

## East of Empire. Byzantium, the “Greek Empire” and the Catalan Company in Fictional and Historical Iberian Literatures (14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries)

By Andreu Ortí-Mondéjar\*

*This essay is devoted to discovering and analysing the transmission of the Byzantine Empire and its association with the Greek cultural identity in the Iberian (Catalan and Spanish) literatures from the Late Middle Ages until the Early Modern Times. We have connected the historical experience of the “Catalan Company” of mercenaries in the beginnings of the 14th century with its representation in chronicles and historical books. Afterwards, we put our attention on the inspiration that Catalan and Spanish writers took from this episode in order to create chivalric fictions and other literary works.*

**Keywords:** *Byzantium, Empire, Crown of Aragon, Chivalric Literature, Early Modern Spain.*

### Introduction

At the “18th Annual International Conference on Mediterranean Studies”, a question arose concerning the use of “Greeks” as a demonym for the inhabitants of the Byzantine Empire at the end of Middle Ages and of the naming Byzantium as the “Greek Empire”. First of all, the mistake must be attributed to the Catalan writers and historians from the Crown of Aragon in the 14th and 15th centuries. Also, the official documents conserved in the Royal Archive of Barcelona — nowadays, Archive of the Crown of Aragon (ACA)— about military expeditions and commercial deals consider the Eastern Roman Empire as a Greek empire, with a Hellenic cultural identity clearly distinguished from the Roman imperial past<sup>1</sup>. The main purpose of this article is following the literary representation of the Byzantine Empire in the Catalan and Spanish chivalric romances and other historical sources in order to discover how the “Greek” identity was implicitly conceived and defined.

To deal with this question, the paper is enhancing the political context that concerned the mentioned authors while writing their fictions, on the one hand, and the impact of the cultural image created by them in the Iberian perception of the

---

\*PhD Candidate - Predoctoral Fellow (Professor in Practice), Faculty of Geography and History, University of Valencia, Spain.

1. José M. Floristán Imízcoz, *Fuentes para la política oriental de los Austrias* (León: Universidad de León, 1988); Antoni Rubió i Lluch (ed.), *Diplomatari de l’Orient català (1301-1409)* (Barcelona: IEC, 2001).

Eastern imperial scenery. Did Catalan and Spanish writers create a Greek cultural identity in the romances written around the dream of "saving" a Christian Byzantium? How does this perception change in the Iberic cultural memory when the military confrontations between the Spanish Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire increased along the central decades (siege of Viena, 1532; battle of Lepanto, 1571) of the 16th century?<sup>2</sup>

## Methodology

The representation of the imperial ideology in Medieval literature has a vast tradition of studies from different intellectual approaches<sup>3</sup>. However, the "cultural turn" of the 1990's has provoked an academic point of non-return<sup>4</sup>. When we approach to a specific political context of the past, we must understand the cultural networks of references about principles and values of the historical subjects. That is what allows us to understand the specific motivation of each political process. And fictional literature is an unavoidable source for the intellectual construction of the cultural history about Late Medieval and Early Modern polities<sup>5</sup>. Chivalric romances were one of the most spread literary genres before and after of the origins of the movable-type printing<sup>6</sup>. Medievalists have also demonstrated the capacity of the "chivalric spirit" for explaining the goals and aspirations of the societies that read those books in Western Europe<sup>7</sup>.

---

2. For these concepts, see also: Nikolas Rose, "Identity, Genealogy, History", in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), 128-150; Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Ancient Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Various Authors, *Memory before Modernity. Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013).

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

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

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

6. For this Western Medieval universe and its literature: 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); 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).

7. José Enrique Ruiz-Doménec, *La novela y el espíritu de la caballería* (Madrid: Taurus, 2023).

We have recently devoted a special attention to the inspiration taken by some Catalan writers from the Greek scenery around the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II (1451-1481)<sup>8</sup>. The central role of the Crown of Aragon in the Western and Central Mediterranean politics in the middle of the 15th century was attached to the composition of some romances that are considered nowadays as the “Golden Age” of Catalan literature. The presence of the Byzantine horizon in that sources remarks its importance in the political vision of the Catalan –and even of the Spanish– writers in the next century. Nevertheless, the aim of that analysis was discovering the roots of some political concepts depicted in fictional works, such as the “empire”<sup>9</sup>. In addition, we confirmed the existence of a dialectic confrontation between the Catalan-Aragonese subjects (Latin Roman Church) and the population of the Byzantine Empire (Orthodox Church) in many historical and fictional texts. Consequently, the question of the “Greek” identity attributed to Byzantium in the Western Mediterranean –Iberian– shores and its political meanings is still needed of deeper research.

Answering the initial questions involves analysing the chronicles that include notices around the Greek people and the Byzantine Empire and, in the same way, some chivalric romances where a fictional Eastern empire mentioned as “Greek empire” appears. That is the case of *Tirant lo Blanc* (1490), the major book of the Golden Age in Catalan literature and still well considered by Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quijote de la Mancha* more than one century later (1605-1615)<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, we will also reconstruct the Greek inspiration –translated in different names: “empire of the Greeks”, “emperor of Constantinople” – in the Spanish chivalric romances of the first decades of the 16th century. Many of them situate the end of the narration in the acquisition of the imperial throne in Constantinople, and their authors choose in different occasions the royal surname “of Greece” for their fictional dynasties. According to our sources, firstly, we would like to precise the attribution of that Greek identity to Byzantium by the Iberian writers in the 14th and the 15th centuries and, secondly, the changes and continuities on its political significance after the vanishing of the Empire, in the 16th and the 17th centuries.

---

8. Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

9. Andreu Ortí-Mondéjar, “Greece and the Idea of Empire through Fictional Literature. From Medieval Catalonia to Early Modern Spain”, in *Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 11 (Issue 3, June 2025): 211-226.

10. Joanot Martorell, *Tirant lo Blanch. Text original (València, 1490)* (Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch Editions, 2008), edited by Albert Hauf; Joanot Martorell, *Tirant lo Blanc* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2016 [1979]), edited by Martín de Riquer. The Catalan quotes are taken from the 2016 Riquer’s edition and we will add in brackets the corresponding pages of the English shortened version by Robert S. Rudder, *The White Knight: Tirant lo Blanc* (RSR, 1995): Martorell, *Tirant*, 2016, chapter in Roman numerals, page in Arabics (Rudder, *White Knight*, 1995, chapter in Roman numerals, page in Arabics).

Literary sources give us an interesting opportunity to access into the complexities of the identity in the premodern world. Identity is built above the past of the single and collective subjects, but that past is always an intellectual and permanent rework. Judit Pollmann and other historians have recently developed studies around the practices of memory in the Early Modern Times, focusing on different regions all around Europe<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, as Nikolas Rose wrote, we must consider the relevance of the connections between history and genealogy for building an identity, even more in the societies of our chronological framework. For this reason, we are going to detail the interpretations of the past that we can find in chronicles ("Interpretation and Imagination") and also to confront them with the resources of the literary fiction ("Fiction and Literature").

Contemporary historiography is perfectly conscious of the political identity of the Byzantine Empire as the heir of the Eastern Roman Empire in Medieval times. Obviously, the Greek modern identity was born in the first third of the 19th century, and this proposal will not discuss that question. However, the modern Greek nationalism has a dialectic relationship with its Byzantine past, as it has been studied<sup>12</sup>. This work intend is to go deeper in the cultural memory of the Byzantine Empire in the Iberian Renaissance both in Catalan language under the rule of the Crown of Aragon and in Spanish texts produced in the times of the Habsburg dynasty<sup>13</sup>. This way, we can extract a perception and a concept of Greek people managed in transnational sources, but we cannot attribute a strong political —even less, national— Greek identity<sup>14</sup>.

