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Francesco Benozzo e Andrea Fassò

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INDICE

Editoriale

ANDREA FASSÒ		
<i>Cavalleria e guerra totale</i>	pag.	7
FRANCO CARDINI		
<i>Ricordo di Jean Flori</i>		9

Articoli

FRANCESCO BENOZZO		
<i>La «Vita Sancti Faronis», le origini delle chansons de geste e le ballate delle Isole Faroe</i>		13
MARTA CAMELLINI		
<i>L'ambasceria di Hasting nel «De moribus» di Dudone e la «Chanson de Roland»</i>		25
NAHID NOROZI		
<i>Episodi paralleli nel «Tristano» e nel «Vis e Rāmin» di Gorgāni (XI sec.)....</i>		35
ENRICO CARNEVALE SCHIANCA		
<i>Di alcuni poco noti arabismi nel lessico di cucina tardo-medievale</i>		65
EPHRAIM NISSAN		
<i>About a Wrong Etymology of Latin merŭla 'blackbird', with a Plausible Alternative Etymological Hypothesis, and Other Topics in the Naming of Thrushes</i>		85
BRUNO BASILE		
<i>Emilio Salgari al lavoro. I bucanieri del «Corsaro Nero»</i>		115
DAN OCTAVIAN CEPRAGA		
<i>Scrivere a voce alta: le lettere versificate dei soldati contadini romeni</i>		131
STEFANO RAPISARDA		
<i>«Italien ist vor uns versunken», Hugo Schuchardt, luglio 1915</i>		155
STEFANO BANNÒ		
<i>«Si sonus cadit, tota scientia vadit»: Friedrich Schŭrr alle prese con il vocalismo nel dialetto di Nimis</i>		177

Note

MARIO ALINEI - FRANCESCO BENOZZO <i>Per un ridimensionamento dell'elemento prelatino nelle lingue romanze: l'etimologia di it. mucchio e it. calanco.....</i>	209
MAHMOUD SALEM ELSHEIKH <i>Di bisso e di bazza</i>	217
MAHMOUD SALEM ELSHEIKH <i>Naso camuso, naso a bufala. Un nodo etimologico</i>	225
ANDREA FASSÒ <i>Cavalleria borghese. Il duello fra Dino Grandi e Giuseppe Osti (1922)</i>	237

Review article

XAVERIO BALLESTER <i>Scarcely Classic, Barely Tradition, Dubiously Medieval and Catalan by Force</i>	243
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Review-article

Scarcely Classic, Barely Tradition, Dubiously Medieval and Catalan by Force

XAVERIO BALLESTER

Lluís Cabré, Alejandro Coroleu, Montserrat Ferrer, Albert Lloret & Josep Pujol, *The Classical Tradition in Medieval Catalan, 1300-1500. Translation, Imitation, and Literacy*, Tamesis, Woodbridge, 2018, 289 pp.

One of the first problems with this publication is the very particular use of the phrase *Classical Tradition*, as here this concept extends up to Petrarch (†1374) and Boccaccio (†1375) compared to the traditional use that confines it to authors of ancient Greek and Latin literature. This means that, alongside the classics of Virgil, Livy and Ovid, the *medieval* Petrarch and Boccaccio are also studied as models for *medieval* authors Bernat Metge (†1413) and Joan Roïç de Corella (†1497) respectively. Since Petrarch and Metge shared space in this world for around 40 years, it is also difficult to understand the meaning that the term *tradition* might have in respect of these two almost contemporary authors.

Together with the selection of authors (classics?) imitated, there is a second problem concerning the criterion for selecting the authors (medieval?) doing the imitating. Out of the many authors we find between 1300 and 1500 writing in Balearic, Western Catalan, Eastern Catalan, Provençal or Valencian, only 5 are selected, who, with the particular exception of the humanist Metge, Eastern Catalan, and of Roïç, are not exactly remarkable for their rich *basic repertoire* in respect of their imitation – often rather marginal or secondary – of Greek and Latin authors. Thus, what should account for the bulk of this work: «a critical study of the influence of the classics in five major works» according to the publisher's blurb on the back cover of the book, is actually confined to 29 pages (93-122), resulting in an average of less than 6 pages per author in a book of close to 300 pages.

