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### THE PRESENCE OF THE ARAGONESE IN ROMANIA BASED ON 14TH-CENTURY ARAGONESE DOCUMENTS

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**THE PRESENCE OF THE ARAGONESE IN ROMANIA  
BASED ON 14TH-CENTURY  
ARAGONESE DOCUMENTS\***

This paper<sup>1</sup> forms part of a University of Athens research program focused on the settlement of the Aragonese and Catalans in the Latin dominions of the Eastern Mediterranean during the crusade period (12th-15th centuries) based on published and unpublished archival material. The program aims to collect documents relating to Aragonese policy and activities in the Eastern Mediterranean -Cyprus and Romania, in particular- in an effort to provide another view of the medieval civilization of the Mediterranean. Unpublished archival material from the *Archivo de la Corona d'Aragon* in Barcelona seemingly sheds light on aspects of the crusading ideology and the ambitious claims of the Aragonese kings -especially James II (1291-1327), Alfonso III (1327-1336) and Peter III (1336-1387)- in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is well known that the kings of Aragon turned to the East after the Sicilian Vespers of 1282 and the acquisition of Sicily, and made numerous efforts to obtain titles and territories through treaties or marriage agreements. They also signed commercial treaties and were recognized by their contemporaries as an important naval power, although they proved incapable both of disrupting the economic dominance of the Venetians and the Genoese, and of preventing Turkish expansion. It was the Ottoman threat and expansion into the area during the 14th and the 15th centuries that rallied the Christian powers, even the Byzantine emperors, who showed themselves willing to adopt the Catholic faith in order to obtain support from the West.

The written sources indicate that the Eastern Mediterranean was a common and profitable destination for Westerners who, although not numerous

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enough to bring about demographic change, nonetheless influenced the mentality and culture of the local populations which influenced them in turn. It is clear from the contemporary sources (Angevin, Venetian and Aragonese archives, as well as Venetian notarial documents) that acculturation and interaction with the Greeks in Romania contributed to a process of Hellenization and influenced group behaviours. Catalan cruelty was noted in Byzantine documents and described in the most horrific detail, while the memory of the Catalan presence was kept alive and passed on down the centuries in popular Greek tradition (songs and literature).

It is well known that Aragon and Catalonia shared a common historical course after the 12th century. This culminated with the acquisition of Majorca, the Balearics, Valencia and Provence during the reign of James I the Conqueror (d.1276), when the resultant kingdom was named Aragon-Catalonia. James I's next objective was to approach the Pope and prepare a crusade to the East in 1267-1269, which led to the crusade of St. Louis and paved the way both for Angevin intervention and Aragonese claims in the Eastern Mediterranean. James' successor, Peter (d.1285), conspired against the Angevins of Sicily with Michael VIII Paleologus, and succeeded in bringing Angevin oriental policy to a halt. The first king of Sicily was also king of Aragon, though the kingdoms remained separate after his death. In 1291, James II was forced to resign Sicily to Frederick, but went on to take over Sardinia in 1323. A wealth of unpublished documents from Barcelona cover the reign of James II up to 1327, offering numerous and important insights into his foreign policy. After Catalan expansion in the Western Mediterranean, the Aragonese used commercial treaties and marriage arrangements to forge a new political and economic power in the East that was to threaten the existing status quo for a time. Their expansion began in the aftermath of preparations for the crusade of 1269, and the onset of diplomatic relations between James I and Michael Paleologus. After the death of St. Louis, a 10-year commercial treaty was signed between the Aragonese and the Tunisian king in 1271, shoring up their good relations. It was renewed under Peter; after the Sicilian Vespers, they claimed the annual rent of 2833 ounces of gold the Tunisian king owed the Angevins. Barcelona had developed into a major economic centre, and Aragonese merchants and commercial methods had spread throughout the East. Generally speaking, the Aragonese were primarily interested in Syria, Cyprus and North Africa. Catalan ships circulated in the area, along with merchants and pirates, causing problems. Numerous complaints were lodged against them and demands for compensation made by Venice or the Lusignan dynasty of Cyprus. Marriage arrangements, financial contributions and diplomatic missions between

Cyprus and Aragon to arrange the transportation of people and products as well as protection from pirates provided the framework for the new Aragonese political and economic power, claiming the title "Rex Jerusalem", which Charles II of Anjou tried to sell to Alfonso of Aragon in 1290.