---

11. Various Authors, *Memory before Modernity. Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013).

12. Despina Christodoulou, "Byzantium in Nineteenth-Century Greek Historiography", in *The Byzantine World* (London-New York: Routledge, 2011), edited by Paul Stephenson, 445-461; Roderick Beaton, *Greece. Biography of a Modern Nation* (London: Allen Lane Publishers, 2019).

13. José M. Floristán Imízcoz, "Bizancio y la herencia Paleóloga en la política exterior de los reinos peninsulares (1400-1502)", in Various Authors, *Perfiles de Grecia y Roma. Actas del XII Congreso Español de Estudios Clásicos* (Valencia: Sociedad Española de Estudios Clásicos, 2009, 3 vols.), III: 13-52; José M. Floristán Imízcoz, "«Bizancio después de Bizancio»: La herencia imperial de Constantinopla y la política exterior de los Austrias españoles (1517-1621)", in Various Authors, *Baetica Renascens* (Cádiz-Málaga: Federación Andaluza de Estudios Clásicos – Instituto de Estudios Humanísticos, 2014, 2 vols.), II: 863-875; Miguel Ángel de Bunes Ibarra, "La conquista turca de Bizancio según los cronistas europeos de los siglos XVI y XVII", in *Erytheia* 13 (1992): 89-102.

14. Gregory T. Papanikos, "The national identity of ancient and modern Greeks", in *Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 10 (Issue 1, 2024): 63-80.

## The Facts

Ramon Muntaner (1265-1336) was one of the Catalan and Aragonese soldiers who disembarked in Monemvasia in 1303. The expedition had departed from Messina, in the kingdom of Sicily, ensured under the rule of a secondary branch of the Aragonese dynasty after the Peace of Caltabellotta (1302). The struggle for the island had started in 1282, when Peter III “the Great” of Aragon (1276-1285) invaded Sicily to support a riot broken out in Palermo against the king Charles of Anjou, also count of Anjou and Provenza and king of Naples – together with Sicily in the period 1266-1282. When Sicily rioted against his power with the support of Peter of Aragon, Charles untied an offensive that lasted for 20 years, sometimes interrupted by diplomatic truces. After his death in 1285, his son Charles II continued the war against the following kings of Aragon – Alphonse III (1285-1291) and his brother James II (1291-1327)<sup>15</sup>. Indeed, James – former king of Sicily – renounced to the insular throne in order to obtain a diplomatic agreement with France, the Pope and Charles II of Anjou (Treaty of Anagni, 1295). However, the Sicilian Parliament elected his youngest brother Frederick (1296-1337) as the new king, and he reached the independence of the island in the cited Peace of Caltabellotta (August 1302)<sup>16</sup>.

The diplomatic agreement had some unexpected consequences. The end of the war left many Catalan and Aragonese soldiers without incomes, so many of them joined to a company commanded by the Italian captain Roger de Flor. And the Company set sail towards the Byzantine Empire paid by the emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282-1328)<sup>17</sup>, whose reign was threatened by the conflicts between Genoese and Venetian fleets and, specially, by the increasing attacks of Turkic groups of population<sup>18</sup>. One of his officers was Ramon Muntaner, author of an essential chronicle for the Catalan Medieval literature (c. 1330)<sup>19</sup>. In the book we can find the

---

15. Steven Runciman, *The Sicilian Vespers. A History of the Mediterranean World in the Later Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: University Press, 1958); 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), 83-105; Stefano M. Cingolani, *Pere el Gran. Vida, actes i paraula* (Barcelona: Base, 2010), 149-198.

16. Cingolani, *Pere el Gran*, 199-319.

17. Franz Georg Maier, *Byzanz* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1973), Spanish translation: *Bizancio* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1974), 340-342; Judith Herrin, *Byzantium. The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 201, 276 and 291.

18. They were structured and organised by the mythical leader Osman at the beginning of the 14th century, afterwards known as the founder of the Ottoman –Osmanli– Empire: Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire 1300-1650. The Structure of Power* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 8-9.

19. Ramon Muntaner, *Les quatre grans cròniques. III. Crònica de Ramon Muntaner* (Barcelona: IEC, 2011), edited by Ferran Soldevila, Jordi Bruguera and Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol. An English translation can be found in: Ramon Muntaner, *Chronicle* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1921), translated by Anne Goodenough (Ontario: Publications Catalan Series, 2000).

account of the achievements reached by the monarchs of the Crown of Aragon since the naissance of James I (1208-1276) until the coronation of Alphonse IV in 1327. Muntaner's intention was to glorify the military expansion in the Iberian Peninsula (Valencia, Balearic Islands) and the Western Mediterranean Sea (Sardinia, Sicily)<sup>20</sup> and he still provokes that effect on the reader, thanks to his vivid literary style and the introduction of some writing techniques taken from chivalric romances and *chansons de geste*. Certainly, it happens because he lived and could testify — despite the bias of his political ambitions— about the campaigns, such as the presence of the "Catalan Company" —*exercitus Cathalanorum*— in Sicily, Greece and Anatolia.

That military campaign started as an independent initiative driven by De Flor as a way of offering economic benefits to the unoccupied groups of mercenaries in Sicily. Ramon Muntaner was one of those vacant soldiers. More than 20 years later, he introduced this episode in his chronicle about the Aragonese monarchy's expansion because it had both a political and a biographical significance. Muntaner himself tells us the origins of the expedition to "Romania" departed in order to support the "emperor of Constantinople" against the spreading of Ottoman population and armies throughout Anatolia and the Minor Asia. These zones were theoretically under the rule of Byzantium.

He [De Flor] had a galley equipped and called two knights whom he trusted, and told them all he had planned; and also told them that, above all, they should make a treaty by which he would obtain, as wife, the niece of the Emperor of Lantzaura [dynasty Asen of Bulgaria], and also that he be made Grand Duke of the Empire; and again, that the Emperor give pay for four months to all those he would bring...

ell [De Flor] féu aparellar una galea e hac dos cavallers en què es fiava e dix-los tot lo fet que s'havia pensat. E encara los dix que de tot en tot tractassen que ell hagués per muller la neboda de l'emperador, filla de l'emperador de Lautzara [dynasty Asen of Bulgaria]; e, encara, que fos megaduc de l'emperi; e, encara, que l'emperador faés paga a tots aquells que ell menaria, de quatre meses<sup>21</sup>

---

The chapters devoted to the Catalan expedition to the Byzantine Empire have been independently published: Ramon Muntaner, *L'expedició dels catalans a Orient (Extret de la "Crònica")* (Barcelona: Barcino, 1951). English translation: *The Catalan Expedition to the East: from the Chronicle of Ramon Muntaner* (Barcelona-Woodbridge: Barcino-Tamesis, 2006), translated by Robert D. Hughes. We will take quotations from the IEC's 2011 edition, adding the pages of the English translation in brackets: Muntaner, *Crònica*, 2011, chapter in Roman numerals, page in Arabics (*Chronicle*, 2000, page in Arabics).

20. Ernest Belenguer and Felipe V. Garín (eds.), *La Corona d'Aragó. Segles XII-XVIII* (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 2006); Flocel Sabaté (ed.), *The Crown of Aragon. A Singular Mediterranean Empire* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2017).

21. Muntaner, *Crònica*, 2011, CXCIX, 333 (*Chronicle*, 2000, 402). We can compare this negotiation with the fictional representation of the origins of the Greek adventure in *Tirant lo Blanc*: Martorell, *Tirant*, 2016, CXVI, 251-252 (Rudder, *White Knight*, 1995, IV, 58-59).

