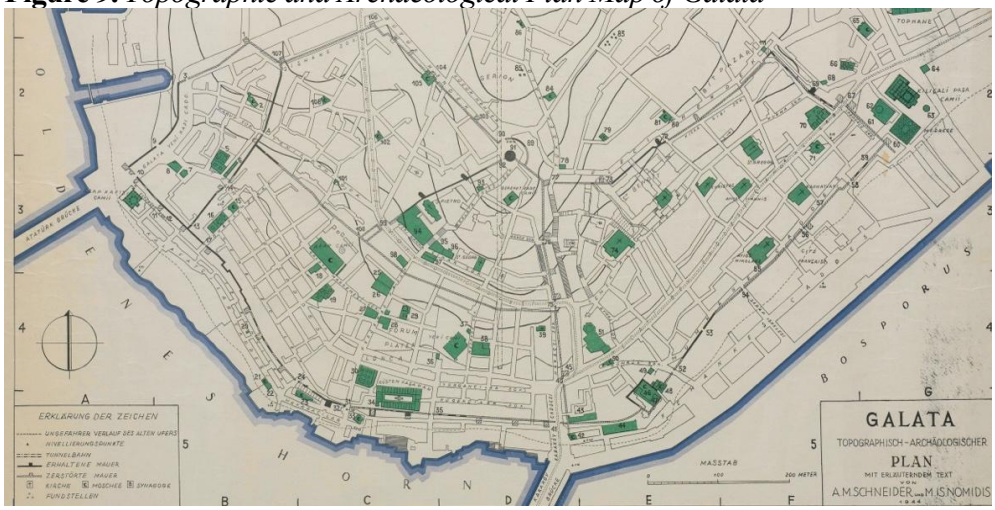
Throughout the specialization period, port facilities experienced substantial modifications to accommodate large cargo vessels, container ships, oil tankers, and transports for grain and ore. More substantial vessels necessitated seabed excavation and/or the establishment of extensive new piers to ensure enough water depth. In some instances, these new mandates necessitated the relocation of port activities from their original sites (Hein 2011, 2016, 2018, Schubert 2018).

The declaration of the Republic on October 29, 1923, was a decisive turning point for the Republic of Turkey; radical political and socio-cultural transformations took place with the Republic. These reforms promoted the adoption of contemporary and scientific methodologies in urban planning research and established the foundation of modern Turkish infrastructure. In this context, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk assigned the responsibility of urban planning for Istanbul to French planner Henri Prost in 1936. Prost sought to modernize the city in accordance with the Republic's Westernization objectives while simultaneously prioritizing the preservation of its historical fabric. Prost's strategy was to maintain the operational integrity of the ports and industrial areas in Galata and the Golden Horn while endeavoring to link the two banks of the Golden Horn through the establishment of new squares and transit lines and to emphasize economic advancement. (Bilsel 2011, 2010, Aydemir 2008, Tekeli 2021).

Schneider and Nomidis' 1944 Topographic and Archaeological Plan Map of Galata (Figure 9) is a detailed monograph that illustrates the spatial impacts of the Prost Plan and the systematic urban planning techniques employed following the Republic's declaration. The map indicates that the outside and inner walls have been predominantly obliterated. However, the sea walls from the western boundary of the 1st Expansion Zone to the Galata Bridge have remained relatively intact. The section of the walls spanning from the Galata Bridge to the northwest, delineating the western boundary of the 2nd Expansion Zone, has mostly endured, but the structural integrity of the walls in other regions has been considerably compromised. Within these regions, one can discern only remnants and vestiges at specific locations.

The 1944 map indicates a substantial rise in building along the shoreline between the Atatürk Bridge and the Galata Bridge. In the area characterized by extensive construction, particularly along the coastline, small-scale warehouses and commercial structures situated between Kalafatçılar Street and Fermenciler Street have been razed, replaced by large-scale factories and industrial facilities. The areas that developed around the city walls can be defined as transitional zones that have undergone functional transformation with the expansion of the city center. While this belt, in which the walls act as a spatial boundary, delineates the limits of the old urban fabric, the modern and large-scale structures located beyond the walls represent the new dynamics of urban development. The proliferation of these facilities has limited access to Kalafatçılar Street, a main thoroughfare adjacent to the coast, for the ports. This situation exemplifies a transition process aligned with the Prost Plan's objective of maintaining the functional integrity of industrial zones. Conversely, Kurşunlu Han, Yelkenciler Han, and Galata Bedesten maintain their original architectural layouts.

Figure 9. *Topographic and Archaeological Plan Map of Galata*



Source: Salt Research, 2024

Regionalization Period – (1950-today)/1986-Istanbul-Galata 1970

Regionalization is the most recent phase in the growth of port cities, significantly influenced by pivotal transformations including globalization, containerization, widespread motorization, and the transition from coal to oil. These transformations have generated increased land requirements for the establishment of refineries and transshipment facilities. The advent of larger and more automated port terminals has displaced industrial operations and port facilities from urban areas. The regions at the interfaces of the historic port cities have emerged as appealing experimental zones for architects and urban planners (Hein 2011, 2016, 2018, Schubert 2018).

Post-1950, modernization efforts in Istanbul initiated the development of industrialization. The city's burgeoning population and the prevalent usage of motor vehicles emerged as significant factors of urbanization. During this decade, urban development projects were predominantly confined to road extension and traffic management (Tuna 2019, Tekeli 2021, Şahin 2015, Gül 2024). The map created by M. Papatriafantafilou and J. L. Arnaud (1986) illustrates the physical configuration of Galata in 1970 and depicts the impact of urbanization efforts from the 1950s on its urban morphology (Figure 10).

Figure 10. *The 1970 Istanbul-Galata Map (1986)*

Source: Salt Research, 2024

The demolitions associated with road construction in the 1950s inflicted damage on the extant sections of the walls, and the remaining portions of the seawalls have also been significantly dismantled. According to the 1970 Istanbul-Galata Map, the parts of the walls descending from the Galata Tower to the northwest and the parts located on the eastern border of the 5th Expansion Region and the northern border of Tophane constitute the last remnants of the walls. Only a minuscule portion of the Galata Walls remains in incomplete remnants and fragments.

The expansion of Tersane and Kemeraltı Streets, along with the establishment of Karaköy Square, constitutes significant modifications that stand out on the map. The expansion and convergence of Tersane and Kemeraltı Streets markedly diminished the built-up area ratio, with Tersane Street's width increasing from 7 meters to 30 meters and Kemeraltı Street's breadth from 7 meters to 21 meters. The newly constructed square that supplanted Karaköy Street encompasses an area of 11,000 square meters and is 80 meters in width. During this time, Karaköy Square evolved into a transport hub, and the inauguration of the Karaköy underpass in 1964 enhanced the square's role as a traffic junction (Orçun Kafesçioğlu 2016). Refik Saydam Street, delineating the western boundary of the district, and Maliye Street, linking Kemeraltı Street to the coastline, are newly inaugurated thoroughfares in this development. Furthermore, the roadway was expanded by eliminating the stairs on the Yüksek Kaldırım roadway to accommodate vehicular traffic; nevertheless, this expansion resulted in the street becoming too steep. This intervention led to the abrupt transformation of the historical street fabric into wide arterial roads and clusters of large-scale buildings located behind them. As can be observed through the map, the traditional fabric in Galata was fragmented under the influence of post-1950 modernization policies, and the historical character of the area was, in places, erased.

The map indicates the existence of substantial industrial facilities situated south of Kalafatçılar Street and Fermenciler Street. Galata Bedesten and Kurşunlu Han maintain their original architectural layouts, while Yelkenciler Han, although retaining its courtyard typology, exhibits a severe deterioration in its spatial arrangement. During the development of Karaköy Square, edifices like Komisyonu Han, Azize Police Station (Seyrüsefain İdaresi), Galata Pier, and Havyar Han were razed (Orçun Kafesçioğlu 2016).

Following 1980, the influence of global neoliberal policies intensified the deindustrialization of urban centers, prompting the relocation of port facilities to the city's periphery. This shift entailed the dismantling of industrial infrastructure in Istanbul and the transfer of port operations from the Golden Horn to Tuzla between 1984 and 1989. As a result, the industrial heritage along the Galata shoreline was gradually eroded, paving the way for new waves of capital investment in the coastal zone (Şen et al. 2024). The outdated industrial edifices in this fringe-belt region have become targets for urban redevelopment and new capital investments.

Efforts to terminate industrial activity on the Golden Horn persisted until 1994, after which, in 1995, international initiatives were initiated to convert these regions into centers for congress, culture, and the arts. The evolution of shipyards and ports resulted in the recognition of these processes as a worldwide phenomenon (Butler 2007). Since 2011, urban interventions along the Galata shoreline and the Golden Horn area have underscored the impact of prior demolitions on spatial coherence. Although the Haliç Metro Bridge, completed in 2012, aimed to solve transportation challenges, it has permanently endangered the Golden Horn and Süleymaniye silhouette and damaged cultural heritage sites such as the Galata Walls. The demolition of industrial zones, the damage to the building stock caused by the construction of the Haliç Metro Bridge, the widening of Tersane Street, the opening of Refik Saydam Street, and the destruction of the built environment in Karaköy Square collectively led to a significant reduction in structures in the area between Tersane Street and the coastline. As a result, the balance between built and open spaces was disrupted, and open areas increased noticeably.

Discussion

The evolution of Galata as a port city has significantly influenced its social and economic framework as well as its urban planning methodologies. This evolution has become particularly apparent through fundamental urban components such as walls, gates, roadways, and structures. The swift transition observed in the region since the onset of the 19th century is directly attributable to the alteration of these elements.

The walls of Galata are significant edifices that embody the area's historical and defensive roles. Beginning in the mid-19th century, the 6th Department Municipality resolved to dismantle the walls, resulting in their significant destruction. The Goad Map illustrates the demolition of the walls subsequent to the decision made in 1864. The removal of the walls reconfigured Galata's intra-city transit and commerce, leading to the expansion of its transportation network and the development of new highways and trade zones in the surrounding districts. The 1944 map distinctly illustrates this alteration; a significant segment of the outer walls and coastal barriers was dismantled, although the walls surrounding the Galata Tower were mostly maintained. The losses incurred to establish new infrastructures and transit routes led to the deterioration of the region's historical fabric.

The city gates and transit infrastructure in Galata were crucial to the economic and cultural development of the area. In the 19th century, the efforts of the 6th Department Municipality facilitated the transition from organic road textures to

broader and more uniform avenues, and the dismantling of the city walls resulted in the establishment of new transportation arteries. The Goad Map illustrates this transition process and depicts configurations including Büyük Galata Avenue, Yorgancılar Avenue, and Karaköy Square. The expansion of Yüksek Kaldırım Avenue enhanced transit between Galata and Karaköy, while simultaneously accentuating the avenue's severe gradient. Following the renovation initiatives post-1950, the widths of Tersane and Kemeraltı roads were expanded, Karaköy Square was transformed into a transportation hub spanning 11,000 square meters, and the inauguration of the Karaköy underpass in 1964 enhanced the area's role as a traffic nexus. Nonetheless, these road widening initiatives altered the spatial configuration of Galata, providing merely surface remedies and modifying the solid-void ratios. Projects like the Haliç Metro Bridge post-2011 illustrate the conflict between modernization and the preservation of historic heritage. This transition process alters the historical identity of Galata and exposes the enduring impacts of urban interventions on its spatial and cultural fabric.