To form a global view of the Aragonese presence in Romania, we must distinguish the Almugavares, the Catalan mercenaries who settled in the duchy of Athens, from the Catalans who settled in Latin dominions of their own free will as merchants, landowners or businessmen, and from the pirates at large in the Aegean and the Ionian seas. The Almugavares, unemployed after the treaty of Caltabelotta (1302), found themselves in the service of Andronicus II; having broken with him, they started incursions, robberies and piratical raids into Central Greece. In 1311, they defeated the Burgundian duke of Athens at the battle of Orchomenos, after which they settled in the duchy of Athens, remaining there until 1388. In an effort to legitimize their new conquests, they recognized the Aragonese king of Sicily as their leader. The 14th century was a turning point for Western Europe, which was beset by socio-economic crises, but also for Romania, where Frankish domination seemed precarious. There, Frankish society evolved, with many of the crusader families disappearing and being replaced by newcomers, mostly Italians. The decline of the Frankish states explains how a handful of leaderless mercenaries succeeded in keeping the duchy for almost a century. The Catalans were primarily interested in expanding into Central Greece, where they succeeded in increasing their territories in 1318. Plans to exchange Sicily for Morea or Albania may have come to nothing, as Aragonese documents prove, but they did serve to reinforce their alliances with Venice and the Turks. The Pope excommunicated them (*societatem nefandam*) on several occasions, and it was only in the second half of the 14th century that we note a change in western mentality, which now held that the Christian powers, including the Byzantines, should unite against the common enemy: the Turk. It is important to note that Greeks are called upon to cooperate with the West.

A wealth of archival documents from the reigns of James II, Alfonso III and Peter III provide valuable information about Aragonese policy, and the Aragonese kings' great interest in Romania, and especially in the duchy of Athens, which they considered their legal dominion. The Aragonese kings seem to have shown a great interest in the situation in Romania and made diplomatic approaches to the Byzantine emperor as well as to the pope, the Hospitallers of Rhodes, and the Angevins. Aragonese documents report the activities of the Catalans as well as Aragonese interventions in several spheres. The Catalans had a reputation as pirates in the Aegean and the

Ionian seas, and the Aragonese kings asked to be kept informed of piratical acts committed against or by their subjects. Thus it was that James II was informed about incursions into Byzantium<sup>2</sup>, and frequently intervened on behalf of his subjects to request damages for losses suffered at the hands of Venetian or Genoese pirates. In 1305, when some Genoese attacked an Aragonese boat in Romania, he claimed compensation from Genoa for the robberies suffered by Berengarius, a Catalan officer; Genoa, considering itself a loyal friend, begged forgiveness for any damage done<sup>3</sup>. The inhabitants of the island of Cerigo were accused of attacking a merchant boat from Barcelona in 1329 and compensation was claimed<sup>4</sup>.

Peter III the Ceremonious was also kept informed of hostilities committed against or by his subjects<sup>5</sup>. In 1336, he was informed about an act of piracy committed against a Venetian ship carrying alum<sup>6</sup>, and in 1342 he took a Barcelonan ship under his protection that sailed ad partes *Constantinopoli et Romanie*<sup>7</sup>. In 1360, he claimed compensation from Venice for damages committed to Mallorcan merchants in the Aegean and in the Ionian seas near Jacinth<sup>8</sup>, and, in 1380, for robberies committed near Modon against a Barcelonan ship en route for the island of Sapientia<sup>9</sup>. Peter also intervened on behalf of several Catalan merchants who suffered losses in Byzantine territories during 1386<sup>10</sup>.