Monemvasia was the harbour where De Flor's fleet had to arrive in Greece, and he also required to find there the advanced reward for their military service. It is easy to understand that the emperor Andronikos II accepted those hard conditions because he had no alternative to continue his fight. Nevertheless, the position of the mercenaries was mainly rejected by the co-emperor Michael IX (1295-1320), son of Andronikos, and he was not alone. The Byzantine court also considered De Flor —who had received the honorific title of Caesar of the Empire<sup>22</sup>— as a growing menace for the stability of the Empire. Leaving the rule of war in Eastern provinces in the hands of Catalan mercenaries was a risk for the bureaucratic Byzantine system<sup>23</sup>. In addition, the irruption of the Company exacerbated the rivalry between the Catalans and the Genoese group established in the same Constantinople, due to the previous challenges that both merchant communities had settled in other commercial sceneries across the Mediterranean Sea.

The political stress exploded two years later. De Flor had commanded a successful campaign in Anatolia accepting little orders from the old emperor. As a response, Michael IX organised a meeting with him and other Catalan leaders in Edirne. It was not a celebration, but a betrayal. At least, Muntaner and posterior writers such as Moncada considered it was so. The 30th April 1305, De Flor and his main officers were murdered by the soldiers of Michael, and Muntaner described the scene with his characteristic and pathetic style:

Skyr Miqueli [Michael IX] summoned Gircon to Adrianople [Edirne], chief of the Alans, and Melech, chief of the Turcopoles, so that they were altogether nine thousand horsemen. And on that day he invited the Caesar to a banquet. And when they had eaten, this Gircon, chief of the Alans, entered the palace in which Skyr Miqueli and his wife and the Caesar were; and they drew their swords and massacred the Caesar and all who were with him; and then, throughout the city, they killed all who had come with the Caesar; not more than three escaped...

al setèn jorn xor Miqueli [Michael IX] hac fets venir a Andrinòpol [Edirne] Girgan, cap dels alans, e Melic, cap dels turcoples, així que foren entre tots ben vuit mília hòmens a cavall. E aquell dia ell convidà lo cèsar; e, con hagren menjat, aquell Girgon, cap dels alans, entrà en lo palau on estava xor Miqueli ab sa muller e el cèsar, e van trer les espaes e van tot especejar lo cèsar e tots aquells qui ab ell eren; e puis per la ciutat mataren tots quants ab lo cèsar eren venguts, que no n'escaparen mas tres <sup>24</sup>

---

22. In the 14th century, it had become a courtly dignity without determining the heir or co-emperor of the reigning emperor or *Basileus*. I would like to thank the blind peer-reviewers for their remarks about this title.

23. Michael Angold, "The Byzantine Political Process at Crisis Point", in Paul Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010): 5-21 (6); Leonora Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950–1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 39.

24. Muntaner, *Crònica*, 2011, CCXV, 353 (*Chronicle*, 2000, 427-428).

After the murder, the Company attacked the Byzantine troops and other mercenaries such as the Alans —episode known as “the Catalan Revenge” — and they contributed to the political instability in the centre of the Empire and in the Peloponnese. The region had been divided along the period that started with the Fourth Latin Crusade against Constantinople (1204) until the dynastic restoration of the Palaiologos with the emperor Michael VIII (1261-1282). Many groups of Western knights had established little feudal states and there was a multilinguistic —and troublesome— coexistence of Greek and Latin communities<sup>25</sup>. In that context, the Catalan mercenaries defeated the Frankish chivalry of Gautier V of Brienne, duke of Athens, and occupied the Acropolis —known by them as the “castle of *Cetines*” — and all that feudal state in 1311. Finally, in 1319, the Sicilian prince Alphonse Frederick (c. 1290 – c. 1335) joined to the Catalan Company, so they conquered also the duchy of Neopatras and defeated the Frankish lords of the region. Both states remained under the indirect sovereignty of the monarchs of Sicily until its transfer to the protection of Peter IV of Aragon (often called “the Ceremonious”, 1336-1387) in 1377<sup>26</sup>.

This political process conditioned the literary presence of the Greek domains in the Crown of Aragon —and in the Spanish Monarchy of the Early Modern Ages— in chronicles and historical texts. Muntaner’s chronicle is the paradigm of that historical and even biographical literature. Here we examine the epic translation of the facts written by Muntaner —and its influence in historical books that hoped to recover ancient glories for the Spanish monarchy in the 17th century, as Francisco de Moncada did. The political interest on the Eastern Mediterranean regions conditioned also the imagination of the Catalan writers in the following two centuries, and *Tirant lo Blanc* (1460-1464) is the perfect example of the chivalric dream of preserving Byzantium from the Ottoman invasions in the same moment of Mehmet’s conquest. Despite the differences in the geopolitical scenery, this literary pattern created a permanent aim in the Spanish chivalric books of the 16th century, in which knights and princes wanted to reach the throne of Constantinople as the award for their military efforts. We will analyse it in the last pages of this article.

---

25. The *Chronicle of Morea* is a great reflect of that era, and we have an accurated Spanish translation: Gregoria Núñez Esteban, *La Crónica de Morea: versión castellana del texto medieval griego y estudio preliminar* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2015), PhD Dissertation.

26. José M. Floristán Imízcoz, “La Corona de Aragón y el Imperio Bizantino de los Paleólogos”, in Various Authors, *Mallorca y Bizancio* (Palma de Mallorca: Aula General Weyler, 2005), 103-156 (110-114).

## Interpretation and Imagination

It is important to keep in mind this conflictive episode when we read the Muntaner's chronicle. Muntaner is not only a military responsible of De Flor's troops; he is also an officer who loses the influence that he had in the first structure of the Company before the murder of Roger De Flor. Therefore, his descriptions of Byzantium, its political system and its population are extremely critical. Those descriptions help us to discover and precise how the Empire and its people were perceived in the Western side of the Mediterranean Sea. We are going to analyse the uses of three concepts: "Romania", "emperor of Constantinople" and "the Greeks". Studying the commercial influence of the Aragonese Crown in the Eastern Mediterranean, Damien Coulon remarked recently: "the old Byzantine Empire, which it is better to call 'Romania', the name used in Western documents from the epoch"<sup>27</sup>. That is the same concept that Muntaner uses in the first lines explaining the expedition in the Chapter CXCIX: "How Frey Roger began to treat the passage into Romania...".

"And sent messengers to the Emperor of Constantinople"<sup>28</sup>, it continues the previous quote. On the one hand, the name of "Romania" goes referred to all the lands once upon a time ruled by the Byzantine Emperors —but lost some centuries ago: Levant (Siria and Lebanon), Minor Asia. Thus, it is a geographical concept with a non-precise delimitation. On the other hand, "emperor of Constantinople" is the name used when it only pretends to identify the Byzantine sovereign. Its precision —mentioning only the capital city— reveals that Western writers had perceived the loss of lands and influence of the Empire after the Fourth Crusade of 1204. If we inspect the documents conserved about the relations of the Crown of Aragon and its Eastern affairs, we will find that official terms to design the Byzantine Empire were very similar to those of the chronicle.

For instance, the Catalan commander Berenguer d'Entença writes to the Dux of Venice to apologise and compensate an attack of his ships to a Venetian galley "*in mari portus de le Guayle [Quaglie] imperii Romeorum*"<sup>29</sup>. In the same month, 22nd September 1304, the king James II of Aragon is writing to his brother Frederick of Sicily "*super negocio Romanie*"; the same "*predicti imperium Romanie*" that Entença mentions again in his new letter to the Dux<sup>30</sup>. The diplomatic documents give us a powerful title: "*imperium Romanie*" (Empire of Romania) and "*imperium Romeorum*" (Empire of the Romans, similar to the Greek title "*Basileía Romaíon*"). Both reinforce the identity of the Empire with its Roman past, with its political origins being the

---

27. Damien Coulon, "The Commercial Influence of the Crown of Aragon in the Eastern Mediterranean (Thirteenth – Fifteenth Centuries), in Flocel Sabaté (ed.), *The Crown of Aragon. A Singular Mediterranean Empire* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2017), 279-308 (281).