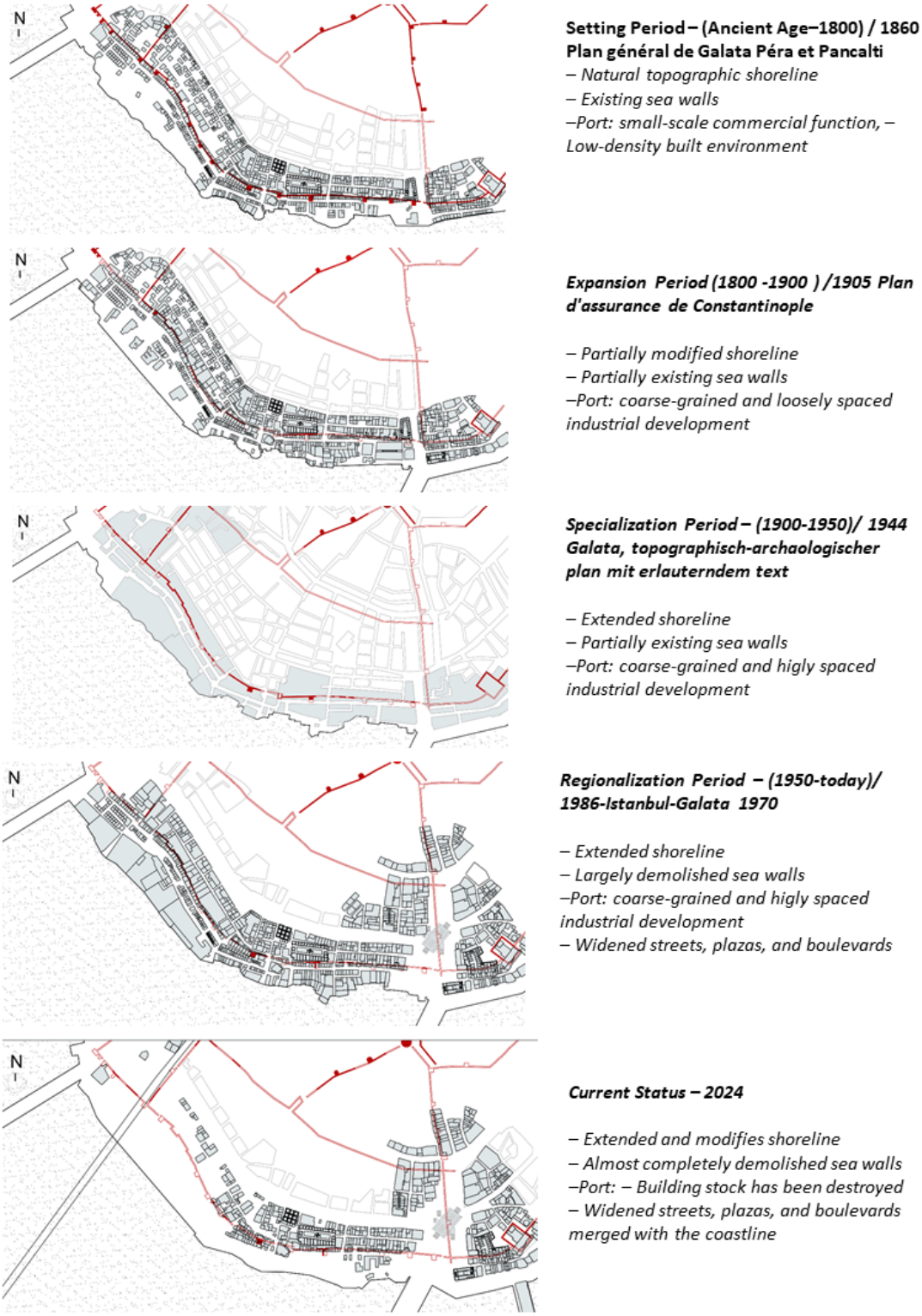
The edifices in Galata significantly contributed to the formal metamorphosis of the city. While the Galata Bedesten and Kurşunlu Han retained their original architectural layouts, Yelkenciler Han showed signs of spatial degradation. The 1905 insurance maps indicate that these edifices maintained their commercial roles, whereas other commercial constructions in the vicinity underwent swift transformations. The destruction of walls and the infilling of the shoreline resulted in the expansion of dock areas, particularly along Kalafatçılar Street and the waterfront, where warehouses and small commercial units proliferated, thereby enhancing economic activities. The transition is more pronounced on the 1944 map, as large-scale industrial complexes supplanted tiny commercial ones post-1950. Beginning in the 1980s, global neoliberal policies facilitated the relocation of industry from urban areas, resulting in the erosion of the industrial history along the Galata coast and the reconfiguration of the shoreline (Figure 12).

Galata's development serves as a microcosm of the substantial physical and social shifts experienced by Istanbul's port-city structure. It is a process that alters not just economic operations but also the social and cultural dynamics of the city. This procedure also illustrates the difficulties encountered in urban planning, the conservation of cultural assets, and the incorporation of contemporary life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Galata waterfront and its surrounding areas should be regarded as a significant site that preserves the characteristics of a historical fringe belt while reflecting the layered and dynamic structure of the urban fabric. The spatial transformations observed in this area not only reflect broader trends in the modernization of port cities but also highlight the inherent tensions between conservation and development.

Figure 11. *An Evaluation of the Fringe-Belt Evolution of Galata through Historical Maps*



Source: Created by Author 1

When considering the historical evolution of port areas, the transformation process up to the 1970 map largely follows a natural and expected trajectory. However, the urban planning and development policies implemented after 1950 severely damaged the built environment. The physical and functional continuity between Tersane Avenue—the main axis connecting the port and the inner parts of Galata since antiquity—and the shoreline has been lost. As a result, the area, which formerly held the qualities of a historical fringe belt, has turned into a largely vacant, fragmented, and characterless zone (Figure 11).

Future urban planning and conservation strategies should take into account both the historical value and the evolving functional roles of these fringe-belt areas, aiming to strengthen spatial continuity and reinforce Galata's urban identity. In this context, planning approaches that integrate historical form with contemporary needs—balanced and culturally sensitive—can serve as a guide toward a sustainable urban future that respects the past while embracing transformation.

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Charting Uprisings and Alliances in the Middle East: 2011-2024

*By Yaron Katz**

This paper investigates the political and strategic transformations that have reshaped the Middle East from the 2011 Arab uprisings through the Israel–Hamas War. It argues that the region's shifting landscape is marked by the emergence of "fluid alliances" that prioritize immediate strategic interests over long-term partnerships. These are informal, interest-based partnerships formed in response to acute security and political pressures. These alliances reflect a broader recalibration of regional order, shaped by diminished U.S. engagement, the fragmentation of traditional power blocs, and the enduring legacies of domestic unrest. Employing a multi-theoretical framework that draws on realism, constructivism, and neo-Gramscianism, the paper systematically analyzes how these paradigms illuminate different dimensions of alliance formation, power projection, and identity politics in the post-uprising period. It also critiques the inefficacy of longstanding regional organizations in sustaining cooperation, highlighting how ad hoc coalitions and bilateral arrangements have supplanted formal mechanisms. Through an examination of political discourse and regional behavior, the study reveals the complex interplay of ideational forces that have undermined state legitimacy, enabled authoritarian resilience, and impeded efforts toward regional integration. The findings emphasize the volatility and structural fragmentation that continue to define Middle Eastern geopolitics more than a decade after the uprisings

Keywords: *Alliances; Middle East; Arab Uprisings; Regional Cooperation; International Relations*

Introduction

This study investigates the profound geopolitical, social, and economic transformations that have occurred in the Middle East from the outbreak of the Arab uprisings in 2011 through the ongoing Israel–Hamas War. These years have marked a turbulent era of political reordering, ideological contestation, and shifting regional alignments. The initial mass protests that erupted across Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Bahrain, and Yemen in 2011 signaled a widespread challenge to entrenched authoritarian regimes and brought to the surface deep-rooted grievances related to governance, economic disparity, political repression, and identity. While the uprisings initially galvanized hopes for democratization and popular empowerment, the subsequent period has been defined by instability, protracted conflict, and the reassertion of authoritarian rule. These developments disrupted domestic politics and reconfigured the broader regional order.

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One of the most striking features of the post-2011 Middle Eastern geopolitical landscape is the emergence of what this study terms "fluid alliances". These are informal, pragmatic, and short-lived coalitions formed in response to immediate strategic or security imperatives, rather than grounded in ideological affinity or institutional commitment. These alignments reflect a departure from earlier patterns of pan-Arab solidarity or bloc-based politics. They underscore the limitations of traditional regional institutions, such as the Arab League and Gulf Cooperation Council, which have largely failed to provide cohesive responses to the region's crises.

At the same time, the diminishing influence of the United States - a trend evident in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings - had significant ramifications for regional power dynamics. Although the U.S. continued to play a role in military operations and diplomatic engagements, its relative retrenchment contributed to the rise of alternative regional powers such as Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, empowered non-state actors, and allowed for greater Russian and Chinese involvement. Yet, while many scholars and policy analysts have observed this shift, there has been limited systematic analysis of how these developments intersect with evolving patterns of alliance formation, identity politics, and economic restructuring.

This paper seeks to address this gap by employing an integrative theoretical framework that draws on realism, constructivism, and neo-Gramscianism. Each lens brings a distinctive analytical utility: realism helps explain the strategic behavior of states and the formation of fluid alliances in a competitive regional environment; constructivism sheds light on how evolving identity narratives shape regional conflict and cooperation; and neo-Gramscianism provides tools for analyzing how hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces, linked to global capitalism and domestic class structures, influence regional political economies. This tripartite framework allows a multidimensional analysis of the Middle East's transformations.

The research aims to clarify the persistent challenges to regionalism and cooperation by exploring how shifting power balances, contested identities, and economic restructuring interact to perpetuate instability. Particular attention is provided to the role of non-state actors such as Hamas, the entrenchment of authoritarian regimes through neoliberal reform packages such as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, and the disjuncture between elite-driven foreign policy strategies and popular sentiments. By tracing these developments from 2011 through 2024, this study contributes to both empirical and theoretical debates in international relations.

Theoretical Framework

This study examines the profound geopolitical, ideological, and economic transformations in the Middle East from the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011 through to the Israel-Hamas War that started on October 7, 2023. To explain the complexities of this evolving regional landscape, a theoretical framework is employed, drawing on three prominent international relations and critical theories: realism, constructivism, and neo-Gramscian theory. Each of these perspectives offers distinct analytical tools that allow for a multi-layered examination of state behavior, identity politics, and hegemonic power structures that have shaped the region's shifting alliances and conflicts.

Realism constitutes the foundational pillar of the theoretical framework, providing insight into how states navigate the international system defined by uncertainty and competition for power and security (Waltz, 1979). Central to realism is the understanding that states are rational actors primarily concerned with survival, power maximization, and balancing threats. In applying realism to this study, particular attention is given to state-centric actions such as military interventions, alliance formations, and strategic partnerships. The emergence of ad hoc partnerships motivated by strategic imperatives rather than enduring ideological alignment illustrates realist dynamics in a region marked by declining U.S. hegemonic influence and an increasingly multipolar order. Realism thus aids in decoding how pragmatic calculations of power and security dominate state behavior in a volatile and uncertain regional context.

While realism foregrounds material power and security interests, constructivism brings the significance of identities, ideas, and norms in shaping international relations (Wendt, 1999). Constructivist theory emphasizes that state interests are constructed through social interaction and collective meaning-making processes. This perspective is essential for understanding how ideological currents such as pan-Arabism, sectarianism, and political Islam have influenced both state and non-state actors in the Middle East during the post-Arab Spring era. Constructivism enriches the analysis by revealing the ideational underpinnings of conflicts and cooperation, highlighting that alliances and enmities in the region are shaped by material interests and contested social meanings and symbolic power.

The third theoretical lens employed is neo-Gramscian theory, which offers a perspective on the intersections between ideology, economic structures, and hegemonic power in global and regional contexts. This approach demonstrates how dominant social groups maintain power through ideological consent and the construction of hegemonic blocs that integrate political, economic, and cultural elements. In the Middle Eastern context, neo-Gramscian analysis focuses on the role of global capitalism, neoliberal reforms, and shifting hegemonic alignments in reshaping regional dynamics, thereby realigning regional actors toward pragmatic interests over ideological solidarity (Harris, 2022). Neo-Gramscian theory interrogates economic imperatives and hegemonic discourses of political strategies and alliances, shaping the structural conditions for both cooperation and conflict in the region.