Another important aspect of Aragonese policy were their interventions with regard to their subjects in Romania. Thus, king James' help in reconquering Romania was requested in 1304 by Roger de Lluria<sup>11</sup>, while in the following year, Berengarius was to inform the king of Roger's assassination. The Infante Ferrand of Majorca swore an oath of fidelity and homage to Frederick III of Sicily in 1307, and agreed to the campaign in which the Catalan Marshal Bernardo di Rochaforte and their allies the Turks would

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2. A. RUBIO I LLUCH, *Diplomatari del'Orient Català (1301-1400)*, Barcelona 1947, p. 35 (XXXI) (hereafter: LLUCH): *quod Cathalani existentes in imperio Romanie totum currunt imperium et devastant, et quod castrum de Callipoli munierunt.*

3. LLUCH, p. 8 (VIII), 20 (XVII), 23 (XIX), 47 (XXXVII).

4. LLUCH, p. 173 (CXLIII), 178 (CXLVII).

5. LLUCH, p. 298 (CCXXII).

6. LLUCH, p. 215 (CLXVI).

7. LLUCH, p. 229 (CLXXVIII).

8. LLUCH, p. 321 (CCXLIII), 329 (CCXLVIII), 331 (CCXLIX).

9. LLUCH, p. 469 (CCCLXXXVIII).

10. LLUCH, p. 634 (DXCVIII).

11. LLUCH, p. 11 (XI), 14 (XIII).

meet Ferrand on Euboea in 1307<sup>12</sup>. James ordered the company of Almagavares not to damage any of the monasteries on Mount Athos<sup>13</sup>.

The famous agreement Robert of Naples made with Frederick III of Sicily in 1311 to exchange Morea for Sicily was never realized, and James was informed about it in 1312<sup>14</sup>. In 1314, Pope Clemens V informed James that the Catalans of Athens faced excommunication if they failed to abandon the duchy; in an attempt at compromise, the Aragonese king ordered the company to leave Athens<sup>15</sup>. The marriage of the Infante Ferrand to Isabelle de Sabran, the daughter of Marguerita Villehardouin, was celebrated in the same year, and James congratulated him on the event<sup>16</sup>. In 1315, Ferrand informed James that he had conquered Clarenza and would be taking over the entire principality. The following year, he prevailed on the Count of Cephalonia, John Orsini, who also laid claim to the principality through his father Richard, who was married to Marguerita Villehardouin, but died shortly afterwards<sup>17</sup>. In 1318, James proposed a different exchange to Frederick and Robert of Naples: Sicily for Albania and Achaea. He repeated his proposal in 1326<sup>18</sup>. In 1325, James was asked to assist in the provision of compensation for damage wreaked by the Catalans on Euboea<sup>19</sup>. James also intervened in several commercial matters. His success in guaranteeing that Catalan merchants would no longer have to pay 3% to the Byzantine Empire and in extracting an agreement from Andronicus II in 1320 allowing them to pay 2% in a Greek document<sup>20</sup> are proof of the Aragonese king's diplomatic abilities.

Several documents refer to Alfonso intervening in Romania in an effort to obtain information on the personal possessions of Catalans in the duchy<sup>21</sup> or on the situation of the Pisans in Romania<sup>22</sup>. Pope John XXII excommunicated the *detentores* of the duchy for a second time in 1333<sup>23</sup>. In 1334, the inheritance

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12. LLUCH, p. 38 (XXXII), 43 (XXXV); FR. THIRIET, *Régétes des délibérations du sénat de Venise concernant la Romanie, I* (1160-1363), Paris 1958, p. 150 (the sister of Gautier de Brienne had married Roccaforte in 1308 and menaced Euboea).