Added to the unjustified limit on imitators is – and this is the third problem – the limit on what is imitated, based on a convenient and economic but unreal *monogenetic* understanding of the influences (*id est*: Ovid → March; Virgil → Curial; Livy → Martorell...), a view perhaps encouraged by the catalogue –

necessarily *monogenetic* – of translations (pp. 155-223) from classic (and... post-classical) works into *Catalan*. Strangely, in the case of Roïç, who wrote a good number of works in which the influence of various Latin authors can clearly be seen, the authors have chosen a work that was heavily influenced by Tuscan and *Romance* writer Boccaccio. However, in the foreword to *Tirant*, for example, there is mention of Cicero («that great orator Tullius»¹), Homer («that eminent poet Homer»²) and Livy (*Titus Liuius*) as models, but the volume restricts itself – we imagine not after an exactly arduous *heuristic* sourcing task – to only describe the influence of the latter («In the Shadow of Livy» pp. 116-122).

A fourth problem, already hinted at, is the description of *medieval* applied to 15th century authors like Ausias March (1397-1459), Joanot Martorell (1413-1468), Joan Roïç (1435-1497) or, as we shall see later, the author of *Curial e Guelfa*. For linguistic, chronological and even *mindset* reasons, within literature in what could be called a *Limousin* language, the term *medieval* writers could, however, be acceptable without any problems if applied to the great Ramon Llull (*circa* 1232-1315), a trilingual Balearic, and to the bilingual Valencian Saint Pere/ Pedro Pasqual/ Pascual (*circa* 1227-1300), but they would be on the margins of that weird *medieval* period of 1300-1500 imposed by the Catalan scholars.

A fifth and serious problem – which in practice turns this volume into a work with, at the very least, a misleading title – is the use of the term *Catalan* to refer to three authors who are certainly Valencian and to a fourth, the author of the anonymous novel *Curial e Guelfa*, who was very probably Valencian by adoption and who, of course, all basically wrote in Valencian.

This work is therefore the umpteenth attack on Valencian culture, history and language, an international attack this time, as it is written in English and released by a foreign publisher. With the same impertinence that in the tightly-knit ranks of Catalan ultra-regionalism – *nota bene*: historically Catalonia has never been more than a region – it is argued, *verbi gratia*, that Miguel de Cervantes was actually one Sirvent – a Valencian surname, by the way – and originally wrote his famous *Don Quixote* in Catalan, or that Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci were actually two Catalan nobles bearing the surnames Colom and Despuig respectively, or that the location of the legendary Tartessos is identified as being that of the Catalan town of Tortosa, or in a similar way to how ultra-Catalanists systematically replace the historic name of *Crown of Aragón* with the artificial designation of *Catalan-Aragonese Confederation* etc., etc., the book also argues that the Valencian language should be called *Catalan*. This flies in the face of a tradition that is centuries rather than decades

¹ «aǻll grā orador Tulli».

² «aquell egregi poeta Homero».

Scarcely Classic, Barely Tradition, Dubiously Medieval and Catalan by Force

old, still observed by the sovereign nation of speakers and legally protected as the official name in the statute of an autonomous region that years ago was an independent kingdom, both Islamic and Christian; a region that was, in fact, a nation.

Nobody can deny the evident historic ties that exist between Catalan, Valencian and all the languages belonging to the same linguistic group as Occitan (p. 3: «Catalan, a Romance language closely related to Occitan»). Such ties become closer the further back in time you go, to the extent that they were indistinguishable until probably the 13th century. However, the basic argument for this anti-historic linguistic annexation is the dogmatic *mantra* of «The name that most accurately describes this language is the adjective *Catalan* [...] The reason for this name is the historically proven fact that Catalonia was the starting-point from which, in the Middle Ages, this language spread by means of resettlement to other regions»³, according to the introduction to the *on-line* version of the valuable *Diccionari català-valencià-balear* by Alcover and Moll (1926-1962). This same hypothesis is uncritically picked up by the authors of this volume, who after previously presenting an anachronistic map of *The Catalan-speaking territories* (p. 2) confine themselves to saying that the territories of Valencia were «conquered by James I in the 1230s [...] King James annexed them with the status of kingdom within the Catalan-Aragonese [*voilà!*] Crown. The most populous coastal areas were resettled by Catalans, and the more mountainous areas by Aragonese» (p. 12). It seems that the Catalan *resettlers* suffered from altitude sickness and avoided mountainous regions...