The Arab uprisings exposed deep structural weaknesses within many Middle Eastern states and underscored the limitations of existing regional cooperation mechanisms such as the Arab League and the GCC. Historically, regimes in the region have leveraged confrontational foreign policies alongside symbolic commitments to pan-Arabism or pan-Islamism to project power and bolster domestic legitimacy. These ideological frameworks functioned as rhetorical tools legitimizing regime authority without fostering substantive cooperation (Fawcett, 2020). As Barnett and Solingen (2007) highlight, Arab states have long espoused unity rhetorically while fearing the institutionalization of regional mechanisms that could undermine their sovereignty and reveal internal vulnerabilities.

By integrating these three theoretical lenses, the framework provides a layered understanding of the fragmentation and fluidity characterizing the post-2011 Middle East. Realism explains the material logic behind state actions and alliance formation;

constructivism reveals the ideational and identity-based motivations underlying those behaviors; and neo-Gramscian theory situates both within a broader context of structural power, economic dependency, and ideological control.

To operationalize this theoretical framework, the study adopts a combination of discourse analysis, geopolitical event mapping, and comparative institutional analysis. The post-2011 regional landscape witnessed increasing fragmentation, as threatened regimes sought to secure their positions through ad hoc, interest-based coalitions or "liquid alliances" (Gause, 2014). These temporary, flexible partnerships were motivated by immediate security concerns rather than long-term ideological alignments. Saudi Arabia and the UAE formed a strategic partnership to counter Islamist movements, while Turkey and Qatar supported opposing factions, revealing deep ideological and geopolitical divergences that complicated efforts at regional cohesion. The Syrian civil war epitomizes the failure of formal regional cooperation, as rival states backed opposing factions, turning the conflict into a proxy battlefield.

The role of external actors remains pivotal. The perceived U.S. retrenchment after the uprisings heightened insecurity among Arab states, especially within the Gulf monarchies, compelling regimes to pursue more transactional alliances to mitigate emerging threats (Feldman, 2021). Concurrently, Iran's growing influence exacerbated sectarian and geopolitical tensions, further fracturing the potential for unified regional action. In contrast, the Arab League and the GCC demonstrated significant shortcomings in managing post-uprising crises (Achcar, 2013). While the Arab League endorsed international intervention in Libya and sanctions on Syria, these measures were limited by member states' concerns over sovereignty. The GCC, although a more effective institution, faced internal divisions that hindered deeper integration or "Gulf Union" ambitions (Ulrichsen, 2020). Regime survival remained the paramount concern, undermining prospects for durable regional governance. This integrative framework enables a comprehensive understanding of a region marked by fragmentation, shifting alliances, and contested hegemonic projects.

The Arab Uprisings and the Israel-Hamas conflict reveal distinct but interconnected patterns of polarization and power contestation in the Middle East. The uprisings exposed the fragility of authoritarian regimes, generating fragmented and short-lived alliances rooted in regime survival and immediate interests. Conversely, the Israel-Hamas conflict exemplifies entrenched, ideologically driven rivalries supported by durable regional and international alliances. However, both cases demonstrate the limits of regional cooperation but in different ways: the uprisings through the collapse of formal regional institutions and the rise of fragmented state-centered politics, and the Israel-Hamas conflict through the persistence of deep geopolitical fault lines that draw in global powers. Together, they illustrate the complexity of legitimacy, power, and alliance formation in a region marked by enduring instability and contested futures.

Strategic Role of External Actors

The Arab uprisings precipitated a profound reconfiguration of the Middle East's political landscape, exposing entrenched structural weaknesses within many Arab states and fundamentally challenging the efficacy of regional governance institutions such as the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). These upheavals illuminated the enduring paradox at the heart of Arab regionalism: while pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism have served as powerful rhetorical tools for regimes to project legitimacy and authority, their practical application as frameworks for genuine regional cooperation has been historically limited and, at times, counterproductive. As Fawcett (2020) asserts, the invocation of these ideological constructs often functioned as symbolic gestures designed primarily to reinforce domestic regimes rather than to foster robust interstate collaboration. This rhetorical mobilization of identity politics was intricately tied to regime survival strategies, privileging symbolic unity over substantive integration.

Barnett and Solingen (2007) provide a critical perspective on this phenomenon, highlighting the ambivalent stance of Arab states toward regional unity. While public discourse consistently espouses the value of Arab solidarity, underlying apprehensions about regime sovereignty and the potential empowerment of supranational bodies have hindered the institutionalization of regional cooperation. This tension has engendered a persistent fragmentation in regional governance, wherein states remain wary of formalized structures that might constrain their autonomous control or expose domestic vulnerabilities to external scrutiny.

The events of the Arab Spring crystallized these longstanding dynamics by unleashing widespread domestic upheaval and discontent, intensifying regime insecurities, and underscoring the primacy of survival over cooperation (Hinnebusch, 2020). The rapid overthrow of authoritarian rulers in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya was emblematic of popular mobilization against repressive governance and indicated the fragility of state institutions and regional mechanisms. Valbjørn and Bank (2012) argue that although regimes continued to rhetorically invoke Arab solidarity as a means of legitimizing authority, the absence of deep-rooted domestic legitimacy significantly undermined the capacity for regional organizations to act cohesively or effectively. Consequently, the post-2011 period witnessed an increasing trend toward political fragmentation and a retreat from comprehensive regionalism in favor of pragmatic, interest-driven alliances tailored to immediate security concerns (Kamrava, 2018).

This strategic recalibration has led to the emergence and predominance of fluid, context-specific coalitions characterized by their informal nature, temporal flexibility, and pragmatic orientation. A salient illustration of this phenomenon is the coalition formed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to counteract the political influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, which both states perceive as a destabilizing actor threatening regime stability and the established regional order (Lynch, 2020). In contrast, Turkey and Qatar supported Islamist movements, including the Brotherhood, as part of their strategies to expand regional influence, reflecting a complex web of competing ideological and geopolitical agendas that further complicate attempts at unified regional action (Lynch, 2023).

The Syrian civil war exemplifies the limitations of formal regional cooperation and the resultant reliance on alliances. The conflict evolved into a multifaceted proxy war, with regional and international actors backing rival factions to advance their strategic interests. This battleground dynamic exposed the fragmentation of the regional system and underscored the declining efficacy of institutions like the Arab League, which failed to coordinate an effective, unified response. Phillips (2020) emphasizes that these alliances are intrinsically shaped by the broader international context and the perceived retrenchment of the United States' hegemonic role in the region, which prompted regional states to seek alternative partnerships and strategies for self-preservation.

The perceived diminution of American engagement following the uprisings contributed to an environment of heightened insecurity among key regional players, especially the Gulf monarchies that had long depended on U.S. military and diplomatic guarantees (Feldman, 2021). This strategic vacuum incentivized a recalibration of alliances and the adoption of more flexible and transactional coalitions aimed at countering emergent threats through the expanding influence of Iran in regional conflict zones such as Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. Iran's growing footprint was widely interpreted by Gulf states as an existential challenge, intensifying sectarian fault lines and heightening geopolitical rivalries. This development contributed to the disintegration of attempts to forge cohesive regional security frameworks (Koch and Stivachis, 2019).

Regional organizations have struggled to adapt to these new realities. The Arab League, historically the principal forum for regional dialogue, demonstrated limited capacity to mediate or resolve the crises unleashed by the uprisings (Valbjorn, 2021). Although it formally endorsed international interventions in Libya and imposed sanctions on the Assad regime in Syria, these measures were largely ineffective in altering conflict dynamics or fostering regional consensus. The League's inability to enforce collective decisions reflects its institutional weaknesses and the persistent reluctance of member states to cede sovereignty or empower supranational governance (Del Sarto et. al., 2024).

The GCC faced significant internal challenges that hindered its evolution. Despite undertaking military intervention in Bahrain to suppress popular protests and mediating the conflict in Yemen, the Gulf bloc was unable to overcome divergent threat perceptions among its members or to advance the vision of a unified "Gulf Union." The predominance of regime security considerations and inter-member rivalries perpetuated institutional fragmentation, limiting the GCC's capacity to function as a cohesive security community. These internal divisions and external pressures diminished the GCC's ability to serve as a stabilizing regional actor (Lawson, 2022).

The Arab uprisings accelerated the decline of traditional regionalism, paving the way for a regional order defined by fragmentation, fluidity, and pragmatism. The ascendancy of alliances as the principal modality of interstate interaction reflects the security imperatives and survival calculations of regimes confronting pervasive instability and external threats (Diab, 2021). While these informal coalitions enable rapid, flexible responses to emergent challenges, their lack of institutionalization and durability undermines prospects for sustained regional cooperation or conflict

resolution. The persistence of such alliances highlights the fundamental challenges confronting regional organizations and the enduring limits of ideological frameworks premised on Arab unity. This fragmented regionalism, shaped both by endogenous insecurities and shifting external influences, continues to define the strategic calculus of Middle Eastern actors in the post-Arab Spring era (Magee & Massoud, 2022).

U.S. Retrenchment and Regional Perceptions

The decade following the Arab Spring was marked by profound internal political transformations and a significant recalibration of the involvement and influence of external actors (Saaida, 2024). Historically, the preeminent external power in the region, the United States' post-Arab Spring policy trajectory, is widely perceived by regional rulers and policymakers as a period of strategic retrenchment and cautious disengagement (Mounir, 2020). This perceived shift from a historically dominant, interventionist role toward a more selective, ambiguous, and reactive posture shaped regional power dynamics and precipitated consequential realignments (Pollack, 2021).

The Obama administration's calibrated response to the Arab Spring signaled a marked departure from earlier paradigms of American foreign policy in the Middle East. Unlike the overt military interventions that characterized the early 2000s - the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the NATO-led intervention in Libya in 2011 - the administration adopted a posture of deliberate restraint (Aras & Kardaş, 2021). This strategic hesitancy was predicated on lessons drawn from the protracted and costly conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as domestic political considerations emphasizing "leading from behind" and reliance on multilateral institutions and regional actors to manage instability (Phillips, 2021). However, this calculated restraint was widely interpreted by regional governments as a withdrawal of the United States' traditional security umbrella and an erosion of American willingness to decisively influence regional outcomes in their favor. The failure to intervene militarily in Syria's protracted civil war and the equivocal stance toward Egypt's political upheavals post-Mubarak further fueled skepticism among allies regarding the reliability and predictability of U.S. security commitments (Lynch, 2020). During this period of less American involvement, this uncertainty engendered strategic anxiety, prompting states to reassess their dependence on U.S. backing and explore alternative security arrangements (Bahgat, 2022).

The "pivot to Asia" strategy announced by the Obama administration underscored a reorientation of American diplomatic and military priorities away from the Middle East toward the Indo-Pacific region. This strategic shift, driven by the perceived rise of China as a peer competitor and the necessity to safeguard economic and security interests in Asia-Pacific, effectively deprioritized the Middle East within a broader geopolitical calculus (Aras & Kardaş, 2021). The consequent redeployment of military assets and a reduction in diplomatic bandwidth contributed to a tangible diminution of U.S. presence and engagement in Middle Eastern affairs. For regional actors, this reallocation of resources created a power vacuum and heightened concerns about American commitment, encouraging regional powers to fill the void through more assertive regional policies. This trend was emblematic of a broader realignment

in international relations, wherein regional states increasingly perceived themselves as responsible agents rather than mere proxies within a U.S.-led global order (Phillips, 2021).