28. Muntaner, *Chronicle*, 2000, 400.

29. Rubió, *Diplomatari*, XII, 13 (10th September 1304).

30. Rubió, *Diplomatari*, XIII, 14 (James II to Frederick of Sicily) and XIV, 15 (Entença to the Dux).

Eastern Roman Empire, whose capital city was established in the little place of Byzantium and renamed as Constantinople by Constantine the Great (306-337 A.D.).

The third title that we find is "*imperator Constantinopolitanus*", as we read in Muntaner's quote ("emperor of Constantinople"). It can be found also in many chivalric romances detailed in the fifth section of this essay. An anonymous account of the campaigns in 1303-1305 is registered in the Archive of the Crown of Aragon, and it tells the history of the "*multitudine almogavarorum*"<sup>31</sup> in "*partibus Romanie*", who had helped the emperor Andronikos until the murder of Roger de Flor and the prison of Berenguer d'Entença<sup>32</sup>. This way, official documents and historical accounts are expressing their political perception with the same words. Nevertheless, we said that "Emperor of Constantinople" is an unofficial naming that reveals the reduction of the political horizons of Byzantium since the 13th century. But that approaches us to another way of designating the rival troops of the Company and, at least, a part of the population ruled by the Byzantine emperors: the "Greeks". Muntaner mentions this name 17 times along his chronicle, and he does it generally to express a negative opinion.

Being Greek, for Muntaner, is more a cultural or ethnic question than a political one; they are one more group of soldiers —together with mercenaries such as some Turkic groups, the Alans or the Venetian and Genoese communities— under the orders of Andronikos and Michael Palaiologos. The Greeks are the inhabitants of the Ancient Hellenic (or even Balkan lands) that obey the Orthodox Church and usually the Byzantine emperor. It is a cultural and linguistic community that represents and, in the end, identifies all the empire. However, there are also Greek communities under the sovereignty of other princes and lords in Anatolia or even in the Peloponnese. They are the vassals of the monarch who paid the Company, but also the monarch who broke the *pacta, que eis fecerat et promiserat*. And that affair surely provokes these lines by Muntaner:

And this happened owing 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.

e açò esdevé per dos pecats senyalats qui en ells regnen, ço és: la un, que són les pus ergulloses gents del món, que no ha gents al món que ells preen res sinó ells mateixs, e res no valen; d'altra part, que han la menys caritat de llur proïsme que gents que sien en el segle.<sup>33</sup>

---

31. "*Almogàver*" is the Catalan word for those mercenary warriors.

32. Rubió, *Diplomatari*, XV, 17: "*quod imperator Constantinopolitanus non quitabat dictos armigeros nec etiam pacta, que eis fecerat et promiserat*". The account is written with a poor Latin vocabulary and grammar, but it is very useful to understand the Catalan point of view.

33. Muntaner, *Crònica*, 2011, CCIII, 339-340 (*Chronicle*, 2000, 410). The following quotes can be found in the same page and the next ones.

The chronist is also a defeated soldier after 1305. When he writes his famous book 25 years later, he has not forgotten the death of De Flor and hundreds of his comrades. For this reason, Muntaner throws the “wrath of God [*los grecs han la ira de Déus sobre ells*]” over the Greeks in his narration, along which Greeks are conceptualized as victims of the Turks or defeated soldiers. When there is an epidemy of “pestilence upon the Greeks that anyone could have defeated them [*sobre los grecs ha Déus tramesa tanta de pestilència, que tothom los confondria*]”. According to the modern editor of the text, Muntaner expresses the “hatred and contempt for the Greeks”<sup>34</sup> of the Catalans.

Anyway, the use of the demonym “Greek” to define that community is very common, but it is not only used for the vassals of the Byzantine emperor. When Athens and Neopatras are taken under the direct Aragonese protection, Peter IV of Aragon designs the viscount of Rocabertí as lieutenant of the Crown in both duchies and the king writes instructions directed to *axí Franchs com Grechs* (“both Frankish and Greek people”)<sup>35</sup>. So, the Greeks are a collective of traditional population before the arrival of the Catalans, but not the only one —we also have there the Frankish states in Morea or Peloponnese. In this case, these “Greeks” are under the rule of the Aragonese king.

To sum up, we must remember that the contact between the Crown of Aragon and the Greek communities begins in a warlike context that leads to a delicate political equilibrium. And written sources represent and transmit a tough and heated message. From an Iberian point of view, the expedition of the Catalan Company commanded by Roger de Flor in 1303-1305 represents a successful episode of military history that conferred two feudal states —duchies of Athens and Neopatras— to the Aragonese kings for 80 years long. On the other side, the subjects of Andronikos II and Michael IX Palaiologos only turned to the Catalan mercenary troops in a very particular situation of extreme military necessity against the Ottoman invasion of Anatolia. The cost of the Company, its presence —and abuses— against population and the requests of De Flor and other mercenary leaders provoked their murder by the hands of Michael IX<sup>36</sup>. Obviously, the combination of epic and betrayal laid the foundation of a heroic narrative that we can follow in chronicles, chivalric romances and, even, historical Spanish texts some centuries later.

Of course, the frontiers between these three genres are confuse in the Medieval and Early Modern literature. Indeed, historiography in the premodern times is a part of a wider written culture and it is placed “between History and Literature”<sup>37</sup>.

---

34. Muntaner, *Chronicle*, 2000, 215 (note 97 of the English editor).

35. Rubió, *Diplomatari*, DCCXII, 743.

36. The version of the Byzantine historians about this period is a question that we cannot detail in this paper. Georgios Pachymeres (1242 – c. 1310) gives information about Roger de Flor and his Company, but Nicephorus Gregoras (1295 – c. 1360) lives almost entirely the era of the Catalan duchies.

37. Jaume Aurell, *La historiografía medieval. Entre la historia y la literatura* (Valencia: PUV, 2016).

It is a genre that connects some mythical and religious origins of the humanity, the dynasties and the states with the account of the facts in which they have been involved, using many literary and rhetoric figures for that. The same procedure can be also found in fictional literature, but with the obvious imaginative ingredient added, which was no absent in the chronicles. In the next section we will go deeper in that topic. However, it is important to understand that some less fictional texts (such as the chronicles and other books devoted to reconstructing the past) are also part of the Catalan and Spanish literatures. We have seen that in Muntaner's chronicle, and we are going to analyse the same situation in a book that sets the episode of the Catalan Company in the written memory of the Spanish culture in the decade of 1620. That was the beginning of an enchained series of military conflicts that lead the Spanish Monarchy to play a central role in the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) and to fight against the second European power: the monarchy of France (1635-1659).

The delicate diplomatic and warlike scenery reinforced the interest in some historical episodes of glory for the Iberian Medieval kingdoms. The *Expedición de los Catalanes y Aragoneses contra Turcos y Griegos* ["Expedition of Catalan and Aragonese soldiers against Turks and Greeks"] was written and first published in 1623 by Francisco de Moncada (1586-1635)<sup>38</sup>, marquis of Aytona, count of Osona and influent politician in the Spanish court. He also wrote some historical books, but his main work was this one reflecting the influx of Muntaner, as we can see in the title. Moncada tells the episode of the Catalan mercenaries hired by "*Andrónico Paleólogo Emperador de Griegos* [Emperor of Greek People]"<sup>39</sup>, but the title establishes both Ottomans —initial opponents— and Greeks —vassals of the emperor— as enemies. Or as allies, according to the diplomatic evolution of the complex political situation in the South of the Empire (Peloponnese or Morea). As we can see, for Moncada, the Palaiologos and the Empire are attached to the Greek people, forgetting the ethnocultural diversity of the Eastern Roman Empire. In the end, here we have another statement of the Greek identification of Byzantium in the Spanish literature of the 17th century —also edited in the 18th (1777, second edition of the book).