13. LLUCH, p. 50 (XL).

14. LLUCH, p. 58 (XLVII), 69 (LIV).

15. LLUCH, p. 82 (LXVI), 84 (LXVII, LXVIII), 90 (LXXII).

16. LLUCH, p. 85 (LXIX), 91 (LXXIV).

17. LLUCH, p. 97 (LXXVII), 99 (LXXX), 105 (LXXXV).

18. LLUCH, p. 119 (IC), 165 (CXXXIV).

19. LLUCH, p. 154 (CXXV).

20. LLUCH, p. 138 (CXIV), 140 (CXV).

21. LLUCH, p. 200 (CLIV).

22. LLUCH, p. 154 (CXXIV).

23. LLUCH, p. 206 (CLVIII).

of the duchies of Athens and Neopatras was granted to Guillelmo, the son of Frederick II of Sicily, though he was to die in 1338 without visiting the area. He was succeeded by his brother, John of Aragon Randazzo, who died in 1348<sup>24</sup>. Peter III granted permission to Duke Frederick to equip ships in Barcelona for the defence of the duchies<sup>25</sup>. Documents dating from 1352 indicate that rivalry between the Aragonese and Genoese grew in intensity during the mid 14th century<sup>26</sup>. In 1351, Peter congratulated the duke on the marriage of his daughter to the son of the Infante Ramon Berenguer<sup>27</sup>. In another document, Peter reminded his subjects in the duchies, and all the Catalans and the Aragonese *in partibus Romanie*, of their close ties to the crown of Aragon<sup>28</sup>, and intervened in several matters on their behalf, securing the immediate release of a couple from Thebes captured by the Venetians on the grounds that they were *antea francos et liberos* and free to go anywhere they wanted<sup>29</sup>. Peter was kept informed of all matters touching upon the church, the appointment of officers, and the internal situation in -and succession of- the duchies<sup>30</sup>. In 1356, he inveighed upon the Pope to withdraw the excommunication of the Catalans in the duchies, which Innocent VI did in 1368<sup>31</sup>. In 1357, Sicily and the duchies were ceded to Peter III because Frederick died without heirs<sup>32</sup>, and in the years that followed, Peter's interventions were more frequent due to his suzerainty. In 1370, Peter's wife ceded possession of the duchies to her brother Frederick III of Sicily<sup>33</sup>. A considerable number of documents dated 1379 provide information about the vicars of the duchies. Peter also informed the Great Magister of the Hospitallers of Rhodes, John Fernandez Heredia, to prevent anybody from oppressing his subjects therein<sup>34</sup>. He also offered Catalan citizenship to Greeks as a reward for their services and fidelity to the house of Aragon<sup>35</sup>, and in 1382 exempted Greeks and Albanians who wanted to settle in the duchies

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24. LLUCH, p. 209 (CLIX).

25. LLUCH, p. 250 (CXCIII).

26. LLUCH, p. 259 (CCII), 261 (CCIV), 263 (CCV) the battle of Constantinople.

27. LLUCH, p. 255 (CXCVII).

28. LLUCH, p. 257 (CXCIX).

29. LLUCH, p. 259 (CCI).

30. LLUCH, p. 298 (CCXXIII), 299 (CCXXIV), 300 (CCXXV), 301 (CCXXVI).

31. LLUCH, p. 304 (CCXXX), 309 (CCXXXV).

32. LLUCH, p. 307 (CCXXXIV).

33. LLUCH, p. 411 (CCCXXIII).

34. LLUCH, p. 487 (CCCXCVIII).

35. LLUCH, p. 540 (CDLXXIX).

from taxes<sup>36</sup>. In addition, he advised his subjects, Franks and Greeks, to obey the vicar of Athens, and offered them his protection<sup>37</sup>. Several documents address Navarrese claims<sup>38</sup> and various affairs of the subjects of the duchies, including the financing of ships for the duchy in 1383<sup>39</sup>. He also intervened in matters concerning the succession of the duchies in 1386<sup>40</sup>.

Moreover, the privileges the Pisans had obtained in the East were ceded to Florence in 1407 when that city conquered Pisa, thus ensuring itself access to the sea. Florence had emerged as a major economic power active in the Eastern Mediterranean and Romania -one recalls the political role of the Acciaiuoli in the principality of Achaea and in the duchy of Athens. A privilege drafted in Greek in 1387 by Nerio on behalf of a certain Peter of Athens indicates the importance of the Greek language under Florentine rule<sup>41</sup>.

Venetian notarial acts contain valuable information on the Catalans who settled in Venetian territories such as Crete of their own free will as "habitatores", and played an important social and economic role in those communities. Venetian documents show that Catalan landowners bought and sold land (*serventarie*)<sup>42</sup>, sold animals (oxen and horses)<sup>43</sup>, sold grain in advance, a common practice at the time<sup>44</sup>, entrusted their children to artisans to learn their craft<sup>45</sup> and signed work contracts<sup>46</sup>. Their presence as witnesses to several acts<sup>47</sup>, proxies for collecting money from debtors<sup>48</sup> and guarantors to product sales<sup>49</sup> indicate their central role in everyday life. As Venetian notarial

36. LLUCH, p. 587 (DXXXVI).

37. LLUCH, p. 455 (CCCLXXIV), 459 (CCCLXXVIII).

38. LLUCH, p. 503 (CDXXV), 745 (DCCXV).

39. LLUCH, p. 743 (DCCXII, DCCXIII), p. 744 (DCCXIV), 746 (DCCXVII).

40. LLUCH, p. 628 (DXCV, DXCVI), 631 (DXCVII).

41. LLUCH, p. 636 (DC).

42. *Catastici Feudorum Crete, Catastici Sexterii Dorsoduri, 1227-1418*, CH. GASPARIS (ed.), t. II, Athens 2004, p. 416 (777), 508 (966), 509 (967).