The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran emerged as a pivotal juncture in U.S. regional policy, eliciting profound implications for alliance structures and regional security perceptions. While lauded by proponents as a diplomatic milestone aimed at curbing nuclear proliferation, the agreement was perceived as a strategic concession to Iran, a long-standing adversary and hegemonic rival within the Gulf and broader Middle East (Juneau, 2021). This perception was compounded by concerns that legitimized Iran's regional activities and expanded its influence through proxy networks, thereby undermining the security calculus of U.S. allies. The JCPOA catalyzed a palpable estrangement between the United States and its regional partners, eroding mutual trust and incentivizing these states to pursue autonomous and often more aggressive security and diplomatic postures (Salman & Ali, 2021). This dynamic illustrates the complex interplay between nuclear diplomacy and regional power politics, wherein efforts to manage one dimension of conflict inadvertently exacerbate tensions in others.

The withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from Iraq and Afghanistan in the mid-2010s symbolized a broader narrative of American disengagement from the region. The drawdowns left fragile and often contested state institutions vulnerable to internal fragmentation and external interference, while simultaneously diminishing the United States' capacity to shape regional security architectures directly (Lynch, 2016). The vacuums created by these withdrawals facilitated the expansion of non-state actors and proxy militias and allowed regional powers to assert influence through asymmetric means (Nimer, 2022). These developments contributed to a complex security environment characterized by fragmentation, localized conflicts, and shifting alliances.

The cumulative effect of these interrelated factors fostered an environment in which regional actors recalibrated their foreign policies and strategic behaviors. Gulf monarchies such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates undertook more autonomous and often interventionist strategies, including military involvement in Yemen and assertive opposition to Islamist movements supported by rival states, notably the Muslim Brotherhood (Juneau, 2021).

Turkey, under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, leveraged the reduced American footprint to expand its regional ambitions, promoting neo-Ottoman visions of influence through direct military involvement and political patronage in Syria, Libya, and beyond (Kutlay & Öniş, 2021). Concurrently, Iran intensified its reliance on non-state proxies, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and various militias in Iraq and Syria, to project power asymmetrically and counterbalance U.S. and Saudi influence. These developments illustrate a marked departure from Cold War-era bipolar alignments, with the emergence of fluid, transactional "liquid coalitions" predicated on immediate strategic interests rather than enduring ideological or sectarian commitments (Weissenburger, 2024).

This recalibration of U.S. engagement and the resultant regional responses have had profound implications for ongoing conflicts and political fragmentation in the Middle East, including the protracted and complex Israel-Hamas conflict. The perception of American disengagement and ambivalence has created a permissive

environment for the empowerment of non-state actors, undermining traditional state-centric security paradigms and encouraging regional powers to engage in more flexible, opportunistic foreign policy maneuvers (Emek Grosse, 2025). These dynamics contribute to the fragmentation of regional order, complicating prospects for conflict resolution and reinforcing patterns of volatility and competition.

Comparative Analysis of the Arab Uprisings and the Israel-Hamas War

The Middle East has had complex political struggles characterized by competing claims to legitimacy, shifting alliances, and regional rivalries. Two major events epitomize these dynamics, yet they differ fundamentally in their structural characteristics, actors, and geopolitical implications. A comparative analysis reveals how these events reflect different modes of regional polarization and the evolving nature of power and legitimacy.

The Arab Uprisings, which erupted across multiple Arab states beginning in 2011, were primarily manifestations of popular discontent with longstanding authoritarian regimes. These regimes had maintained power through a combination of coercive repression and legitimizing ideologies rooted in pan-Arab nationalism, religious rhetoric, or patronage networks (Kamrava, 2016). The uprisings exposed the structural fragility of these regimes, whose claims to legitimacy rested more on state control and less on popular consent. This legitimacy deficit became pronounced as socioeconomic grievances - unemployment, corruption, and lack of political freedom - eroded the social contract between rulers and ruled (Fawcett, 2020).

In response, many regimes adopted "liquid alliances," characterized by short-term, opportunistic coalitions among regional actors and domestic factions to preserve the status quo (Kamrava, 2016). These alliances were inherently unstable and primarily reactive, aiming at regime survival rather than ideological coherence or long-term strategic objectives. This fragmentation underscored a broader pattern of state disintegration and political fluidity, which in some cases led to violent civil conflicts and enduring instability.

On October 7, 2023, Israel was struck by a sudden and devastating attack carried out by Hamas militants. The assault claimed the lives of 1,200 civilians and led to the abduction of 251 individuals, triggering a full-scale war involving Israel and neighboring actors. The inability of the government, military, and intelligence services to prevent the attack and safeguard civilians has deeply eroded public trust in the state, raising serious concerns about the nation's collective sense of security and its future trajectory (Vitman Schorr et al., 2025). In contrast to the Arab Springs, the Israel-Hamas conflict is not primarily an internal state crisis but a territorially and ideologically rooted confrontation between a recognized state and a non-state actor. Hamas derives its legitimacy through a dual political-military identity, positioning itself as the defender of Palestinian national rights and resistance to Israeli occupation (Kaye, 2023). Unlike authoritarian regimes struggling with internal dissent, Hamas claims legitimacy through nationalist ideology and armed resistance, asserting sovereignty over Gaza despite lacking broad international recognition (Colombo and Soler i Lecha, 2021).

Israel claims legitimacy through the principles of state sovereignty and national security, emphasizing its right to self-defense against what it perceives as existential threats from Hamas and other militant groups such as Hezbollah (Khatib, 2023). This ongoing conflict is a contest over territorial sovereignty, national identity, and the international recognition of statehood and governance, rendering it a protracted zero-sum struggle rather than a fluid contestation of internal legitimacy.

The Arab Uprisings catalyzed a wave of realignments, producing ephemeral alliances that reflected immediate strategic interests. Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, forged coalitions aimed at countering Islamist political movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, which they viewed as a destabilizing threat to their regimes (Gause, 2014). Turkey and Qatar supported various Islamist factions, positioning themselves as champions of political Islam and regional influence (Harel, 2019).

These alliances were notable for their volatility and transactional nature, lacking deep ideological foundations or institutionalization. They reflected a fractured regional order in which states prioritized short-term regime survival and influence over the pursuit of coherent, long-term regional strategies. This fluidity was symptomatic of a Middle East grappling with the erosion of traditional power structures and the rise of multipolar contestations (Bagheri and Kannarva, 2022). However, in stark contrast, the alliances that characterize the Israel-Hamas conflict are deeply entrenched and emblematic of longstanding geopolitical rivalries. Hamas's patronage by Iran represents a strategic proxy relationship through which Iran extends its influence across the Levant, challenging Israeli and Western interests (Hanieh, 2023). Conversely, Israel's security architecture is buttressed by support from Western powers, mainly the United States, whose military aid, diplomatic backing, and strategic cooperation underpin Israel's regional dominance. The war epitomizes a polarized Middle East where regional and global powers leverage local actors to pursue broader strategic aims, solidifying a bipolar or multipolar regional configuration rather than a fragmented or fluid landscape. Ahmed (2025) explains that in the "war on terror," state actions following terrorist attacks have redefined how state responses intersect with international law, although he criticizes state responses to the terrorist attacks through the lens of cosmopolitanism to demonstrate the principles of humanity, equality, and international law in the "war on terror".

The aftermath of the Arab Uprisings also revealed the ineffectiveness of regional institutions such as the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Although these bodies sought to mediate conflicts in Libya, Yemen, and Syria, their impact was constrained by member states' reluctance to cede sovereignty or empower supranational governance structures (Bromley, 2018). This hesitancy reflected entrenched state-centric norms and the absence of a cohesive regional security framework capable of managing intra-Arab conflicts. The result was a fragmented regional order characterized by competing national interests and the absence of coordinated multilateral action.

Conversely, the Israel-Hamas conflict has been the focus of sustained international attention and intervention. The United Nations has repeatedly attempted ceasefires and peace negotiations with limited success, while regional powers such as Egypt and Qatar have played crucial mediatory roles (Efron, 2023). Western countries maintain a

high-profile involvement, reflecting the conflict's broader geopolitical significance. This internationalization underscores the marginalization of regional organizations in managing the conflict and highlights the role of global powers in shaping outcomes. Unlike the fragmented regional responses to the Arab Uprisings, the Israel-Hamas conflict operates within an international diplomatic architecture that combines regional mediation with great-power diplomacy, demonstrating the globalization of Middle Eastern conflicts (Maronw, 2025). However, as explained by Kravetz (2024), while the Israeli political and military responses appear consistent with the outlined principles, unexpected problems like hostage dilemmas and urban warfare complexities present unforeseen challenges not directly addressed by the manifesto.

The international environment shaped the trajectories of both the Arab Uprisings and the Israel-Hamas War in distinct ways. The Arab Uprisings coincided with a perceived withdrawal of American influence in the Middle East, which created a power vacuum that exacerbated regional instability (Ulrichsen, 2020). This perceived U.S. retrenchment emboldened Gulf monarchies to assert greater regional agency by supporting counter-revolutionary forces, thereby influencing the trajectory of the uprisings and subsequent conflicts. In contrast, the ongoing conflict in Gaza remains a critical arena for U.S. strategic interests. American military and diplomatic support for Israel anchors the regional security architecture and shapes the conflict's international dimension. Simultaneously, Iran's backing of Hamas represents a direct challenge to U.S. regional hegemony, transforming Gaza into a proxy battleground for broader U.S.-Iranian rivalry (Szalai, 2025). This dynamic adds layers of complexity to the conflict, making it a focal point of global power competition.

Renewed Violence

The decade spanning the aftermath of the Arab Spring and preceding the Israel-Hamas conflict constitutes a critical period of transformation, distinguished by extensive shifts in political configurations, security dynamics, and regional alliances. These transformations are best understood through a multifaceted lens that captures the interplay between domestic upheavals, the disintegration and reconstitution of state authority, the ascendance of non-state actors, and the recalibration of regional and international power projections (Mounir, 2020). This period is emblematic of the broader challenges confronting state sovereignty, regional cooperation, and the traditional paradigms of Middle Eastern geopolitics. While Bauhn (2024) argues that the moral responsibility for the deaths of Palestinian non-combatants in the Gaza War rests with Hamas, Dahl & Strachan-Morris (2024) claim that intelligence agencies appear to have provided warning, and policymakers failed to listen before the Hamas attack on Israel.

The surprising nature of the Arab Spring uprisings also demonstrates the fragility of the region, The violence initially was a popular movement toward democratization and political liberalization that revealed the deep structural vulnerabilities of many Arab regimes. Tunisia and Egypt experienced regime overthrows, but in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, the uprisings precipitated devastating civil wars and the near-total collapse of centralized governance (Lynch, 2023). This disintegration must be contextualized

within the socio-political economy of the region, where chronic unemployment, economic marginalization, and authoritarian repression fostered profound public discontent. The failure of these regimes to deliver inclusive political participation or address economic grievances rendered them susceptible to mass mobilization, challenging the long-standing authoritarian social contracts that had maintained relative stability. Szalai (2025) concludes that the changing role of the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the various strategic narratives of Gulf states demonstrate that the Middle Eastern regional system changed during this turbulent period.

The resultant state fragmentation generated significant political vacuums, which non-state actors exploited to establish de facto control over territories and populations. The emergence of entities such as Hamas, Hizballah, ISIS, the Houthis, and various Libyan militias illustrates a broader trend toward the decentralization of political authority and the erosion of the Western model of sovereign territorial control. These groups assert military dominance and engage in governance functions, complicating efforts at conflict resolution and state reconstruction (Bauhn, 2024). The divergence in state responses from violent repression in Egypt and Saudi Arabia to negotiated compromises and authoritarian resilience elsewhere highlights the heterogeneous trajectories within the region and the limits of pan-Arab solidarity (Brown, 2020).

The prominence of non-state actors constitutes a paradigm shift in Middle Eastern conflict dynamics. Hamas exemplifies this development as an organization straddling political governance and militancy, challenging Israel's state-centric security framework. Iran's strategic utilization of such groups, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria, epitomizes its doctrine of "asymmetric warfare," whereby proxy actors serve as force multipliers and instruments of regional influence (Miller and Miller, 2023). This strategy complicates conventional conflict paradigms, as these non-state actors operate transnationally, possess local legitimacy in some contexts, and blur the lines between state and non-state violence.