This is evidently the basic dogma of Catalan ultra-regionalist propaganda that seeks to justify the cultural, territorial and linguistic *Anschluß* of Valencian and Balearic as part of a supremacist political agenda based on the forced unity of *the* language, just like in other times similar projects were devised based on a particular race or religion.

However, the gratuitous statement that the expansion of Catalan by linguistic resettlement has been «historically proven» (*històricament demostrat*) actually reveals an exercise of voluntarism that is more ideological than scientific. Up to the present day no historian – or scholar in general – has managed to prove that an enterprise, as we know today, basically carried out in military terms by the Aragonese nobility, inexplicably led to Aragonese settling in such numbers in the hinterland and Catalans settling in such numbers along the coast that they managed to impose their respective languages in no time at all on a population that vastly outnumbered them and that – very, very hypothetically – only spoke in Arabic.

³ «El nom que designa més pròpiament aquesta llengua és l'adjectiu *català* [...] La raó d'aquesta denominació és el fet, històricament demostrat, que Catalunya va esser el punt de partida des d'on, en l'edat mitjana, aquesta llengua es va estendre, per la repoblació, a les altres regions».

What is true is that until well into the 20th century – and always under the protection of certain political movements – the native status of the Valencian language was never in question. Self-confessed ultra-Catalanist and *ante litteram* separatist Josep Aladern (1869-1918) wrote back in 1903:

Another important question [...] is whether the Catalan [*sic*] of Valencia and Mallorca is previous to the Arab conquest [...] Arab chronicles say that Tariq took control of Valencian cities with no resistance whatsoever and that their inhabitants were respected [...] So what else were they going to do other than continue to speak their own language? It is not easy to suppose that in three hundred or even four hundred years they were going to learn a language as difficult as Arabic [...] so much so that almost all the place names remained in Catalan [*sic*] and not in Arabic, and the conquerors, when they conquered towns and other places, found them already christened with names in their language [...] During both the Arab rule and the Christian reconquest, the language of the native people at first, and the new Catalans later, was kept strictly divorced from Arabic⁴ (Aladern [1903: 10]).

In fact, the place names preserved from the period prior to that of King James I as well as the new and extensive 13th century Valencian texts – published in the current 21st century – provide evidence of the early – not late or slow – linguistic split of the Valencia region or the already emerging distinctive features of Valencian compared to Catalan, almost a century before similar differences could be seen between Galician and Portuguese in the west of the peninsula. These texts confirm that the works in Valencian by S. Peter Pascual, born in the capital of the kingdom some 10 years before James I entered the city in 1238, indeed belong to that century. This makes it increasingly incredible and unreal to argue the modern theory that Valencia's two languages were solely the result of a dual, gradual and absurd *linguistic* resettlement of Aragonese *mountain-dwellers* and Catalan *beach folk*.

Luckily, we also have the testimony of the Valencian authors studied in this monograph volume. Unless, which is unlikely, they were unaware of the language they were speaking and writing, when they refer to it explicitly they are unequivocal: they spoke Valencian and wrote in Valencian, a Valencian that was often, especially in the case of the poets, somewhat like Provençal. What is true – and this really is a historical fact, with documented evidence to prove it – is that authors in the kingdom of Valencia – established expressly as an independent kingdom by King James I of Aragon, amongst other reasons, from