Moncada is the author of this book, more serene than Muntaner's one. The Hispanic nobleman gives a heroic account of the battles of the Catalan army in Anatolia and Morea, but he also talks about their "ambition" and "avarice"<sup>40</sup>. Nevertheless, after "defeated the Turks in the first increase of their Ottoman rise", the weapon were "turned against the Greeks". And the main community of the Byzantine Empire did not receive a better consideration in the following chapters: "The Greeks were so jealous and superb that they were plotting betrayals and

---

38. Francisco de Moncada, *Expedición de catalanes y aragoneses contra turcos y griegos* (Madrid: Antonio de Sancha, 1777). We cite according to the second edition of the book. Translation of the quotes by the author of the paper.

39. Moncada, *Expedición de catalanes y aragoneses*, 1.

40. Moncada, *Expedición de catalanes y aragoneses*, 3-4.

treacheries. They were requesting with mouth and hands to Michael [IX] a disaffection against us [...]”<sup>41</sup>. The association between the historical characters (Catalan soldiers) and the identity of the 17th century writer —with his use of the plural subject (“against us”)— explains Moncada’s “disaffection” against the Greeks in the text.

In the following pages we are going to analyse, on the other side, the almost positive representation of the Greek people in the fictional literature of the Spanish Golden Age. Many chivalric romances in the 16th century depict an empire in Constantinople or in “Greece”, creating a political system whose throne was the final desire or a friendly place in the adventures of the main character. Sometimes, Greece is the name of the dynasty of princes and knights, and we will prove it with some examples provided by chivalric romances and travel literature.

### Fiction and Literature

*Tirant lo Blanc* is the major book of the Catalan Medieval literature, but that is not the reason to consider it here. This literary masterpiece, as it has been considered, is also the main source to see how Greek people were seen by the Iberian writers in the 15th century. Written in the period 1460-1464 (published in Valencia, 1490), the novel is constructed around the figure of a young Breton knight, Tirant lo Blanc (“the White”), who travels with Christian troops to Constantinople and reaches to save the Emperor from the Ottoman enemy. The inspiration taken from Muntaner by his author, Joanot Martorell (c. 1400 – 1465) is evident. This romance, published in the last moments of the Christian conquest of the emirate of Grenade<sup>42</sup>, creates a Latin Western identity for Greece. It allows to rejoin the Orthodox Byzantium with the Western Latin Christendom to express a military success in response to the defeat of 1453.

Tirant defeats the Ottoman army many times and he also receives the title of Caesar, as imagined heir of the Empire: “The emperor sent a proclamation throughout the city, with many trumpets and drums, that they should all consider Tirant his successor and the Caesar of the empire. And he made them swear that after his death they would hold him as their emperor and lord. And from that time forward the new

---

41. Moncada, *Expedición de catalanes y aragoneses*, 116, with the original Spanish text: “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”.

42. More information about its political context in: Martín de Riquer, *Tirant lo Blanch, novela de historia y de ficción* (Barcelona: Acantilado, 2013); Andreu Ortí-Mondéjar, “La cultura política de la Corona d’Aragó al *Tirant lo Blanc*. L’ofici de príncep i la institució del consell a través de la literatura de ficció”, in *eHumanista/IVITRA* 27 (2025): 347-360.

Prince Tirant was named Caesar of the Greek Empire"<sup>43</sup>. It allows him to marry the only daughter of the old emperor, but he cannot assume the imperial crown because of his unexpected death. This romance, in this point, projects another feudal desire: the ascension in the feudal scale of power until reaching the royal throne.

However, Tirant's expedition is not inspired by avarice, but by religion and political ambition. Indeed, the development of the plot is a counterfactual: while the Byzantine Empire disappears in 1453, the "Greek Empire" of *Tirant* is finally rescued for Christianity. That reflects the ideology of the author, a little nobleman of the Crown of Aragon who lived in the 15th century. He survived in the court of Alphonse V of Aragon (1416-1458), the Aragonese monarch who conquered the reign of Naples (1443) and played an important diplomatic role in the years of the fall of the Palaiologos' Empire<sup>44</sup>. In the end, the proximity of this kingdom to the Balkan frontier and to the Ottoman Empire lets us to understand the ideological and political background of Martorell's book.

In the novel, the literary shadow of Byzantium is called the "Greek Empire". The link between the Greek community and the Palaiologos' throne that we mentioned when reading Muntaner is here complete. "We, Frederick, Emperor of the Empire of Greece by the immense and divine majesty of the sovereign and eternal God"<sup>45</sup>, it starts the letter in which the literary emperor of Greece asks for military aid to the court of the king of Sicily —the knight Tirant was serving him. That is another parallelism with De Flor and the Catalan Company, who left the Sicilian kingdom in 1303 towards "Romania". Remembering the arrival of De Flor:

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. E Déus après donà-los tan bon temps, que dins poc temps preseren terra a Malvasia; e aquí los fon feta molta d'honor e los fo donat gran refrescament de totes coses. E atrobaren aquí manament de l'emperador que dretament se n'anassen en Contastinoble; e així ho compliren, que partiren de Malvasia e anaren-se'n en Contastinoble.

---

43. Rudder, *The White Knight*, 1995, XIII, 233. Original Catalan text: "E l'Emperador cridar féu per tota la ciutat, ab moltes trompetes e tabals, que tots tinguessen a Tirant per primogènit seu e Cèsar de l'Imperi. E féu-lo jurar que, après son òbit, lo tinguessen per Emperador e senyor llur. E així fon fet, que d'aquí avant lo novell príncep Tirant fon nomenat Cèsar de l'Imperi grec" (Martorell, *Tirant*, 2016, CDLII, 961, and see also CDLIII, 962).

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

45. Rudder, *The White Knight*, 1995, IV, 58. Original Catalan text: "Nós, Frederic, per la immensa e divina majestat del sobiran Déu eternal, Emperador de l'Imperi grec [...] que vós vullau ab molta amor e voluntat anar a servir l'estat imperial" (Martorell, *Tirant*, 2016, CXV, 248 and CXVI, 251).

E, con foren en Contastinoble, l'emperador, lo pare e el fill, los reeberen ab gran goig e ab gran plaer, e totes les gents de l'emperi.<sup>46</sup>

We can find a similar —extensive— account in Martorell's novel:

Tirant took his leave of the king and queen, and of Philippe and the infanta. And with all the men on board, they let a favorable wind fill the sails, and they sailed quickly over a calm sea until one morning they found themselves before the city of Constantinople.

When the emperor heard that Tirant had arrived, he was happier than he had ever been, and he said that he felt as if his son had come back to life. As the eleven galleys neared shore, all the cries of happiness made the entire city resound. The emperor went up on a great cenotaph to watch the galleys come in. When Tirant learned where the emperor was, he had two large flags of the King of Sicily brought out, and one of his own. He had three knights come out in armor, each of them with a flag in his hand, and every time they passed in front of the emperor they lowered the flags until they nearly touched the water, while Tirant's touched it each time.

This was a sign of greeting, and because of the emperor's dignity they humbled themselves so lowly before him. When the emperor saw this, which was something that he had never seen before, he was very pleased.

When Tirant was on land he found the Count of Africa waiting for him on shore with many men, and he welcomed him with great honour. They then made their way to the platform where the emperor was. As soon as Tirant saw him he knelt to the ground, along with all his men, and when they reached the middle of the platform they bowed again. When he was six feet away he knelt and tried to kiss his foot, and the worthy lord would not permit it. He kissed his hand, and the emperor kissed him on the mouth.

Tirant pres comiat del Rei, de la Reina, de Felip e de la Infanta. E, recollida tota la gent, donaren les veles al pròsper vent e navegaren ab bon temps e la mar tranquil·le, que un matí se trobaren davant la ciutat de Constantinoble.