The proliferation of such actors undermines traditional diplomatic modalities predicated on sovereign actors and formal state negotiations. Regional security architectures thus face unprecedented challenges in conflict management, counterterrorism, and peacemaking. The reliance on non-state proxies intensifies sectarian and ideological fissures, contributing to the prolongation of conflicts and complicating pathways to comprehensive peace (Lynch, 2023).

Post-Arab Spring Middle Eastern diplomacy has been characterized by the fragmentation of long-standing alliances and the emergence of flexible partnerships shaped primarily by immediate strategic interests rather than enduring ideological or historical affinities (Fawcett, 2020). This fluidity reflects the precariousness of regional political landscapes and the pragmatic considerations of state actors seeking to maximize influence amidst uncertainty.

Turkey and Qatar's initial backing of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups exemplifies this dynamic, motivated by ideological affinities and strategic ambitions to extend influence through Islamist movements. In contrast, Saudi Arabia and the UAE adopted counter-revolutionary stances, prioritizing regime security and regional dominance over revolutionary change. These competing agendas precipitated rivalries and undermined institutions such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which

struggled to reconcile divergent interests and coordinate unified responses (Lavi, 2023).

This shifting alliance system is starkly evident in the context of the Israel-Hamas conflict. The Abraham Accords, brokered in 2020, represent a watershed moment in regional diplomacy, wherein normalization agreements between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain signify a strategic departure from the traditional Arab consensus supporting Palestinian statehood (Riedel, 2021). These accords reflect the prioritization of geopolitical and economic imperatives over pan-Arab solidarity (Fathollah-Nejad, 2021). Nonetheless, the resurgence of violence in Gaza has complicated these emerging alignments, reinvigorating popular and political support for Palestinian rights and exposing potential fault lines within the newly forged diplomatic frameworks. Israel has continued to bombard Gaza since 7 October 2023 and, with the support of Western nations, built consensus around framing terrorists (Aitlhadj et al., 2024). Marone (2025) shows that the Israel-Hamas war contributed to increasing the frequency of attacks carried out in Europe and led to a growth in the number of attacks against Jewish and Israeli targets; however, it did not have profound effects on the level of organization and the severity of these acts of violence.

Concomitant with these regional realignments has been a perceptible retrenchment of U.S. hegemony in the Middle East (Ulrichsen, 2020). This perceived vacuum provided opportunities for regional actors such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran to pursue more assertive policies, both diplomatically and militarily. Iran's continued investment in proxy networks extends its regional reach and heightens sectarian polarization, challenging both Israeli security and U.S. strategic objectives (Del Sarto, 2024). The Saudi-Iranian rapprochement talks mediated by China in 2023 reflect a novel configuration of great power engagement, illustrating the region's growing integration into broader global power contests and the diversification of security partnerships (Lavi, 2023).

The Arab Spring exposed the limitations of pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism as cohesive ideological frameworks. While symbolic rhetoric around Arab unity endured, substantive cooperation remained elusive, hampered by divergent national interests and intra-Arab rivalries, particularly between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The failure of the Arab League and GCC to effectively mediate crises in Libya, Syria, and Yemen further exemplifies the weakness of regional organizations in fostering collective security and political resolution (Fawcett, 2020).

This fragmentation profoundly influenced the trajectory of the Palestinian cause. Despite occasional surges of pan-Arab support, the centrality of Palestinian statehood in regional politics has diminished in the wake of normalization agreements with Israel. The UAE's engagement with Israel, motivated by economic and security considerations, typifies the shifting calculus among Arab states, signaling a pragmatic departure from historic solidarities (Riedel, 2021). Nonetheless, the latest Gaza conflict has reignited political discourse and public mobilization in support of Palestinians, underscoring the persistent salience and volatility of the issue, as well as the potential fragility of the Abraham Accords under conditions of renewed violence (Hanieh, 2023).

Conclusion

The post-Arab Spring Middle East has undergone significant reconfiguration characterized by the erosion of traditional state sovereignty, the rise of non-state actors, the fracturing of regional alliances, and the emergence of new geopolitical dynamics involving global powers. The Israel-Hamas War exacerbates these underlying trends, demonstrating the intricate interplay between domestic grievances, regional rivalries, and international strategic competition

The period between the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 and the resurgence of large-scale conflict in the form of the Israel-Hamas War marks a decisive epoch in the political evolution of the Middle East. This era has been characterized by the interplay of shifting geopolitical alignments, contested identity formations, and economic restructuring under global neoliberal imperatives. Employing the theoretical frameworks of realism, constructivism, and neo-Gramscianism provides a multidimensional analytical lens through which to understand the fragmentation and reconstitution of regional order.

From a realist perspective, the regional system has undergone a transformation driven primarily by the pursuit of security, survival, and relative power maximization among states. The retrenchment of the United States from direct intervention, particularly following the failures of interventionist policies in Iraq and Libya, created a strategic vacuum that regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates sought to fill. These actors increasingly engaged in proxy warfare and established informal and temporary alliances based on converging interests in specific conflicts. The Abraham Accords, which normalized diplomatic relations between Israel and several Arab states, particularly the UAE and Bahrain, demonstrate the realist shift toward pragmatic security and economic cooperation over historical ideological commitments to the Palestinian cause. Such developments exemplify Kenneth Waltz's (1979) argument that the anarchic structure of the international system compels states to prioritize relative gains and security over normative alignment.

In contrast, constructivist theory foregrounds the role of ideas, norms, and identity in shaping the behavior of both state and non-state actors. The Arab Spring was a paradigmatic rupture in the discursive construction of political legitimacy across the region. It dislodged dominant narratives that had long sustained authoritarian rule and opened space for alternative identity formations, including resurgent Islamism, revived nationalism, and transnational solidarities. The intensification of the Sunni-Shia divide, particularly visible in the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran and their respective regional clients, illustrates how identity can become securitized and strategically instrumentalized. Constructivist scholars such as Peter Katzenstein (1996) and Martha Finnemore (1996) have argued that interests and preferences are not exogenous givens but socially constructed through interaction, norms, and historical legacies. The continued ideological salience of non-state actors whose framing of the conflict with Israel invokes pan-Islamic, anti-colonial, and liberationist discourses demonstrates that identity remains a powerful driver of mobilization, even amid shifting alliances and regional realignments.

The neo-Gramscian approach offers a political economy perspective that connects regional transformations to the global capitalist system and its neoliberal imperatives. Neo-Gramscianism views hegemony as the ideological and material leadership of a historical bloc that links domestic elites with transnational capital. Following the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia and the UAE accelerated neoliberal reform programs, including *Vision 2030*, under the banner of modernization and economic diversification. These programs, while ostensibly technocratic, are deeply political projects designed to secure elite dominance, attract foreign investment, and ensure integration into global markets. However, the dislocation caused by these reforms - rising inequality, labor market exclusion, housing crises, and youth unemployment - intensified social grievances, especially among marginalized groups.

Counter-hegemonic forces have emerged in opposition to both authoritarian governance and neoliberal restructuring. These actors contest the domestic legitimacy of ruling regimes and the broader regional hegemonic order aligned with U.S., Israeli, and Gulf interests. The Israel-Hamas War exemplifies this dialectic of hegemony and resistance. While Arab regimes increasingly prioritize normalization and economic integration with Israel, large segments of their populations remain deeply opposed to such moves, perceiving them as betrayals of the Palestinian cause and as capitulations to imperial and capitalist interests. The resultant legitimacy crisis creates a volatile political field where ideological contestation persists despite elite-level realignment.

These theoretical perspectives illuminate the complex nature of Middle Eastern politics in the post-2011 era. Realism explains the strategic behavior of states, constructivism reveals the enduring power of identity and ideology, and neo-Gramscianism exposes the structural contradictions of capitalist transformation and hegemonic projects. These frameworks operate on different analytical levels and can be synthesized to provide a more holistic account of regional dynamics. The erosion of traditional regional organizations, such as the Arab League, and the emergence of ad hoc coalitions reflect a fragmented regional order that lacks cohesive mechanisms for conflict resolution or cooperative governance. The durability of non-state actors, the persistence of authoritarianism, and the pressures of youth demographics and climate change further complicate the prospects for stability. While some regimes continue to pursue technocratic modernization and security partnerships, the underlying tensions between elite-driven reform and popular discontent suggest that the region will remain in flux.

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Greece and the Idea of Empire through Fictional Literature. From Medieval Catalonia to Early Modern Spain[1]

*By Andreu Ortí-Mondéjar**

*This essay is devoted to drawing the representation of imperial ideology in the two major chivalric romances of the 15th century Catalan literature (*Tirant lo Blanc *and* Curial i Güelfa*). Both chivalric romances have a complex structure that designs a dialectic relationship between the idea of Empire (Greece, Byzantium) and the supposed threat of Islam (Ottoman Empire). Focusing on the Greek narrative scenery, we establish the connection of* Tirant *and* Curial *with previous chronicles (Muntaner) and romances (*Jacob Xalabin*) that describe the military presence of Catalan troops in Athens and Neopatras during the 14th century. Thanks to this approach, we have sketched the common topics about the Ottoman Empire and the "Greeks" in both romances, considering them as discursive otherness.*

Introduction

On 27th June 1458, Alphonse V of Aragon (often called "the Magnanimous") died in the fortress of Castel dell'Ovo, in the capital city of his new reign of Naples, permanently conquered by the Aragonese king in 1443. His death worsened a campaign against supposed corruption practices in the Neapolitan court driven by the Crown since the Parliament of 1456. The Italic magnates rejected the royal intention in a cautious resistance, but it created litigious problems to the royal officers who had arrived in Naples from the Iberian states of Alphonse V (*catalani*). The royal secretary Francesc Martorell was one of the victims of the baronial counterblast. He was exiled in Sicily and passed away in that kingdom, under the rule of John II of Aragon, brother and successor of Alphonse. However, Naples remained as an independent realm in the hands of the illegitimate son of the old king, Ferdinand (*Ferrante*)[2].

In his court, *catalani* continued working as a strong group of political aid for Ferdinand I of Naples, but some of the big names of the group were replaced. This political earthquake had an unexpected consequence: Joanot Martorell, nephew and Francesc's favourite, lost the royal favour and had to leave Naples and return to his hometown (Valence, Spain). Until his death in 1465, Joanot put together the literary

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[2]Alan Ryder, *The Kingdom of Naples under Alfonso the Magnanimous* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 226-228.

sources that he had read, the vital experiences of a chivalric life and many contemporary inspirations through the filter of his imagination. The result of four years of writing (January 1460-1464) was *Tirant lo Blanc*, one of the most classical books in the period considered to be the "Golden Age" of the Catalan Literature[3].

Unfortunately, we do not have enough information about the production context of the other great Catalan novel of the 15th century, the anonymous manuscript *Curial i Güelfa* (c. 1440)[4]. While *Tirant* remained 35 years as a manuscript, until its *princeps* edition in 1490, *Curial* only appeared in Literature handbooks and collections of essential sources in the first years of the 20th century. Since it was critically edited in the 1930's, polemics around its authorship have not ceased. Was *Curial* written by another Alphonse V's courtier? Which is the linguistic —Catalan or Valencian— and the literary —Iberic (Medieval) or Italian (Renaissance)— pattern of the romance? As we can see, these academic questions have generated controversial responses conditioned by regionalist or nationalist ideologies and traditional considerations about the transition between the end of the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Times[5].

