

## **Greece and the Idea of Empire through Fictional Literature. From Medieval Catalonia to Early Modern Spain<sup>1</sup>**

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*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 Xalabín) 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 27<sup>th</sup> 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*)<sup>2</sup>.

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,

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

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 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<sup>3</sup>.

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)<sup>4</sup>. 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<sup>5</sup>.

The point of this essay is far from a philological controversy. 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.

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<sup>3</sup>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.

<sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>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<sup>6</sup>. 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<sup>7</sup>. One of them is political culture, a concept that has helped historians to understand better the motivations and aspirations that moved historical subjects<sup>8</sup>. 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 theoretical framework that legitimated the continuity of monarchical successions, based on the metaphor of "the King's Two Bodies"<sup>9</sup>: 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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<sup>6</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), edited by George Taylor.

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

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

<sup>9</sup>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)<sup>10</sup>.

The empires that we analyse in our two romances are more concrete<sup>11</sup>, 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<sup>12</sup> —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<sup>13</sup>. Finally, we observe that empire is a form of expressing power

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<sup>10</sup>Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 24-41 and 451-495.

<sup>11</sup>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.

<sup>12</sup>John Watts, *The Making of Politics. Europe, 1300-1500* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-42.

<sup>13</sup>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. Catedra, *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 -

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”<sup>14</sup>. 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<sup>15</sup>. 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<sup>16</sup>.

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*

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London - Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2021); José Enrique Ruiz-Doménec, *La novela y el espíritu de la caballería* (Madrid: Taurus, 2023).

<sup>14</sup>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).

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

<sup>16</sup>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).

*est in regno suo*<sup>17</sup>. 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<sup>18</sup>. 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<sup>19</sup>. 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 Empire (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 Christianity or attempt to create an alliance of the Christian princes to recover the capital city of the deceased Byzantine Empire<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup>. But even the style of diplomatic correspondence and chivalric romance presents its similarities. For instance, Alphonse V dispatched a defiance

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

<sup>18</sup>"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).

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

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

<sup>21</sup>Sobrequés Vidal, "Sobre el ideal de cruzada", 234.

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” —fictitious prince allied to the Ottoman emperor in the novel— in the chapter CLII<sup>22</sup>.

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 après 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. Après 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 gents d'estranyes terres se vengueren*

<sup>22</sup>*Tirant*, ed. Riquer, 2016, CLII, 384.

*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.*<sup>23</sup>

[—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 Christianity 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 Christianity 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.]<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>. 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<sup>26</sup> have considered that part of the travels of the main character, Curial, represents the transition of medieval forms of knowledge to Renaissance ones. According to *Curial*, Athens has a historical status that comes

<sup>23</sup>*Tirant*, ed. Riquer, 2016, CXXVI, 284.

<sup>24</sup>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.

<sup>25</sup>Lorenzo Valla, *La falsa Donazione di Costantino* (Florence: Ponte Alle Grazie, 1993), edited by Gabriele Pepe.

<sup>26</sup>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.).

from the inspiration given to the laws of Rome<sup>27</sup>. 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<sup>28</sup>. 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*<sup>29</sup>. 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 Trastámara (1412-1516)<sup>30</sup>. After the peace of Caltabellotta (1302), the island of Sicily remained under the influence of a secondary branch of the kings of Aragon<sup>31</sup>. The mercenaries of the wars between Peter III and the Anjou conformed the Great Catalan Company and were hired by Andronikos II

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<sup>27</sup>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).

<sup>28</sup>Quotes in: *Curial*, ed. Aramon, 2018, III, 374 and 377.

<sup>29</sup>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 circolazione degli uomini, delle idee, delle merci. Gli influssi sulla società e sul costume*, XVI Congresso Internazionale di Storia della Corona d’Aragona (Napoli-Caserta-Ischia, 18-28 settembre 1997), (Naples: Paparo Edizioni, 1997), 1419-1430.

<sup>30</sup>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.

<sup>31</sup>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).

Palaiologos (1282-1328) to fight against the Turks in Anatolia (1303-1305)<sup>32</sup>. 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<sup>33</sup>. 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<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup>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).

<sup>33</sup>Rubió, *Diplomatari*, 13, 15 and 17.

<sup>34</sup>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<sup>35</sup>. 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 Rhodes and as a nation “who have neither commiseration nor love for anyone”<sup>36</sup>.

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)<sup>37</sup>. 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 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<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup>. 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.

<sup>35</sup>*Tirant*, ed. Riquer, 2016, CXVI-CXVII, 249-252.

<sup>36</sup>*Tirant*, ed. Riquer, 2016, CVIIa, 216.

<sup>37</sup>Maier, *Bizancio*, 340-342; Rubió, *Diplomatari*, XV, 16-19 (anonymous account of the episodes before September 1305).

<sup>38</sup>Muntaner, *Chronicle*, 410.

<sup>39</sup>*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 [...]”<sup>40</sup>. 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<sup>41</sup>. It can be checked in the academic historiography about cultural borders and political frontiers in the Mediterranean Sea<sup>42</sup>. 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*<sup>43</sup>.

*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”<sup>44</sup>. 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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<sup>40</sup>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).

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

<sup>42</sup>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).

<sup>43</sup>Anonymous, *Historia de Jacob Xalabin* (Santa Barbara: University of California, 2014), edited and translated by Vicent J. Escartí and Joan V. Fuertes.

<sup>44</sup>*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<sup>45</sup>: “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”<sup>46</sup>. 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”<sup>47</sup>.

### 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 information 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 Constantinople 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

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<sup>45</sup>Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire 1300-1650. The Structure of Power* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 98.

<sup>46</sup>Translation of the quote by the author of the paper. *Jacob Xalabin*, 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.”

<sup>47</sup>*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<sup>48</sup>.

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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<sup>48</sup>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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