Com l'Emperador sabé que Tirant era vengut, en los dies de sa vida no mostrà major alegria e dix que, al parer seu, que son fill era ressuscitat. Les onze galeres vengueren ab tants de sons e d'alegria que tota la ciutat feien ressonar. Lo poble, qui trist estava e adolorit, s'alegrà tot, que els paria que Déu los fos aparegut. L'Emperador se posà en un gran cadafal per mirar les galeres com venien. Com Tirant sabé que l'Emperador estava en aquell lloc, en lo cadafal, féu traure dues banderes grans del rei de Sicília e una de les sues; e féu armar tres cavallers tots en blanc sens que no portaven sobrevestes e cascú tenia una bandera en la mà, e cascuna volta que passaven davant l'Emperador baixaven les banderes fins prop de l'aigua, e la de Tirant la feien tota tocar en l'aigua. Açò era en senyal que el saludaven e per la dignitat que l'Emperador tenia s'humiliava tan baix a ell. L'Emperador, com véu açò, que era cosa nova per a ell, lo que jamés no havia vist, fon molt content d'haver vista tal cerimònia, e molt més de la venguda de Tirant.

Com les galeres hagueren bé voltejat, una amunt, altra avall, vengueren a dar l'escala en terra. E ixqué vestit aquell dia Tirant ab un jaseran de malla e les mànegues de franja

---

46. Muntaner, *Crònica*, 2011, CCII, 335-336 (*Chronicle*, 2000, 406).

d'or, e sobre lo jaseran una jornea feta a la francesa, ab espasa cenyida, e al cap portava un bonet de grana ab un gros fermall guarnit de moltes perles e pedres fines de gran estima. Diafebus ixqué en semblant manera, sinó la jornea que era de setí morat, e Ricard ixqué tan bé abillat com negú de tots los altres, e portava la jornea de domàs blau. Totes aquestes jornees eren brodades d'orfebreria e de perles orientals molt grosses. E tots los altres cavallers e gentilshòmens anaven molt ben abillats.

Com Tirant fon en terra trobà a la vora de la mar lo comte d'Àfrica qui l'estava esperant ab molta gent, qui el rebé ab molta honor. Partiren d'aquí e feren la via del cadafal on l'Emperador era. Com Tirant lo véu ficà lo genoll en terra, e tots los seus com foren a mig cadafal tornaren a fer altra reverència. Com fos als seus peus, agenollà's e volgué-li besar lo peu, e lo valerós senyor no ho consentí. Besà-li la mà e l'Emperador lo besà en la boca.<sup>47</sup>

The long account of Tirant's arrival in Greece not only shows many chivalric customs and traditions. It is also the demonstration of a better consideration of the imperial court in the fictional Byzantine Empire. For Martorell and the Catalan writers of that century, we are talking about the Greek Empire. But an imagined empire needs an imagined history, and the writer creates it in a dialogue between the emperor and the knight. According to the monarch, 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 —who "returned to Greece and became its emperor"— is his grandfather and that he became lord 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"<sup>48</sup>.

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. The novel remained 35 years as a manuscript, and it was finally printed in 1490. With the end of the book, it also finished the dream of many Christian Western readers of conquering Constantinople after its fall in the hands of Mehmed II. Regardless, the image of Greece as the centre of the lost Byzantine Empire remained in its written culture. The historical book of Francisco de Moncada was an example of that, but we can see how an "empire of Constantinople" and the use of "Greece" as a royal surname remain in the Spanish chivalric literature. Maybe the most significative

---

47. Martorell, *Tirant*, 2016, CXVI, 251-252 (Rudder, *The White Knight*, 1995, IV, 59).

48. Original Catalan quote: Martorell, *Tirant*, 2016, CXXVI, 284. The English translation of the source is in my recent paper: Ortí-Mondéjar, "Greece and the Idea of Empire", 218. More about 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.

case would be the romance *Claribalte* (Valencia, 1519)<sup>49</sup>. Its author, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo (1478 – 1557), became the first chronicler of the Spanish conquest of America thanks to some books in which he reconstructed the history of the “West Indies” and its human and natural world. But first of publishing these volumes, he wrote the short chivalric romance of *Claribalte*, an Albanian prince who recovered the throne of Constantinople from the hands of his tyrannic uncle<sup>50</sup>.

Let’s put our attention around 1500, in the first decades of printing activity in the Iberian world. The Spanish translation of *Tirant* was printed in 1511, but three years before *Amadís de Gaula* was born in the printing houses of Zaragoza (1508)<sup>51</sup>. This book was a Medieval chivalric romance whose manuscript versions have not been preserved. Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo extended the original from three to four parts published in one thick volume, and along the 16th century it was continued by different authors in Spain and other European countries (France, Italy, German Empire). It will become in a genealogical story related in many parts and continuations or sequels<sup>52</sup>. This fictional genealogy is essential for the cultural memory of the Greek identity attributed to the Eastern empire in the Spanish Golden Age of literature. While *Tirant lo Blanc* has been considered by the recent research as a “realistic” novel with solid inspiration from the historical past (for instance, by Martín de Riquer), *Amadís* sets up the style of a fanciful chivalric literature. This second variety filled its plots with a lot of supernatural elements — such as witchcraft, giants o enchanted weapons —, set in an unrealistic geography<sup>53</sup>.

Despite that fantasy turn, the Early Modern chivalric romances preserve some remnants from a Byzantine past. Moreover, the Byzantine memory is named as “Greek” or, at least, identified with a fictional empire with its capital city placed in Constantinople. Let’s read the third book of *Amadís*. The hero starts his travel “towards Greece [*contra Grecia*]” to obtain the glory after having a son with his beloved princess Oriana. As there was a diabolic monster in the “islands of Romania [*ínsolas de Romanía*]” —under the rule of the “emperor of Constantinople” —, Amadís sailed to the islands and killed the monster. After that, he was received by the emperor and received many honours until his departure to the native lands of his fiancée Oriana. And the court of Constantinople is also considered in the novel as a cultured centre, where “a book owned by the emperor of Constantinople [*un libro*

---

49. Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Claribalte* (Alcalá de Henares: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 2001), edited by Alberto del Río Nogueras.

50. The ideological and political principles of the novel have been analysed in my paper: Andreu Ortí-Mondéjar, “La encrucijada sucesoria de Carlos V desde la literatura. Tiranía, resistencia, sucesión y Cortes en un libro de caballerías”, in *Tiempos Modernos* 15 (Issue 50, 2025): 40-63.

51. Juan M. Cacho Blecua, *Amadís: heroísmo mítico cortesano* (Madrid: CUPSA, 1979).

52. Cacho Blecua, *Amadís: heroísmo*, 401-406. See also: José M. Lucía Megías and Emilio J. Sales Dasí, *Libros de caballerías castellanos (siglos XVI-XVII)* (Madrid: Laberinto, 2008).

53. Lucía and Sales, *Libros de caballerías*, 219-240.

que el emperador de Constantinopla tiene]" has the information necessary for settling some of the problems that Amadis must risk<sup>54</sup>.

The Greek-Byzantine footprint<sup>55</sup> remains in the sequels of *Amadís de Gaula*, in which we can find the story of his successors. The bibliographical chronology is difficult to follow, so we will only cite some facts for demonstrating it. The volume compiled by Rodríguez de Montalvo in 1508 contains four books, but we can find at least ten sequels more. The 7th one talks about the grandson of Amadis called *Lisuarte de Grecia* ("Lisuarte of Greece", 1514)<sup>56</sup>. We know that it was extremely popular in the Spain of the 1500's because of its many reprintings in: Seville (1514, 1525, 1548, 1550), Toledo (1534, 1539), Zaragoza (kingdom of Aragon, 1587) and Lisbon (Portugal, 1589)<sup>57</sup>. There were also translations and reprintings in many European languages of this 7th sequel written by Feliciano de Silva (c. 1490 – 1554).