The point of this essay is far from a philological controverse. From an historical and cultural perspective, our aim is to compare the representation of political forms of the empire over the two books. Both romances present a common topic in their plot: a Greek —¿Byzantine?— empire threatened by the Ottoman sultanate. That is the first step of a research driven to analyse the cultural spreading of imperial images as a topic in the Medieval political culture, but from a literary perspective. Chivalric romances represent one of the main interests for readers —and listeners— in the European Renaissance, making them a relevant source to understanding the political references of those readers who did not have access to legal treatises or canonical texts. Secondly, we would like to focus on the Greek narrative scenery and consider its tie to the previous Aragonese chronicles that describe the military presence of Catalan troops in Athens and Neopatras along 14th century. And, finally, we also intend to sketch the common topics about the Ottoman Empire in both romances, considering them as a discursive otherness. This opposition gained presence in literary sources after the final defeat of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 —and the political threat of Mehmed II's conquest for Latin monarchies.

[3]Joanot Martorell, *Tirant lo Blanch. Text original (València, 1490)* (Valence: Tirant lo Blanch Editions, 2008), edited by Albert Hauf; Joanot Martorell, *Tirant lo Blanc* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2016 [1979]), edited by Martín de Riquer.

[4]Anonymous, *Curial e Güelfa* (Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 2011), edited by Lola Badia and Jaume Torró; Anonymous, *Curial e Güelfa* (Barcelona: Barcino, Els Nostres Clàssics, 2018 [1930]), edited by Ramon Aramon.

[5]Anton M. Espadaler, *Una reina per a Curial* (Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 1984), 9-16; Abel Soler Molina, "La atribución hipotética de *Curial e Güelfa* a Enyego d'Àvalos (Consideraciones sobre un informe de L. Badia y J. Torró)", in *eHumanista* 38 (2018): 890-914.

Methodology. Reading Politics throughout Medieval Literature and Beyond

Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) discussed in a well-known collection of essays the cultural dimension of ideology and utopia[6]. Ricoeur was a compelling defender of the philosophical analysis of historical categories traditionally considered unmovable. One clear example would be the concept of discourse, constituted in the crossroad of many different types of textual sources, including literature. In this academic context, after the 1990's "linguistic turn", historians are nowadays more aware about the role of interdisciplinary studies to reach a wider comprehension of cultural networks of references and concepts in past societies.

For this reason, philosophical approaches to historical problems —such as Ricoeur's— and literary analysis of historical sources have become essential for many cultural research topics[7]. One of them is political culture, a concept that has helped historians to understand better the motivations and aspirations that moved historical subjects[8]. In this sense, we do not only wonder how a law was promulgated, how an institution worked or the biography of a king or governor. According to hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation by Hans-Georg Gadamer followed by Ricoeur and Jauss, the task of literary criticism and even historians is to bring new life to meanings laid out in historical sources. Here we have an intellectual path leading to the past experiences of authors, codified in their texts.

Our questions about political history through fictional literature put the focus on cultural references of political agents, even those who do not exercise a very influential authority. In this perspective, it is easier to understand the making of political decisions in a scenery that we are usually not able to reproduce in liberal-democratic political terms. Using literature to analyse this topic is not a new approach. In his classical study about Medieval political theology, Ernst H. Kantorowicz (1895-1963) created the theorical framework that legitimated the continuity of monarchical successions, based on the metaphor of "the King's Two Bodies"[9]: the *king* as his physical or natural body as a person made to die, and the mystic fiction of *King's* "body politic" (invisible Crown, corporation). This metaphor was found by Kantorowicz in juridical texts written under the reign of Elizabeth I of England (1558-1603), but afterwards he reconstructed the origins of the political myth in canonical and many juridical sources of the Middle Ages (Frederick II Hohenstaufen, Pope Gregory VII, Thomas Aquinas, Bracton or Baldo degli Ubaldi). That was one of the ultimate contributions of Kantorowicz, a German medievalist who started his career in the traditional intellectual atmosphere of the Republic of Weimar. He had to exile in the United States (Berkeley, Princeton) after 1939, where he published his most relevant studies.

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[6]Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), edited by George Taylor.

[7]Hans R. Jauss, "Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature", in *Modern Genre Theory* (London: Routledge, 2000), edited by David Duff, 127-147.

[8]Ronald P. Formisano, "The Concept of Political Culture", in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 31 (Issue 3, 2001): 393-426.

[9]Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study of Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: University Press, 1957).

Despite his interest in doctrinal texts, two of the eight chapters of *The King's Two Bodies* (1957) are devoted to literature. We possibly find in these two chapters the clearest definition of the geminated nature of monarchies. On the one hand, Shakespeare's *Richard II* (c. 1595) depicts the symbolic fall of this monarch (1377-1399) as a progressive loss of royal or supranatural dignity until his execution, ordered by Henry IV Lancaster (1399-1413). On the other hand, Dante Alighieri's *Comedia* (c. 1320) has a deeper lecture for Kantorowicz. The human dignity is conceived by Dante as an autonomous sphere that is represented in the *corpus morale et politicum* of the Empire, but not submerged in the *corpus mysticum* of the Church. Thanks to his profound analysis of Medieval political thought, we can also conclude with Kantorowicz that the geminated nature of power (religious and secular) inspired the theories about the double nature of the King (person and corporation) and the Crown (object and dignity). These concepts handled by jurists were also in the pen of writers and poets, who even used that theoretical construction to design the plot of their plays (the fall of Richard II) or, in a wider sense, the political mentality of their masterpieces (Dante's metaphysical travel across the Hell, Purgatory and Paradise)[10].

The empires that we analyse in our two romances are more concrete[11], but they evoke many principles of the same political culture and the multiple changes of the Mediterranean —African, Iberian, Italic, Balkan— frontiers in the middle of the 15th century. First of all, the emperor is a specific figure of power that has lost its uniqueness in both romances, so we can study its role as a key point of the fictitious political systems built in literature. Political references act as a believable reference for the 15th century readers, so it can be very useful for a historical reading that helps us to overcome the determinist interpretation of the Late Middle Ages under the paradigms of the 14th century general crisis[12] —natural disasters, war scenery and the building of the Modern State as a response to those problems.

Secondly, after the emperor, the empire should be observed as a political system similar to the national monarchies that emerge in the transition to Early Modern Times. The resistance of the Greek Empire in *Tirant lo Blanc* shows that chivalric courtier culture is alive in the Renaissance in spite of its supposed Medieval spirit[13].

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[10]Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 24-41 and 451-495.

[11]The ideological forms of *Imperium* in Renaissance that fluctuate between the "legacy of Rome" and the *monarchia universalis*: Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the World. Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500-c.1800* (New Heaven - New York: Yale University Press, 1995), 11-62.

[12]John Watts, *The Making of Polities. Europe, 1300-1500* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-42.

[13]Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of Middle Ages* (Various Reprints, 1919), Spanish translation: *El otoño de la Edad Media* (Madrid, Alianza, 1978); Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Heaven - London: Yale University Press, 1983); Josef Fleckenstein, *Rittertum and Ritterliche Welt* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 2002), Spanish translation: *La caballería y el mundo caballeresco* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2006). Some recent references are given about the chivalric world and its literary expressions along the Early Modern Times: Pedro M. Cátedra, *Le songe chevaleresque. De la chevalerie de papier au rêve réel de Don Quichotte* (Paris: Collège de France, 2005); Dani Cavallaro, *The Chivalric Romance and the Essence of Fiction* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2016); Leticia Álvarez-Recio (ed.), *Iberian Chivalric Romance. Translation and Cultural Transmission in Early Modern England* (Toronto - London - Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2021); José Enrique Ruiz-Doménec, *La novela y el espíritu de la caballería* (Madrid: Taurus, 2023).

Finally, we observe that empire is a form of expressing power that is not only associated to the Christendom. For this reason, we also study the literary image of the Ottoman Empire as the main threat for the Christian Greece depicted in those books. The "Turks" are the otherness that contributes to reinforce the political role of Western monarchies in their religious defence against Muslim powers —something essential in the propagandistic representation of well-regarded monarchs such as Matthias Corvinus of Hungary (1458-1490) or Ferdinand of Aragon (1479-1516). And, of course, the central role of the "Greek Empire" and the "Greeks" in the Catalan literature of the Late Middle Ages.

The "Greek Empire" as an Image of Power in Catalan Literature (Crown of Aragon)

The Empire has been considered the "Medieval political myth par excellence"[14]. The word *Imperium* in Rome acquired new senses along the Low Empire in addition to its juridical meaning as jurisdiction and effective military power of the Roman consuls. Consequently, that category associated to the Roman magistrates in the highest positions of their *cursus honorum* was used in the Middle Ages as a specific public regime. However, Empire as a polity involved an aspiration of universalism that was shared with the Roman Church from the times of Constantine the Great (306-337) and, specially, Theodosius (379-395). That is the beginning of a cosmological, religious and political controversy that divides the Medieval political thought: the "Twilight Struggle" between the Italic Papacy and the German Empire[15]. We can find different shapes for the Medieval idea of Empire, but its evolution never loses the connection with the original legitimacy of the Roman Empire. That is the reason why the Byzantine Empire was called "Roman Empire" or "Romania" in the European Medieval scenery, especially in official sources written in Latin[16].

The Roman identity of Byzantium survives to the two *translatio Imperii* movements —*ad francos*, coronation of Charlemagne (800); *ad germanos*, Otto I the Great (962)— and to the constitutional conformation of the dynastic polities that we find in the Europe of the Late Middle Ages. Monarchs and sovereign princes make their efforts to be considered the supreme jurisdiction in their states, according to the principle *non superiorem recognoscens* or *rex imperator est in*

[14]José Manuel Nieto Soria, "El imperio medieval como poder público: problemas de aproximación a un mito político", in Various Authors, *Poderes públicos en la Europa medieval: principados, reinos y coronas* (Pamplona: Government of Navarra, 1997), 403-440 (404).

[15]Francis Oakley, *The Watershed of Modern Politics. Law, Virtue, Kingship and Consent (1300-1650)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 14-50.

[16]Damien Coulon, "The Commercial Influence of the Crown of Aragon in the Eastern Mediterranean (Thirteenth – Fifteenth Centuries), in *The Crown of Aragon. A Singular Mediterranean Empire* (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2017), edited by Flocel Sabaté, 279-308 (281). Antoni Rubió i Lluch (editor), *Diplomatari de l'Orient català (1301-1409)* (Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2001): XII, 13 ("*imperii Romeorum*"); XIV, 15 ("*imperii Romanie*"). It can be also found another irregular denomination that will be used many times in Spanish chivalric romances: "*imperator Constantinopolitanus*" (XV, 17).

regno suo[17]. But the literary imperial idea is also a way of giving more signification to chivalric aspirations. In *Tirant lo Blanc*, written around 1460, the main character is a young Breton nobleman invested as knight in London by the king of England. After that, Tirant's career goes across the Mediterranean Sea and he shows his military abilities in many different geographical localizations (France, Sicily and the coast of Levant, nowadays Siria and Lebanon).

The narrative structure of the romance is based on the defence of the "Greek Empire" of Constantinople. The Empire is condemned to fall under the Ottoman rule ("infidels" in the book), but the old emperor Frederick sends a letter to the Sicilian court that will provoke the intervention of our knight in Greece[18]. The Sicilian king tells Tirant to "desire to go and serve the Imperial state with love and willpower", and that is what happens until the triumph of the Christendom and the unexpected death of Tirant[19]. As it can be seen in the quotes, the Empire is conceived in the novel as a universal principle of power and as a particular state at the same time, but with a higher position when compared to the other coronated heads in Europe. In addition, the Catalan-Valencian writer holds the tradition of recognising the *pars orientalis* of the Roman Emipre (afterwards, Byzantium) as "Greek Empire".

This double dimension of the Empire is even more explicit because the "emperor of Germany" is mentioned also in the pages of the romance. In the middle of the 15th century, when Constantinople is conquered by Mehmed II, the literary recreation of the two Christian emperors cannot be more realistic. After Constantine XI Palaiologos disappears (1449-1453), the other emperor who ruled in the same period was Frederick III of Habsburg (1440-1493) in the Holy Roman Empire. Even the first name, Frederick, seems to be a connection between the chivalric Catalan fiction and the international political situation in the 1450's. We must remember that Pope Nicholas V (1447-1455) reacted to Mehmed's conquest essaying two possibilities: he would either try to convince the sultan of converting into Christianism or attempt to create an alliance of the Christian princes to recover the capital city of the deceased Byzantine Empire[20].