⁴ «Una altra qüestió important [...] es si 'l català de Valencia y Mallorca es anterior a la conquesta àrab [...] Las cròniques àrabs diuen que Tarich s'apoderà de las ciutats de Valencia sense gens de resistència y que sos pobladors foren respectats [...] ¿Què havian de fer, donchs, sinó continuar parlant la seva llengua? No es fàcil suposar que en tres ni quatre cents anys aprenguessin una llengua tan difícil com l'àrabi [...] tan es aixís, que 'ls noms toponímichs se conservaren casi tots en català y no en alarb y 'ls conquistadors, al conquistar pobles y encontradas, los trobaren ja batejats ab noms de la seva llengua [...] Tant durant la dominació àrab com durant la reconquesta cristiana, la llengua dels aborígens primer y d'aquets y dels nous catalans després, se mantingué severament divorciada de l'àrabi».

Scarcely Classic, Barely Tradition, Dubiously Medieval and Catalan by Force

fear of interference by the Catalan nobility – never referred to the language they used for their writing in any other way than as Valencian. For more archaic or literary purposes, they sometimes referred to it as Limousin (as in the place name of the Occitan city of Limoges), but they never identified themselves as Catalan ethnically, linguistically or politically.

In the edition printed in Valladolid in 1555 of poems by March, Juan De Resa accompanies the text with a vocabulary for those who do not know “the Limousin language in which the poet Ausias March wrote his works”⁵ (De Resa 1555: 218; *item* 219: «lègua lemofina»; *cfr.* also 1555: 221):

Everything previously said has been noted down for our Castilians who have no knowledge at all of that language, since it is my intention to speak with Valencians and Catalans, or with Castilians who are experts in it)⁶,

also highlighting the practice, unknown in Castilian, of dropping vowels in word conjunction, whereas

Italians and Catalans and Valencians, replace the vowel they remove with a punctuation mark⁷ (De Resa 1555: 219).

The translation of – as the title says – «The works of the most illustrious poet Ausias March, Valencian gentleman, translated from the Limousin language into Castilian by the excellent poet Jorge de Montemayor”⁸ and published in 1579» is equally explicit.

Even more significant than the testimony of the translators, who – we hope! – knew well which language they were translating from, is that of the authors themselves. In the colophons of the various books of his most popular work *The Hermit (Lo Cartoxa)* the author, Roiç de Corella, says that the work is “translated from Latin into the Valencian language” («trelladada de lati en valèciana lègua» in the first part of the 1496 edition, or «trahida de latina lengua en valenciana» in the 1500 edition of the second part). Also, for example, in the prologue of his *ystoria de Joseph fill del gran patriarcha Jacob* («History of Joseph, son of the great patriarch Jacob») the same author tells us that it is written in «vulgar Valencian prose»⁹.

Item: in the dedicatory note for *Tirant lo Blanch*, published in 1490, the author, Martorell Joanot declares he wrote it in «in popular Valencian, so that the

⁵ «la lengua Lemofina en q̄ el poeta Ausias March escriuio sus obras»

⁶ «Todo lo sobre dicho se ha notado para ñros Castellanos: y q̄ d̄l todo ignorã aq̄lla lègua: q̄ cõ los Valècianos, y Catalanes, ni con los Castellanos expertos enella, no es mi intencion hablar».

⁷ «Ytalianos y Catalanes y Valencianos y en lugar dela vocal q̄ quitã ponen vna virgula».

⁸ «Las obras del excelentissimo Poeta Avfias March, Cauallero Valenciano. Traduzidas de lengua Lemofina en Castellano por el excelente Poeta Jorge de Monte Mayor».

⁹ «en vulgar de valèciana p̄la».

nation of which I am child may be happy»¹⁰ and he also emphasises in the colophon – traditionally attributed to Martí Joan de Galba – to the fourth part of the work: «it was translated [...] into vulgar Valencian by the magnificent and virtuous gentlemen, Johanot Martorell»¹¹.