43. *Franciscus de Cruce, Notaio in Candia (1338-1339)*, CH. GASPARIS (ed.), Venezia 1999 (hereafter: *Franciscus de Cruce*), p. 29 (5), 30 (6, 7, 8), 311 (450, 451), 319 (463), 321 (467), 323 (470): a certain Franguli Catellano sold oxes of value 18, 19, 20 and 22 hyperpera to be paid in one year; p. 35 (16): a horse of 20 hyperpera value.

44. *Franciscus de Cruce*, p. 134 (166).

45. *Franciscus de Cruce*, p. 56 (47).

46. *Franciscus de Cruce*, p. 43 (28).

47. *Franciscus de Cruce*, p. 93 (100).

48. *Franciscus de Cruce*, p. 248 (348).

49. *Franciscus de Cruce*, p. 166 (216).



documents also note, the Catalans were also active in the lucrative slave market<sup>50</sup>, were members of commercial companies (*collegantie*), and lent money<sup>51</sup>.

Information of this sort from various sources indicates the growing importance of the Aragonese in the Eastern Mediterranean; a significance that was to be further enhanced during the reign of Alfonso V the Magnanimous (1416-1458). Attesting to the important part played by Aragon as a naval and economic power in the Eastern Mediterranean, it also underscores the need for further and more profound research.

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50. *Pietro Pizolo, Notaio in Candia (1300, 1304-1305)*, S. CARBONE (ed.), Venezia 1978, p. 114 (936), 194 (1119), 197 (1125).

51. *Pietro Pizolo, op. cit.*, p. 201 (1140), 182 (393).

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

### Η ΠΑΡΟΥΣΙΑ ΤΩΝ ΑΡΑΓΩΝΙΩΝ ΣΤΗ ΡΩΜΑΝΙΑ ΤΟΝ 14ο ΑΙΩΝΑ ΒΑΣΕΙ ΑΡΑΓΩΝΙΚΩΝ ΕΓΓΡΑΦΩΝ

Η παρούσα ανακοίνωση αποτελεί τμήμα ευρύτερης μελέτης για τις δυτικές εγκαταστάσεις στις λατινικές κυριαρχίες της Ρωμανίας την περίοδο των σταυροφοριών, βάσει ανέκδοτου, κυρίως από το Αραγωνικό Αρχείο της Βαρκελώνης, αλλά και δημοσιευμένου αρχειακού υλικού. Όπως προκύπτει οι Αραγώνιοι και οι Καταλανοί ανέπτυξαν φιλόδοξη εξωτερική πολιτική με συνθήκες και επιγαμίες στην ανατολική Μεσόγειο, προκειμένου να κατοχυρώσουν τη θέση τους στην περιοχή ως πολιτική και οικονομική δύναμη. Ιδιαίτερα ανέπτυξαν έντονη δραστηριότητα μετά την κατάκτηση του βουργουνδικού δουκάτου των Αθηνών τον 14ο αιώνα, όπου αξιοσημείωτες ήταν οι επεμβάσεις των Αραγωνίων βασιλέων σε ό,τι αφορούσε τους υπηκόους τους στο δουκάτο, όπως προστασία, διοίκηση ή πολιτική προς τις άλλες δυνάμεις (Ανδεγαυούς, Βενετούς, Γενουάτες). Επίσης, πληροφορίες παρέχονται για Καταλανούς εγκατεστημένους σε άλλες περιοχές, κυρίως βενετικές, ως έμποροι ή επαγγελματίες και για τη συμμετοχή τους στην κοινωνικοοικονομική ζωή των τοπικών κοινωνιών.

ΜΑΡΙΑ ΝΤΟΥΡΟΥ-ΗΛΙΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