These options were nothing more than a dream. Of course, Mehmed II never took into consideration the offer of the pontifex. Furthermore, the proposals of Alphonse V of Aragon —in his position as king of Naples and Sicily—to stipulate a ceasefire or a peace between Christian powers in the Italic peninsula was not successful. Nicholas V could not accept the conditions of the Aragonese king, and his diplomatic opponents such as Florence or Milan would reject the Crusade project of Alphonse[21]. But even the style of diplomatic correspondence and chivalric romance presents its similarities. For instance, Alphonse V dispatched a

[17]Bernard Guenée, *L'Occident aux XIV et XV siècles: les États* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973), Spanish translation (Barcelona: Labor, 1985), 8-21.

[18]"*Nós, Frederic, per la immensa e divina majestat del sobiran Déu eternal, Emperador de l'Imperi grec* [Emperor of the Greek Empire]" (*Tirant*, ed. Riquer, 2016, CXV, 248).

[19]"*que vós vullau ab molta amor e voluntat anar a servir l'estat imperial*" (*Tirant*, ed. Riquer, 2016, CXVI, 251).

[20]Santiago Sobrequés Vidal, "Sobre el ideal de cruzada en Alfonso V de Aragón", in *Hispania* 12 (1952): 232-252.

[21]Sobrequés Vidal, "Sobre el ideal de cruzada", 234.

defiance letter to Mehmed remarking he would be the "destructor" of the Ottoman sovereign. In this case, Alphonse used the same word that Martorell introduces in the duel between the knight Tirant —nominated as commander in chief of the Christian troops— and the "king of Egypt" —fictious prince allied to the Ottoman emperor in the novel— in the chapter CLII[22].

The point is not the effective reaction of the Christian powers. It is well known that the unstable diplomatic balance in Italy started to improve after the Peace of Lodi (1454), but the Pope died in 1455 and Alphonse joined to the peace after a period of hesitation. Not even the Council of Basilea-Ferrara-Florence (1431-1445) had the expected effects, although that council wanted to overcome the confessional gap between the Orthodox and the Latin Western church. In fact, the measure was not effective on the one hand because of the resistance of the Orthodox population in Constantinople and the last provinces of the Empire to change their credo and, on the other hand, because of the passivity of the Christian monarchs.

Tirant lo Blanc is written in Valencia, in the last years of the life of Martorell, when he lost the royal protection in Naples. The last lines are signed in 1464, at the same time of the death of Pope Pius II in the Adriatic coast, while he was waiting the arrival of German troops and a Venetian fleet for a Crusade towards Constantinople. And the novel is the description of an ideal and counterfactual episode: the arrival in Greece of some groups of European knights from different origins, who will direct the course of the war and save the Empire. In the end, the death of the emperor, the princess and Tirant leave the throne to a relative of his, Hippolytus. The reign of the new emperor in the fiction would have affected the borders of all ancient Byzantine Empire, something unbelievable in the political scenery around 1460. Nevertheless, that is the representation —through the narrative scenes of *Tirant*— of the corpus of a religious cosmovision and a sociopolitical system that chivalry had to accomplish or, at least, dream with.

In this ideological point of view, the imperial idea shows us a connection with the origins of Medieval political thought that would arrive until the return to classical culture in the Renaissance. The ties between the Roman model and Medieval polities are obvious when Martorell puts in the mouth of the old emperor Frederick the genealogy of his Greek Empire:

> *—Capità, jo us vull dir aquesta ciutat quant és antiga, car trobareu que aquesta ciutat ha gran temps que fon edificada e fon poblada de gentils qui eren gent idòlatra, e aprés gran temps de la destrucció de Troia foren convertits a la santa fe catòlica per un noble e valentíssim cavaller nomenat Constantí, e aquest fon mon avi, e lo pare d'aquest fon elet emperador de Roma, e era senyor de tota la Grècia e de moltes altres províncies segons copiosament recita la sua història, car com fon guarit de la gran malaltia que tenia per Sant Silvestre, féuse crestià, e féu-lo Papa, e donà-li tot l'Imperi de Roma que fos de l'Església, e ell tornà-se'n en Grècia, e fon emperador de Grècia. Aprés d'aquest, succeí son fill Constantí, qui fon mon avi, e per tots los regnes e terres de l'Imperi fon elet per Papa en totes les sues terres, e Emperador, e per ço com tenia molta humanitat e era home molt benigne, moltes*

[22] *Tirant*, ed. Riquer, 2016, CLII, 384.

> *gents d'estranyes terres se vengueren a poblar ací, e no cabien en aquesta ciutat. Llavors mon avi edificà la nostra ciutat de molt nobles edificis, e posà-li com Constantinoble, e d'aquí avant fon nomenat emperador de Constantinoble.*[23]
>
> [—Captain, I want to tell you how antique this city is, because it was built a long time ago and it was populated by gentile people who were idolaters, and they were converted into Christianism by a noble and courageous knight called Constantine a long time after the destruction of Troy. He was my grandfather, and his father was elected emperor of Rome, and he was lord of all Greece and of many other provinces, as written in his chronicles. Because he was healed by Sant Silvester after a long illness, Constantine's father converted into Christianism and proclaimed Silvester as Pope and also awarded him with the empire of Rome for the Church. After that, the emperor returned to Greece and became its emperor. He was succeeded by Constantine, my grandfather, who was elected as Pope in all the kingdoms and lands of the Empire at the same time as Emperor. Many people from foreign lands came to live here due to his kindness and humanity, and there was not even room for everyone in the city. So, my grandfather built a lot of lovely buildings in our city, and called it Constantinople, and afterwards he was named emperor of Constantinople.][24]

In this intervention, the old emperor projects to a mythical past the roots of the empire. As the character of Frederick says, a figure that reminds us of Constantine the Great is responsible for the division between the Eastern and the Western Roman Empire. In fact, this paragraph remakes the political fiction of the *donatio Constantini*, according to which the Roman emperors of the 4th century would have offered political authority above the Western Empire to the Popes. However, that was a political myth created in the 8th century and the Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457) proved that it was false in 1444[25]. Returning to the romance, Constantine would also have built the city of Constantinople, but this reference is the only coincidence with the historical facts. Frederick, in a novel set around 1450, is stating that the emperor Constantine is his grandfather and that he became emperor of Greece. Obviously, this kind of statements have no pretension to credibility. Its specific mission is legitimating the actions of the main character in defence of a millenary empire whose roots are in the antique times of the "destruction of Troy".

It can be seen in the Catalan text that the Crown of Aragon is not an exception in the general fascination towards the Empire as a form of political representation. Another example could be found in the anonymous text of *Curial i Güelfa*. Recent studies[26] have considered that part of the travels of the main character, Curial, represents the transition of medieval forms of knowledge to Renaissance ones.

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[23] *Tirant*, ed. Riquer, 2016, CXXVI, 284.

[24] Translation of the quote by the author of the paper. In this speech, the emperor Frederick tells the fictional origins of that "Greek Empire" and the etymology of the name of its capital city, that also gives the name to all the empire in the narrative present of the romance.

[25] Lorenzo Valla, *La falsa Donazione di Costantino* (Florence: Ponte Alle Grazie, 1993), edited by Gabriele Pepe.

[26] Antonio Ferrando (ed.), *Estudis lingüístics i culturals sobre* Curial e Güelfa*, novel·la caballeresca anònima del segle XV en llengua catalana* (Amsterdam - Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012, 2 vols.).

According to *Curial*, Athens has a historical status that comes from the inspiration given to the laws of Rome[27]. Abel Soler establishes a hierarchy in the vital route of Curial, from his travel to Jerusalem to those of Athens and the mount Parnassus. The inspiration of the classical fountains of science, however, is not so evident in the political aspect that we are analysing.

The presence of a Greek scenery has been mentioned in the case of Athens, a city with a special reputation in the romance. But the Empire placed in Greek lands of *Tirant* is not so essential in *Curial*. In fact, the book describes at the end of part III an attack of "turks" towards the "Empire", and Curial will act as a commander in chief of the Christian troops in the same way as Tirant. However, the "border of the turks" is far less precise in the anonymous text than in Martorell's[28]. While the combat against Ottomans is the axe of the argumental structure in the second case, Curial is present in many courtier circles and states along the romance. The religious war is essential for Curial's identity, but it is just one more episode in the long of duels and military situations that the main character must solve.

Maybe the reason is that *Curial* draws a historical period, not a counterfactual stage, as does *Tirant*. In *Curial* we can find the diplomatic scenery of the Mediterranean at the end of 13th century, when Peter III of Aragon conquered the island of Sicily to the Anjou dynasty of Charles, count of Anjou and Provenza and king of Naples (including Sicily until 1282). The dynastic rights of his wife, Constanza of Hohenstaufen, were maintained by Peter through the war after the death of the emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen and the defeat of his successors in the Sicilian throne. This way, the Crown of Aragon is an important part of the geographical scenery of *Curial*, while it is absent in *Tirant*[29]. For this reason, *Curial* has been considered a historical romance by literary criticism.

In the end, the episodes of the conquest of Sicily and the war against the Anjou are the basis of the Mediterranean influence of the Crown of Aragon. The kingdom of Sicily ruled by the Hohenstaufen was a nexus with many eschatological and providential ideas that enrich the ideology of many Catalan authors and the dynasties of Aragon (1137-1410) and Trastamara (1412-1516)[30]. After the peace of Caltabellotta (1302), the island of Sicily remained under the influence of a secondary branch of the kings of Aragon[31]. The mercenaries of the wars between Peter III and the Anjou conformed the Great Catalan Company and

[27]Abel Soler Molina, "Atenes i Jerusalem al *Curial*, ambientació literària o dilema ideològic?", in Various Authors, *Homenatge a Kalman Faluba*, Volume 1 (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2019), 25-56 (47-48).

[28]Quotes in: *Curial*, ed. Aramon, 2018, III, 374 and 377.

[29]Anton M. Espadaler, "Política i ideologia en la novel·la catalana del segle XV", in *La Corona d'Aragona ai tempi di Alfonso il Magnanimo. I modelli politico-istituzionalli. La circulazione degli uomini, delle idee, delle merci. Gli influssi sulla società è sul costume*, XVI Congresso Internazionale di Storia della Corona d'Aragona (Napoli-Caserta-Ischia, 18-28 settembre 1997), (Naples: Paparo Edizioni, 1997), 1419-1430.

[30]Martin Aurell, "Escatologie, spiritualité et politique dans la confederation catalano-aragonaise (1282-1412)", in *Fin du monde et signes des temps* (Toulouse: Privat, 1992), 191-235.

[31]David Abulafia, *The Western Mediterranean Kingdoms 1200-1500. The Struggle for Dominion* (London: Routledge, 1997), Spanish translation: *La guerra de los doscientos años. Aragón, Anjou y la lucha por el Mediterráneo* (Barcelona: Pasado y Presente, 2017).

were hired by Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282-1328) to fight against the Turks in Anatolia (1303-1305)[32]. Michael IX (1295-1320), son and *autokrator* (co-emperor) along with his father, ceased his protection to the Company because he perceived them as an out-of-control military force and an economic risk for the treasury of the Empire. That provoked a violent reaction of the Catalan mercenaries and some years later some of their groups created the duchies of Athens and Neopatras, two little feudal states under the protection of the kings of Sicily and Aragon (1311-1390). For this reason, we can suggest that many influences of the imperial idea are present in *Curial* despite the absence of the name of a Greek —Byzantine— empire.