The historic distortion shown in the crude *damnatio memoriae* of the Valencian language can be seen in numerous details in this volume: «Thirteenth- to fifteenth-century Catalan began to be called *llemosí* [...] some medieval works were linguistically adapted or translated into modern Catalan, such as Ramon Llull's *Blanquerna* (edited by Joan Bonllavi and printed in 1521)» (p. 147). In actual fact, whereas in the *Epistola proemial* (prologue) to his translation, published in Valencia, the Catalan professor and scholar Bonllavi actually refers to the original as *primitive Limousin language* when he says that he has «deliberately kept some of the vowels from the original Limousin language»¹²; however, he does specify more than once that he has produced his version in the Valencian language (*estampat en llengua Valenciana* on the front cover and *stāpat ē lēgua valēciana* in the prologue) and not in any kind of anachronistic “modern Catalan”, adding in the Prologue that Valencian is «strange and foreign» to him («this language, to me strange and foreign»¹³).

A sixth problem – minor if you like, but unfortunately currently very widespread – is the habit of *tuning up* old texts to make them into texts that are anachronistically written in the grammar and spelling of – this time truly – *modern Catalan* (p. 5, n. 4: «We have regularized the spelling of the quotations in medieval Catalan throughout the volume»), thus encouraging the mistaken idea of an unmovable historic unity of *the* language and fostering false linguistic mirages, such as, for example, that the traditional pronunciation of *Valencia* in Valencian was at one time with /ɛ/ (*València*) and not, as it is *de facto*, with /e/ (*València*); this is extremely strong proof of the scarce respect for linguistic diversity shown by those who commit linguisticicide, cynically reproaching others for the same attitude in respect of their own language.

A seventh and final problem is the bibliography used, which could be described as full of gaps and even factious and sectarian, as it simply ignores so many contributions *in dissent* of the subject addressed, such as the good works of Ahuir and Palazón (v.g. 2003). In actual fact, despite focusing four fifths of its content on texts written in the Valencian of that period, many details betray the authors' lack of familiarity with Valencian research – and the lamentable traditionally superior attitude of some sectors of learning in Catalonia – even when these happen to be Valencian authors prone to linguistic (and political in

¹⁰ «en vulgar valēciana, perço que la nacio don yo so natural sē puxa alegrar».

¹¹ «fón traduit [...] en vulgar lengua valēciana p lo magnífich : e virtuos caualler, mollē johanot martorell».

¹² «retēir acordadamēt algūs vocables ðla lēgua llemofina pmera».

¹³ «dita lēgua, cō lía ami pegrīa:y ltrāgera»

Scarcely Classic, Barely Tradition, Dubiously Medieval and Catalan by Force

the case of a few) submission. For the *Curial and Guelfa*, for example, it would have been useful to turn to Gómez (1988, 1989, 1993) to consider the possible and – sorry – *polygenetic* influence of at least the classics Sallust, Ovid, Valerius Maximus, Macrobius and... the *post-classic* Boccaccio or the various works of Gros (v.g. 2015). In the author of this work Soler also detects the influence of Seneca [2017: 146: «the methodically bookish Seneca»¹⁴]. Even the denialist monograph by Ferrando & Nicolás [2011] is wrongly cited (v.g. p. 147) as being by Ferrando & Amorós, that is, using the second author's second surname, etc. etc.

But, even so, the most glaring absence in this work has to be that of the extensive (5,122 pages and 16,622 notes!) and brilliant thesis – in the literal sense – by Valencian Abel Soler [2016; *cf.* also 2017], who, following the long historical dispute on whether *Curial e Guelfa* was in Catalan or Valencian, has managed, we believe (*contra*: the Catalan Badia [2017]), to have at last identified the enigmatic author of the novel, who is so enigmatic that the work was actually regarded as a fake written by renowned Catalan philologist Manuel Milà i Fontanals (1818-1884) by Riera [1993: 479-489], the same person who bizarrely also regarded Bishop Peter Pascual (Riera [1986]) as a fake. Soler identifies the author of *Curial* as the courtier or *curial* Íñigo de Ávalos (*circa* 1414-1484), probably born in Toledo, but who grew up and was educated in Valencia, which would explain the essential Valencianist nature of his language, before joining the Neapolitan court of Alfonso the Magnanimous, which would also explain many elements of the so-called diplomatic *koiné* in his language as well as the presence of evident Italianisms (equally missing here are the studies by Calvo [2013 and 2014]).