De Silva wrote more sequels of famous books such as *Amadís* and he also placed his literary adventures in Greece, as we can see in the titles and characters of the 9th and 11th sequels: *Amadís de Grecia* ("Amadis of Greece", 1530)<sup>58</sup>, to whom he attributed again the title of "emperor of Constantinople"; and Rogel de Grecia ("Roger of Greece", main character in the third part of the book *Florisel de Niquea*, 1535)<sup>59</sup>. However, there were more authors who chose the Balkans to place their chivalric plots. The last example of this genre that we are going to cite, it is *Belianís de Grecia* ("Belianis of Greece", 1547), written by Jerónimo Fernández. The hero Belianis is interesting for our topic because he is a knight who needs to reach glory in the exercise of weapons in order to inherit his father's Greek empire. He must confront even a war as a commander of Greek armies against Persia, episode that reflects the ancient clash between East (in this case, Persia) and West (Greece)<sup>60</sup> that we found in *Tirant lo Blanc* some pages before.

To close this essay, I would like to add an example provided by travel literature. The anonymous book *Viaje de Turquía* ["Travels of Turkey"], supposedly

---

54. Anonymous, *Amadís de Gaula* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 2015), edited by Juan Bautista Avalle-Arce, Book III, Chapters LXX-LXXV, 595-658 for all the Greek episode (quotes in pages 618 and 629).

55. In fact, these romances have been englobed in a subgenre of chivalric literature called "Greek-Asian romances" by the Spanish critics.

56. Feliciano de Silva, *Lisuarte de Grecia* (Alcalá de Henares: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 2002), edited by Emilio J. Sales Dasí.

57. The kingdom of Portugal was added politically to the Spanish Monarchy from 1580 until 1640. Printing information: Pascual de Gayangos, *Libros de caballerías, con un discurso preliminar y un catálogo razonado* (Madrid: Rivadeneyra, 1874), 68.

58. Feliciano de Silva, *Amadís de Grecia* (Alcalá de Henares: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 2004), edited by Ana Bueno and Carmen Laspuertas.

59. Feliciano de Silva, *Florisel de Niquea. Parte III* (Alcalá de Henares: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 1999), edited by Javier Martín Lalanda.

60. Nevertheless, religion is not the most decisive cause of the cited literary war: Laura Gallego García, *Belianís de Grecia (Tercera y Cuarta Parte): Edición y estudio* (Valencia: Universitat de València, 2013), PhD Dissertation, 22-24.

by the Spanish humanist Cristóbal de Villalón, was written around 1557 and it has the rhetorical form of a fictional dialogue<sup>61</sup>. In that dialogue, the character of Pedro de Urdemalas tells the story of his life and he specially remarks the years when he suffered as a captive in the Ottoman Empire. At the end of the book, we can find an abridged description of Constantinople<sup>62</sup>. A hundred years after the Ottoman conquest, the voice of Villalón-Urdemalas recognizes clearly the Greek people under the Islamic government. The traveller distinguishes them from other communities (“there are a lot of Greeks and Armenians [*Griegos y armenos hay muchos*]”)<sup>63</sup> and he even remembers some Greek words to identify products and customs that are different from the Spanish – and Ottoman – ones.

### Conclusion

All in all, the cultural memory of the Byzantine empire is becoming vaguer in the Spanish Golden Age, but the Greek people are still alive in its literature. And that is not a question concerning to stylistic details. The identity of the Greeks contributes to change through literature the role that each political system is playing. On the one hand, the Crown of Aragon had fought against both Ottoman and Byzantine troops in the early 14th century, so it could be considered as a glorious episode in their chronicles (Muntaner) and an example for the Iberian writers in crisis periods (Moncada). But romances like *Tirant* show that religious rivalry against Muslim powers was stronger enough to articulate a new Greek identity in the Catalan literary masterpiece founded in a supposed common (Latin) Christendom. Some decades before, on the other hand, Spanish chivalric romances translated into fiction the principle of defending the Catholic faith in the Mediterranean by placing there the fight against the religious otherness. Between those two Manichaean worlds, the Greek identity became a soft literary presence that symbolised the political expectation of triumph in that crusade.

In Catalan (and Spanish) literature of the 14th to 17th centuries, the Byzantine Empire was referred to as the “Greek Empire”. This statement spreads out the period –and also the language of the books– asked to me by Dr. Gregory Papanikos. If we want to be precise, the expression “Greek Empire” is only mentioned this way in *Tirant lo Blanc*. However, it is a story that inspired Miguel de Cervantes in his immortal classic *Don Quijote* (1605-1615) and that has been considered as a “realistic” and “total novel” by contemporaneous writers (such as

---

61. Cristóbal de Villalón, *Viaje de Turquía* (Geneva-Barcelona: Ferni, 1973), edited by Federico C. Sainz de Robles. For the Mediterranean scenery of wars between the Spanish and the Ottoman empires: Andrew C. Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier: A History of the Sixteenth-Century Ibero-African Frontier* (Chicago-London: Chicago University Press, 1978).

62. Villalón, *Viaje de Turquía*, 297-313. See also: Bunes Ibarra, “La conquista turca de Bizancio”.

63. Villalón, *Viaje de Turquía*, 298.

the Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa, Nobel Prize in Literature 2010)<sup>64</sup> and critics. So, its impact allows us to remark the importance of the fictional world evoked by Joanot Martorell. And we can find other footprints of the Byzantine Empire in the Spanish chivalric romances — and their sequels — along the 16th century.

Moreover, the compared analysis of the fictional literature with administrative documents and other literary genres, such as chronicles and historical or travel books, gives us the possibility of recognizing a complex Greek identity from an Iberian point of view. The Greeks are a cultural community that fill with their identity the political system of the Byzantine Empire in the Late Middle Ages. Catalan writers have this perception in their chronicles (Muntaner) after the military adventure of the Catalan Company. Some decades later, the Spanish men of letters in the Renaissance reproduce these historical facts connecting them with the Spanish monarchy of the Habsburgs. Finally, the novelists will use this Greek cultural tradition associated to Byzantium to create political structures that make sense in the imagined worlds of their chivalric romances.

### Acknowledgement and Funding

This essay has been possible thanks to a Formación de Profesorado Universitario Grant (FPU22/01252), by the Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades. It is included in the Research Project “Ganar y perder en las sociedades de los territorios hispánicos del Mediterráneo occidental durante la Edad Moderna” (WINLOSE, PID2022-142050NB-C21), funded by the same Ministerio and the Agencia Estatal de Investigación (Gobierno de España).

### Bibliography

- Abulafia, D. *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.
- Álvarez-Recio, L. (ed.). *Iberian Chivalric Romance: Translation and Cultural Transmission in Early Modern England*. Toronto–London–Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2021.
- Anonymous. *Amadís de Gaula*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 2015; compiled by Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo (1508), edited by Juan Bautista Avalle-Arce.
- Angold, M. “The Byzantine Political Process at Crisis Point.” In *The Byzantine World*, edited by Paul Stephenson, 5–21. London and New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Assmann, J. *Cultural Memory and Ancient Civilization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Aurell, J. *La historiografía medieval: Entre la historia y la literatura*. Valencia: PUV, 2016.
- Beaton, R. *Greece: Biography of a Modern Nation*. London: Allen Lane Publishers, 2019.