From the Chronicles to *Jacob Xalabin*. Empire and Otherness

The origins of the Greek presence in Catalan letters must be found mainly in one of the four "Great Chronicles". Those chronicles were written —dictated— by two of the most important monarchs in the history of the Crown —James I (c. 1275) and Peter IV of Aragon (c. 1382)— and by two writers —Bernat Desclot (c. 1289) and Ramon Muntaner (c. 1332). The last one is the most relevant for our research. Muntaner was also a soldier of the Catalan Company and he wrote his chronicle only two decades after the Catalan campaign in the Byzantine lands and the foundation of the duchies. The personal experience of Muntaner and the vivid style of his text depict a double oriental otherness —the "Greeks" (the Empire or "Romania") and the "Turks".

On the one hand, the Byzantine Empire is a scenery for the glory —and the subsistence— of the Company after the end of the wars between the kings of Aragon and the Anjou dynasty. Byzantium is also a political system that reinforces its identity through a discursive continuity with the Roman Empire. Byzantium is also Rome, as we can see in the imperial title (*Basileía Romaíon*) and, also, in the denomination "Romania" found both in chronicles and official registers[33]. Muntaner recreates the warm reception of the emperor Andronikos given to the Catalan mercenaries:

> Then God gave them good weather and in a few days they landed in Monemvasia and there they found those who showed them great honour, and they were given great refreshment of all things. And they found there an order from the emperor to go straight to Constantinople, and so they did. They left Monemvasia and went to Constantinople. And when they were at Constantinople, the emperors, the father and the son, and all the people of the Empire, received them with great joy and pleasure[34].

[32]For the general scenery: Franz Georg Maier, *Byzanz* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1973), Spanish translation (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1974); Judith Herrin, *Byzantium. The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (Princeton: University Press, 2009).
[33]Rubió, *Diplomatari*, 13, 15 and 17.
[34]Ramon Muntaner, *Chronicle* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1921), translated by Anne Goodenough (Ontario: Publications Catalan Series, 2000), 406.

The description of the arrival at Constantinople is very similar to the literary recreation of the facts that we found in *Tirant lo Blanc* 130 years later[35]. The similarities are both in the positive acceptance of the Catalan soldiers in Byzantium and in the resistances that are described: "but whilst this feast was great, some Genoese, by their arrogance caused a fight with the Catalans", continues the previous quote. And the book of Martorell shows the Genoese as allies of the Mamluk sultanate against the Christian Island of Rodes and as a nation "who have neither commiseration nor love for anyone"[36].

The leader of the Company was invested as Great Duke of the Empire, in a similar way to the character of Tirant, who receives the command of the imperial troops in the romance. Nevertheless, Muntaner and the Catalan Company suffered the betrayal of Michael IX. Considering the Catalans as a menace, the *autokrator* ordered other mercenary groups to murder De Flor and the main leaders of the Company in Edirne (30 April 1305)[37]. Survivors retroceded to Gallipoli and were sieged there. The war was prosecuted under the leadership of Berenguer d'Entença, but in an autonomous position that led to the building of the independent duchies of Athens and Neopatras, under the feudal sovereignty of the kings of Aragon. This political evolution explains the tough and aggressive description of the "Greeks" that Muntaner wrote:

> And this happened owning to two conspicuous sins to which they are given. One is that they are the most arrogant people of the world; there is no people in earth they esteem and value, but only themselves, yet they are worthless people; the other is that they are the less charitable people to their neighbour to be found in all the time[38].

The notable exaggeration of the criticism and the formulary rhetorical construction of both negative judgements —to the Genoese and to the Greeks— shows that we are in front of an affixed literary expression of the political rivalry in Medieval Catalan texts. The competition is a political affair, yet there is a deeper solidarity in religious terms —three groups (Catalan, Genoese and Greeks) are Christian. On the other hand, the religious rivalry shown against the "Turks" is always clearly depicted. The future Ottoman Empire, under the Osman rule, is not a well-defined presence neither in the chronicle nor in Martorell's book. In *Curial* we read a generous description of the Ottoman champion in the battle —*Critxi*—, yet the war between the Greek and the Turkish empires is a marginal episode, not an essential narrative axe[39]. Turkish troops are shown as an unknown and dangerous opponent that must be defeated by the Catalan and Christian champion, real (De Flor) or fictional (Tirant, Curial). Surely, the Ottoman menace after 1453 is higher than it was when *Curial* was written, so the "Turks" appear in *Tirant*'s plot with a more central role.

[35]*Tirant*, ed. Riquer, 2016, CXVI-CXVII, 249-252.
[36]*Tirant*, ed. Riquer, 2016, CVIIa, 216.
[37]Maier, *Bizancio*, 340-342; Rubió, *Diplomatari*, XV, 16-19 (anonymous account of the episodes before September 1305).
[38]Muntaner, *Chronicle*, 410.
[39]*Curial*, ed. Aramon, 2018, III, 373-377.

The travels of the Catalan Company remain in the written memory of the Spanish culture in the Early Modern Times, including the episode of the Greek betrayal. That is the opinion of the count Francisco de Moncada still in 1623, considering that the Spanish nobility of his time was heir of the Catalan soldiers of the company: "The Greeks were so jealous and superb that they were plotting betrayals and treacheries. They were requesting with mouth and hands to Michael [IX] a disaffection against us […]"[40]. However, the opposition between the Spanish monarchy and the Ottoman Empire along the 16th century would attract major attention in the literature of the Spanish Golden Age[41]. It can be checked in the academic historiography about cultural borders and political frontiers in the Mediterranean Sea[42]. In the construction of the religious otherness, the Catalan experience in the Greek duchies of the 14th century is also a way of approaching to the Balkan context in the last decades of Byzantium's political existence and to the Ottoman court in a realistic and less aggressive vocabulary. It is the case of *Historia de Jacob Xalabin*[43].

Jacob Xalabin is a Catalan short novel written between the last years of the 14th century —after the first battle of Kosovo (1389)— and the death of Bayezid I (1403), because the sultan is still alive when the author writes the novel. The main part of the text consists in a sentimental and adventurous romance that involves "Jacob Xalabin" —phonetic translation of the name of the Ottoman prince *Yakub Çelebi*, son of the sultan Murad I (1362-1389). When the adventure ends, Yakub and his young friend Ali Pasha recover the protection of his father, whose name is also Murad. But a Christian invasion against the empire forces the sultan and his two sons to fight in the battle where Murad and Yakub would find their death. The connections between political context (Kosovo, 1389) and the novel are strong and the representation of the Ottoman court is positive under the rule of Murad —who "ruled with great prosperity"[44]. According to the modern editors of the romance, the author should have been one of the last Catalan soldiers living in Athens or Neopatras around 1390, or maybe a merchant who remained in Greece after the loss of the duchies by the Catalan Company. That would be the reason of the wide knowledge of the Ottoman world that our anonymous Christian writer demonstrates in *Jacob Xalabin*.

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[40]Translation of the quote by the author of the paper. Francisco de Moncada, *Expedición de catalanes y aragoneses contra turcos y griegos* (Madrid: Antonio de Sancha, 1777), 114-120 and 143-150: "*Estaban los Griegos tan envidiosos y soberbios, que con rabia y furor increíble, aunque con algún secreto, andaban maquinando trayciones y alevosías; con lengua y manos solicitaban a Miguel ya mal afecto contra nosotros, encareciendo la gran reputación de las armas de los Catalanes, y que ocupaban los grandes cargos de su Imperio, en grande mengua de Su Majestad, y deshonor suyo*" (116).

[41]The most impressive book in this sense is *Viaje de Turquía*, attributed to Cristóbal de Villalón and written around 1557 (Madrid: BAE, 1905).

[42]Andrew C. Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier: A History of the Sixteenth-Century Ibero-African Frontier* (Chicago-London: Chicago University Press, 1978); Miguel Ángel de Bunes Ibarra, *La imagen de los musulmanes y del norte de África en la España de los siglos XVI-XVII. Los caracteres de una hostilidad* (Madrid: CSIC, 1989).

[43]Anonymous, *Historia de Jacob Xalabín* (Santa Barbara: University of California, 2014), edited and translated by Vicent J. Escartí and Joan V. Fuertes.

[44]*Jacob Xalabin*, ed. Escartí and Fuertes, 2014, I, 16.

In the battle held between the Christian troops of Lazar of Serbia and the forces of Murad I, the sultan and his son Yakub died in strange circumstances, but the contemporary chronicles offer different interpretations of those facts. The most widespread version says that Yakub was executed by his half-brother Bayezid, who succeeded Murad as the Ottoman sultan[45]: "And Bayezid, bastard son of the emperor, who was near to his dying father, went towards him. And his soldiers put him inside the tent, and it has been said that the emperor was still alive and that Bayezid finally killed him"[46]. For this reason, Bayezid I had a negative reputation that is spread even in the *Jacob Xalabin*, because he is rejected in the text as "Bayezid, the bastard", who "until nowadays is the lord of all the [Turkish] lands"[47].

Concluding Remarks

Tirant lo Blanc or *Curial i Güelfa* are not the story of *Jacob Xalabin*. This anonymous text has recently fascinated the experts in Catalan Literature thanks to its vivid recreation of the Ottoman court and its detailed çinformation about them. Jacob Xalabin represents the dynamic political scenery that we find in Greece at the end of the 14th century. The presence of this scenery is much less evident in *Curial i Güelfa*, surely written along the first half of the 15th century, before the disappearance of the Byzantine-Ottoman frontier in 1453. *Curial* gives us a lot of clues about the conception that Catalan writers of his century have about the past of the Crown of Aragon and its influence in the Mediterranean, but in a 13th century setting.

Nevertheless, the image of Greece and the empire threatened by Ottomans is nothing more than a detail in the mosaic of sceneries that we find in the romance. On the other hand, the "Turks" of *Tirant* are a developed representation of the essential —religious— otherness for the author, according to the tradition of Muntaner's chronicle. We must remark the impact of the conquest of Constantiople for the knights of Martorell's generation. In fact, his book is an expression of the intellectual necessity of building a world that works in a way far from political and religious changes that he could not avoid.

The romance starts with a Muslim invasion in England and it ends with the total defeat of the Ottomans in front of the Greek-Byzantine Empire. We follow the literary adventures of Tirant, but we always see the same opposition: an alliance between the Turks, the Mamluk sultanate and other Muslim states from Asia that conform a frightening and obscure military presence at the doors of the quiet city of Constantinople represented in the text by the imagination of

[45]Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire 1300-1650. The Structure of Power* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 98.
[46]Translation of the quote by the author of the paper. *Jacob Xalabín*, ed. Escartí and Fuertes, 2014, XVII, 41: "*Y Bayaceto, hijo bastardo del emperador, que se encontraba entonces más cerca de su padre, malherido de muerte, fue enseguida hacia aquella parte. Y sus gentes le habían puesto dentro de la tienda, y se dice que aún no estaba muerto y que este Bayaceto lo acabó de matar*."
[47]*Jacob Xalabin*, ed. Escartí and Fuertes, 2014, XVII, 41 (both quotes).

Martorell. Many passages of the book reinforce this impression. That frightening menace is mitigated by the nobility of the Turkish champion called "*Critxi*" in *Curial*, but it is not different to the tradition of political and religious rivalry between the Christian monarchies and the Ottoman Empire. In fact, Ottoman power will be defined as "machiavellic" in the *Cinquecento*, when the identification with the Florentine author is more an insult —considered irreligious— than a praise[48].

In conclusion, we cannot forget that the dialectic opposition Christendom-Muslim world is also the binomial Greek Empire-Ottoman Empire, but the presence of the second polity is far less defined than the first one. In addition, as we have analysed in the chronicles and in *Tirant*, the Greek scenery presents a more complex relationship with the opinion of the Aragonese —and later Spanish— authors, due to the polyhedric conflicts that confronted the Catalan Company and the public uses of that episode in historical texts —such as the *Expedición de catalanes y aragoneses* written by Moncada and published in the 18th century.

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[48]Luca D'Ascia, "L'impero machiavellico. L'immagine della Turchia nei trattatisti italiani del Cinquecento e del primo Seicento", in *Quaderns d'Italià* 15 (2010): 9-116.

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