Although the book under review here was published in 2018, it could be alleged that Soler's contribution was not available when the original version of this volume was delivered to the publisher, but, in any case, there would always have been the possibility of adding a clarifying note at the last moment, apart from paying more attention, as specialists, to what was being *cooked up*, as a thesis of more than 5,000 pages obviously requires a fair number of years of research. The fact is that the bibliography does indeed include other titles from 2016 (pp. 236, 237, 240, 242, 246, 251, 257, 261, 266), 2017 (p. 265) and even 2018 (p. 257).

And, by the way – going back to the fifth problem – what does the Castilian but Valencian-speaking and Italianised author of *Curial* say about the language the novel is written in? The story is a curious one, as in the whole work some say there is only one possible hint about this in book III: «the aforementioned

¹⁴ «estudiós metòdic de Sèneca».

Pierides were turned by the gods into magpies, who in normal Catalan language are called *garces*»¹⁵.

Well, firstly, an idea of the legitimacy of the historic name of the *Valencian* language is given by the significant fact that some Catalan authors argued that precisely the use of that «in normal Catalan» automatically excluded their authorship by a Valencian (*see* Soler [2016: 4079]), given that a Valencian would very rarely use that term. However, the text cannot say anything other than what it says, since, in fact, *garsa* in Catalan is the common name for the chatterbox magpie (*pica* in Latin), whereas the name of this bird, taboo in so many other languages, is *blanca* in Valencian (*cf.* Escrig [1851: 127]: “*Blanca. Picaza*” (= magpie); Martí 1891: 464: “*Blanca. f. zool. Picaza*” (= magpie); Martí 1909: 71: “*Blanca – Picaza, Urraca*” (= magpie); Fullana 1985: 57: “*blanca. f. urraca, pícara*” (= magpie); Alcover & Moll 2001/2: *s. blanca*: “Bird from the crow family: *Pica pica* (val.)”¹⁶; López 2017: 485: “*blanca [...]* Bird from the crow family”¹⁷ etc.) compared to the Catalan *garsa*, whereas in Valencian *garça-garsa* is used for ‘garza’ (= heron) (*cf.* Orellana [1795: 11]: “*garza*. This is the generic name, as *garça* can equally mean heron, bittern, kingfisher, etc.”¹⁸; Escrig 1851: 451: “*Garça. Garza* (ave)” (= heron (bird)); Martí [1891: 993]: “*Garça. f. zool. Garza*” (= heron); Fullana [1985: 214]: “*garsa. f. garza*” (= heron); Alcover & Moll [2001-2002: *s. garsa*]: “Bird from the crow family, species *Pica rustica* or *Pica caudata*”¹⁹).

To conclude: it is a shame that a great specialist like Alejandro Coroleu has agreed to collaborate – in an undefined way, since the responsibility of the authors for each section is not defined anywhere in the book – in this annexationist pamphlet. If, as is well known, studies on classic tradition for obvious *biological* reasons cannot make any contribution whatsoever to Classic Philology, it is doubtful whether the few pages devoted to the influence of *obscure* authors – if we may be permitted this final irony – like Virgil, Livy and Ovid are of any use to Romance Philology and its respective literatures, and in Catalan and in Valencian. This book, however, will stand as a further example of the powerful propagandistic weapon *ad maiorem gloriam* of the ultra-Catalanist cause. For the time being we continue to trust in cold data, an unprejudiced mind and naked reason in the face of the media, the political powers and financed propaganda.

¹⁵ «les dites Pierides foren per los deus convertides en piques, que en comun lenguatge cathala son dites garces» (and note: *en comun* “in normal/ ordinary”, not *en lo comun* “in joint/shared”).

¹⁶ «Ocell de la família dels còrvids: *Pica pica* (val.)».

¹⁷ «blanca [...] Pardal de la família dels còrvids».

¹⁸ «GARZA. Este es nom generich, pues igualment es Garça el Agró, el Vitol, el Martinet &c.».

¹⁹ «Au de la família dels còrvids, espècie *Pica rustica* o *Pica caudata*».

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