---

64. Mario Vargas Llosa, *Carta de batalla por Tirant lo Blanch* (Madrid: Debolsillo, 2015).

- Belenguer, E., and F. V. Garín (eds.). *La Corona d'Aragó. Segles XII–XVIII*. Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 2006.
- Bunes Ibarra, M. Á. "La conquista turca de Bizancio según los cronistas europeos de los siglos XVI y XVII." *Erytheia* 13 (1992): 89–102.
- Cacho Blecua, J. M. *Amadís: heroísmo mítico cortesano*. Madrid: CUPSA, 1979.
- Cátedra, P. M. *Le songe chevaleresque. De la chevalerie de papier au rêve réel de Don Quichotte*. Paris: Collège de France, 2005.
- Cavallaro, D. *The Chivalric Romance and the Essence of Fiction*. Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2016.
- Christodoulou, D. "Byzantium in Nineteenth-Century Greek Historiography." In *The Byzantine World*, edited by Paul Stephenson, 445–461. London–New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Cingolani, S. M. *Pere el Gran. Vida, actes i paraula*. Barcelona: Base, 2010.
- Coulon, D. "The Commercial Influence of the Crown of Aragon in the Eastern Mediterranean (Thirteenth–Fifteenth Centuries)." In *The Crown of Aragon: A Singular Mediterranean Empire*, edited by Flocel Sabaté, 279–308. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2017.
- Fernández de Oviedo, G. *Claribalte*. Edited by Alberto del Río Nogueras. Alcalá de Henares: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 2001.
- Fleckenstein, J. *Rittertum und ritterliche Welt*. Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 2002; Spanish translation: *La caballería y el mundo caballeresco*. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2006.
- Floristán Imízcoz, J. M. *Fuentes para la política oriental de los Austrias*. León: Universidad de León, 1988.
- Floristán Imízcoz, J. M. "La Corona de Aragón y el Imperio Bizantino de los Paleólogos." In *Mallorca y Bizancio*, 103–156. Palma de Mallorca: Aula General Weyler, 2005.
- Floristán Imízcoz, J. M. "Bizancio y la herencia Paleóloga en la política exterior de los reinos peninsulares (1400–1502)." In *Perfiles de Grecia y Roma. Actas del XII Congreso Español de Estudios Clásicos*, vol. III, 13–52. Valencia: Sociedad Española de Estudios Clásicos, 2009.
- Floristán Imízcoz, J. M. "«Bizancio después de Bizancio»: La herencia imperial de Constantinopla y la política exterior de los Austrias españoles (1517–1621)." In *Baetica Renascens*, vol. II, 863–875. Cádiz–Málaga: Federación Andaluza de Estudios Clásicos – Instituto de Estudios Humanísticos, 2014.
- Gallego García, L. *Belianís de Grecia (Tercera y Cuarta Parte): Edición y estudio*. PhD Dissertation, Universitat de València, 2013.
- Gayangos, P. *Libros de caballerías, con un discurso preliminar y un catálogo razonado*. Madrid: Rivadeneyra, 1874.
- Hall, S., and P. Du Gay (eds.). *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: SAGE Publications, 1996.
- Herrin, J. *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Hess, A. C. *The Forgotten Frontier: A History of the Sixteenth-Century Ibero-African Frontier*. Chicago–London: Chicago University Press, 1978.
- Huizinga, J. *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*. Various reprints, 1919; Spanish translation: *El otoño de la Edad Media*. Madrid: Alianza, 1978.
- Imber, C. *The Ottoman Empire 1300–1650: The Structure of Power*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002.
- Kantorowicz, E. H. *The King's Two Bodies: A Study of Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Keen, M. *Chivalry*. New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 1983.

- Lucía Megías, J. M., and E. J. Sales Dasí. *Libros de caballerías castellanos (siglos XVI–XVII)*. Madrid: Laberinto, 2008.
- Maier, F. G. *Byzanz*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1973; Spanish translation: *Bizancio*. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1974.
- Martorell, J. *Tirant lo Blanch. Text original (València, 1490)*. Edited by Albert Hauf. Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch Editions, 2008.
- Martorell, J. *Tirant lo Blanc*. Edited by Martín de Riquer. Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2016 [1979].
- Martorell, J. *The White Knight: Tirant lo Blanc*. Edited and translated by Robert S. Rudder. RSR, 1995.
- Moncada, F. *Expedición de catalanes y aragoneses contra turcos y griegos*. Madrid: Antonio de Sancha, 1777 (written in 1623).
- Muntaner, R. *Chronicle*. Translated by Anne Goodenough. London: Hakluyt Society, 1921; Ontario: Publications Catalan Series, 2000. Original Catalan text written c. 1330.
- Muntaner, R. *L'expedició dels catalans a Orient (Extret de la "Crònica")*. Barcelona: Barcino, 1951.
- Muntaner, R. *The Catalan Expedition to the East: from the Chronicle of Ramon Muntaner*. Translated by Robert D. Hughes. Barcelona–Woodbridge: Barcino–Tamesis, 2006.
- Muntaner, R. *Les quatre grans cròniques. III. Crònica de Ramon Muntaner*. Edited by Ferran Soldevila, Jordi Bruguera, and Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol. Barcelona: IEC, 2011.
- Neville, L. *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950–1100*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Núñez Esteban, G. *La Crónica de Morea: versión castellana del texto medieval griego y estudio preliminar*. PhD Dissertation, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2015.
- Oakley, F. *The Watershed of Modern Politics: Law, Virtue, Kingship and Consent (1300–1650)*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015.
- Ortí-Mondéjar, A. "Greece and the Idea of Empire through Fictional Literature. From Medieval Catalonia to Early Modern Spain." *Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 11 (3, June 2025): 211–226.
- Ortí-Mondéjar, A. "La cultura política de la Corona d'Aragó al Tirant lo Blanc. L'ofici de príncep i la institució del consell a través de la literatura de ficció." *eHumanista/IVITRA* 27 (2025): 347–360.
- Ortí-Mondéjar, A. "La encrucijada sucesoria de Carlos V desde la literatura. Tiranía, resistencia, sucesión y Cortes en un libro de caballerías." *Tiempos Modernos* 15 (50, June 2025): 40–63.
- Pagden, A. *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500–c.1800*. New Haven–New York: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Papanikos, G. T. "The national identity of ancient and modern Greeks." *Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 10 (1) (2024): 63–80.
- Ricoeur, P. *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. Edited by George Taylor. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Riquer, M. *Tirant lo Blanch, novela de historia y de ficción*. Barcelona: Acantilado, 2013.
- Rose, N. "Identity, Genealogy, History." In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, 128–150. London: SAGE Publications, 1996.
- Rubió i Lluch, A. (ed.). *Diplomatari de l'Orient català (1301–1409)*. Barcelona: IEC, 2001.
- Ruiz-Doménech, J. E. *La novela y el espíritu de la caballería*. Madrid: Taurus, 2023.
- Runciman, S. *The Sicilian Vespers: A History of the Mediterranean World in the Later Thirteenth Century*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1958.
- Runciman, S. *The Fall of Constantinople 1453*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1965.
- Sabaté, F. (ed.). *The Crown of Aragon: A Singular Mediterranean Empire*. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2017.

- Silva, F. *Florisel de Niquea. Parte III*. Edited by Javier Martín Lalanda. Alcalá de Henares: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 1999.
- Silva, F. *Lisuarte de Grecia*. Edited by Emilio J. Sales Dasí. Alcalá de Henares: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 2002.
- Silva, F. *Amadís de Grecia*. Edited by Ana Bueno and Carmen Laspuertas. Alcalá de Henares: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 2004.
- Sobrequés Vidal, S. "Sobre el ideal de cruzada en Alfonso V de Aragón." *Hispania* 12 (1952): 232–252.
- Vargas Llosa, M. *Carta de batalla por Tirant lo Blanch*. Madrid: Debolsillo, 2015.
- Various Authors. *Memory before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe*. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2013.
- Villalón, C. (?) *Viaje de Turquía*. Edited by Federico C. Sainz de Robles. Geneva–Barcelona: Ferni, 1973.